



Richmond City Council

900 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219
www.rva.gov/office-city-clerk

Budget Work Session Minutes

Monday, April 6, 2026

1:00 PM

Council Chamber, 2nd Floor - City Hall

Council Members Present

The Honorable Cynthia Newbille, President
The Honorable Katherine Jordan, Vice President
The Honorable Sarah Abubaker (late arrival)
The Honorable Andrew Breton
The Honorable Kenya Gibson
The Honorable Nicole Jones
The Honorable Stephanie Lynch (late arrival)
The Honorable Ellen Robertson (late arrival)
The Honorable Reva Trammell

Others in Attendance

Laura Drewry, City Attorney
Kimberly Morris, Assistant City Clerk
Candice Reid, City Clerk
Tabrica Rentz, Deputy City Attorney
RJ Warren, Council Chief of Staff

Call to Order

Council President Cynthia Newbille called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m. and presided.

Chamber Emergency Evacuation Plan Announcement

Upon the Chair's request, Assistant City Clerk Kimberly Morris provided information on the appropriate way to evacuate the Council Chamber in an emergency along with public speaker guidelines.

RJ Warren, Council Chief of Staff, outlined the agenda for the budget work session.

Overview of Human Services Budget and Capital Improvement Projects

Amy Popovich, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Human Services, outlined Fiscal Year 2027 priorities including:

- Implementing a new outside agency grant process
- Advancing library feasibility studies
- Distributing opioid abatement funds
- Advancing the Southside Plaza project
- Updating the Strategic Plan to End Homelessness
- Strengthening responses to family violence and language access
- Launching an electric bookmobile
- Expanding the Library's Memory Lab

[CD.2026.108](#) Budget Work Session Documents - Human Services & Capital Improvement Projects

Attachments: [Budget Work Session Documents - Human Services & Capital Improvement Projects](#)

A copy of the presentation has been filed.

Councilor Sarah Abubaker arrived at 1:46 p.m. and was seated.

Councilor Nicole Jones asked about efforts to strengthen language access services including funding and program coordination. She also requested project lists for the proposed Neighborhoods in Bloom allocation, sidewalk maintenance programs, and the citywide parks improvement program.

Karla Almendarez-Ramos, Manager with the the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Engagement, highlighted advancing the Mayor's goal of creating thriving, inclusive communities by improving equitable access to city services through an enhanced Language Access Plan. She also reported on efforts to expand interpretation services and language technology, update policies to align with federal and state requirements, and launch mandatory language access training for city employees to ensure residents can access services regardless of the language they speak.

Vice President Katherine Jordan commended the Department of Human Services, and she asked about the status of fare-free service for Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC), and questioned the long term sustainability of the program.

Joe Dillard, Director of Government and External Affairs at Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC), stated the agency remained committed to fare free service and was seeking alternative funding sources after the proposed budget did not include the previously discussed \$1.5 million allocation. He also noted that Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) did not provide its previous annual transit contribution.

Vice President Jordan asked for clarification about the reduction in the Library's operating budget, including what expenses or services would be affected.

Scott Firestein, Director of the Richmond Public Library, explained that the reduction in the Library's operating budget was primarily due to delaying certain maintenance expenses and making adjustments within the personnel budget.

Councilor Sarah Abubakar asked about proposed Department of Neighborhood and Community Services job vacancies, and opioid abatement funding. She also asked about projected DPU utility rate increases, downtown investments, City Hall space utilization, fire station improvements, and the city's fiber optic network.

Amy Popovich, DCAO for Human Services, clarified that only one new position was included in the FY27 budget, with other listed positions reflecting reclassifications of existing roles. She also reviewed opioid settlement funding, current initiatives, and the upcoming competitive grant process. She also stated that the projected water rate increases remain within affordability targets and explained that courthouse and downtown investments were part of a broader long term planning strategy. She also reported that a City Hall space utilization study was underway, ongoing fire station facility assessments were informing future capital planning, and additional information would be provided on the city's fiber optic network.

