



# News Release

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## **County Executive Proposes People-Focused Budget**

*Funding Priorities Designed to Move Frederick County Forward*

FREDERICK, Md. – Frederick County Executive Jessica Fitzwater today unveiled a budget that puts people first. Anchored in the core values of accountability, inclusion, and sustainability, the Proposed Operating and Capital Budgets for Fiscal Year 2024 reflect unprecedented community input. More than 1,500 people participated, either at one of seven listening sessions, through an online portal, or by submitting surveys. Executive Fitzwater’s budget reduces the income tax rate for the most vulnerable in the community to the lowest rate allowed by law, and keeps the property tax rate unchanged.

“I am proud to present a budget that begins to turn our Livable Frederick vision into reality,” Executive Fitzwater said. “I heard loudly and clearly that residents expect us to invest in our people, and that’s what this budget does. This proposal is fiscally responsible. It ensures healthy reserve funds, meets our long-term pension obligations, and makes tactical investments to protect our coveted AAA bond ratings, which save taxpayer dollars as we invest in essential services and capital projects. Most importantly, it lays a foundation for all of our residents to thrive.”

The proposed budget focuses on investments in Frederick County’s future. Highlights include:

### **Investing in Our Students**

- **Making a record investment in Frederick County Public Schools** – The \$405 million allocation is \$35 million more than required, but less than what was requested by the Board of Education.
- **Constructing new school projects** to address enrollment growth and aging facilities – The Capital Improvement Plan includes a new Brunswick Elementary School that opens this August; an addition to Crestwood Middle School; a new, larger Green Valley Elementary School; a replacement Valley Elementary School; design work to replace Middletown Elementary and Middle Schools on a co-located campus; limited renovations at Ballenger Creek, Monocacy, and Spring Ridge Elementary Schools; and a new Liberty Elementary School a year sooner than promised, with design funding in FY2025.

### **Investing in Our Workforce**

- **Setting lowest income tax rate in Maryland** for working families and seniors on a fixed income – The 2.25% rate for people who make less than \$25,000 is possible by bringing the rate for top wage earners in line with 11 other jurisdictions in the state. The property tax rate remains unchanged.
- **Conducting a disparity study** of Frederick County Government contracting – Results will help to shape the County’s first Minority Business Enterprise program. Small businesses will be aided by new Ombudsman and Small Business Navigator positions.

### **Investing in Our Growing Community**

- **Focusing on housing needs** – To help current residents stay in their homes and new residents afford to live here, the budget increases the Housing Initiative Fund, includes a housing needs assessment, and elevates the Housing Department to a Housing Division.

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- **Connecting people through bikeways and trails** – The budget makes a record investment of more than \$4.5 million in Frederick County’s bikeways and trails system.
- **Investing in senior centers** –A new and improved Brunswick Senior Center, a brand-new facility in east county, and renovations to the Frederick Senior Center are included early in the six-year Capital Improvement Program.
- **Building resilience and responding to climate change** – The budget prioritizes the critical work needed to address climate change. It begins implementation of the County’s Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plan and the Climate and Energy Action Plan.

### Investing in Our Public Servants

- **Attracting and maintaining the best employees** – A 5% cost-of-living adjustment for non-union employees helps Frederick County Government to be an attractive employer. The budget also honors the contracts with public safety unions.
- **Recognizing 911 emergency communications specialists** – To support these front-line emergency responders, the proposed budget provides additional staff and supports the operations of a new state-of-the-art Next Gen 911 Center, funded through an increase to the 911 fee on cell phone bills. The budget also reflects key changes in classifications, shift differentials, and salaries for these workers.

Fiscal Year 2024 begins July 1, 2023. The County Council will hold a public hearing on the proposed budget at **7 p.m. on Tuesday, April 25**, at Winchester Hall. For details, visit [FrederickCountyMD.gov/CountyCouncil](https://FrederickCountyMD.gov/CountyCouncil). Complete copies of the operating and capital budgets are available at [FrederickCountyMD.gov/Budget](https://FrederickCountyMD.gov/Budget). County Executive Fitzwater’s budget presentation can be viewed at [www.FrederickCountyMD.gov/FCGtv](https://www.FrederickCountyMD.gov/FCGtv).

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