Councilor Reva Trammell raised concerns about senior tax relief outreach, noting that some residents lost eligibility due to missed recertification notices and communication barriers, and she asked how the city plans to improve outreach, language access, and support for eligible residents.

DCAO Popovich stated that educational materials, including examples of tax relief letters, would continue to be provided. She also added that the Department of Finance administers the tax relief program and would assist residents with specific application questions.

Councilor Andrew Breton asked if the Office of Children and Families' FY27 budget included significant funding for Safe Routes to Schools or whether it was highlighted based on a single project rather than a broader budget investment.

DCAO Popovich clarified that Safe Routes to Schools was highlighted as a single project rather than a major budget item, noting that the Office of Children and Families' budget is primarily personnel related with limited operating funds. The office coordinates the program by managing the Virginia Department of Transportation grant and bringing together community partners to implement the initiative.

Councilor Ellen Robertson requested updates on the potential impacts of anticipated federal funding reductions and aligning Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) funding with shovel ready affordable housing projects.

DCAO Popovich reported that the partial federal government shutdown had not affected Human Services federal funding or city services as of the meeting date. Staff stated that they would continue monitoring federal funding developments and provide Council with updates as conditions change.

Councilor Kenya Gibson requested clarification regarding funding for the GAP grant program, noting that the administration had resolved the previously reported application backlog. She asked where the funding was allocated in the FY27 budget, how much was appropriated in the prior fiscal year, and why the funding now appears under the Finance Department despite city code requiring appropriations to the local board of social services.

DCAO Popovich explained that GAP grant funding remains within the Finance Department while the city evaluates the programs' future and potential partnerships, with Social Services continuing to provide final approval of grant applications. She added that anti-displacement funding is under review for the upcoming fiscal year and that she was not aware of any additional FY27 funding for the program.

Odie Donald II, Chief Administrative Officer, clarified that funding for the GAP grant program had already been appropriated in the FY26 budget and would be reappropriated in FY27 following the completion of the application backlog. He also explained that the funds remain available because the program was suspended while the backlog was addressed and will be allocated through the previously outlined process.

President Cynthia Newbille advised that staff would follow up with the Richmond Retirement System regarding a requested retirement benefit and COLA analysis. She also asked about GRTC's fare-free program, and potential funding sources.

Adrienne Torres, Chief of Staff for Greater Richmond Transit Company, clarified that the Central Virginia Transportation Authority (CVTA) funds were not specifically supporting the zero-fare initiative but were used for other GRTC purposes. She stated the program was currently supported through prior year surplus funds. GRTC requested \$1.5 million in FY27 baseline funding but was also pursuing advertising revenue, regional partnerships, and additional grants to help sustain the approximately \$5.6 million program cost.

Michael Nixon Garrison, Program Manager with the Department of Budget and Strategic Planning, presented the proposed FY27 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), highlighting progress on previously funded projects and proposed capital investments.

Odie Donald II, Chief Administrative Officer, emphasized that the proposed CIP reflects Council priorities, community input, and administrative goals while distributing investments citywide. He also highlighted accelerated funding for improvements to the John Marshall Courts Building, the use of short term debt for FY27 vehicle replacement, and additional initiatives including the Mayo Island redevelopment.

Councilor Kenya Gibson requested additional information on funding for Safe Streets for All, Vision Zero, and red light camera enforcement.

Bobby Vincent, Director of Public Works explained that Vision Zero encompasses multiple transportation safety investments, including traffic calming, speed humps, roundabouts, and red light cameras, and indicated that administration would work with Council to provide detailed information on Vision Zero funding allocations, People's Budget expenditures, the Pine Camp project, and other requested budget items.

Councilor Stephanie Lynch expressed concern that available funding may be insufficient to address traffic fatalities, traffic calming, paving, alley improvements, and other public right-of-way needs.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:03 p.m.

CITY CLERK