



## **FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT**

---

## **OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

Jessica Fitzwater  
*County Executive*

April 2024

To the People of Frederick County,

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your County Executive. One of my most important roles is developing a budget that invests in our community's priorities. The Proposed Fiscal Year 2025 Operating and Capital Budgets are anchored in my administration's core values of accountability, inclusion, and sustainability and reflect community input while demonstrating strategic investments and fiscal responsibility.

For the fifteenth year in a row, Frederick County ranks as one of Maryland's healthiest counties with health factors and outcomes far exceeding the national average. Good health is no accident. It takes planning and a commitment to making healthy choices.

This proposed budget delivers a healthy Frederick County. It ensures the County maintains our strong financial health and provides the services our residents rely on for social, environmental, and physical health and safety. This budget supports efficient, people-focused services and recognizes the amazing County employees who work hard every day to keep Frederick County a great place to live.

Frederick County's financial health is strong. We continue to earn the confidence of the three largest bond rating agencies. Our coveted triple AAA bond rating allows us to get the best bang for the buck, with low interest rates that save taxpayers millions of dollars, which can then be reinvested in our community.



The Fiscal Year 2025 budget uses outcome-based strategies to ensure our division budgets align with the goals of Livable Frederick and the community recommendations found in the Transition Report. In preparation of the budget, I met with all of our divisions and partner agencies to review their expenses. Many divisions, such as Transit, Family Services, Planning and Permitting, and Public Works, were able to shift unfilled or under-utilized positions to streamline operations. To ensure fiscal responsibility, this budget uses one-time funding for one-time expenses whenever possible.

Once again this year, hundreds of residents shared their budget priorities by speaking at one of my five community listening sessions in January and February, taking the Balancing Act budget survey, testifying at one of two public hearings, or sending an email. I heard loud and clear the calls to focus on people. This budget will help Frederick County deliver the services residents need and want to maintain good health and live their best lives.



## PUBLIC SAFETY

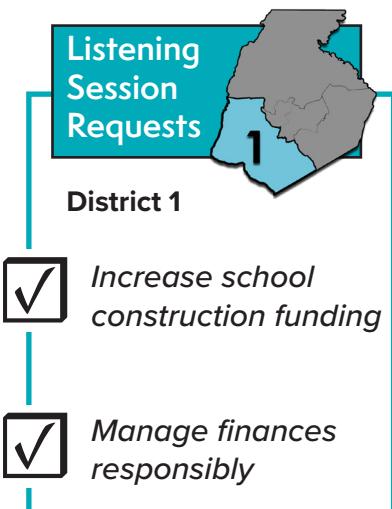
It is the job of local government to always be vigilant and forward-thinking. We use good planning to strategically invest in our assets and ensure public safety. A sense of safety and security leads to a healthier community. This budget invests in the people who keep us safe – those in our Division of Fire and Rescue Services, both career and volunteer, as well as Emergency Management, the Sheriff's Office, and the State's Attorney's Office. It focuses on improved service and training and employee health and wellness for all our first responders.

The budget provides daytime career firefighter staffing on weekdays at the Wolfsville Fire Station, serving one of our most rural parts of the County. It also invests in an EMS medic captain to expand our Community Behavioral Health Program, as demand for these services continues to grow. Being able to access emergency healthcare and meeting people where they are leads to a healthier Frederick County for everyone.

Construction begins this year on a new Green Valley Fire Station, with a replacement station at Carroll Manor to follow. We will also replace several vehicles for the fire service.

The FY25 budget honors the multi-year contract commitment we made to our firefighters, and it funds new contracts for our deputies and correctional officers to include key salary and benefit enhancements.

People may not realize how much the County's Division of Animal Control contributes to our health and safety, caring for the animals that reside in Frederick County, some of whom are ill or in unwanted or dangerous situations. We heard repeatedly from the community about the need for a surgery coordinator at Animal Control to streamline operations and enhance spay and neuter services. This position is included in the proposed budget. In addition, the much-anticipated expansion of the Animal Control center will begin construction in FY25. Providing a modern, safe place for vulnerable animals that are waiting for their forever homes improves our quality of life and is fundamental to our overall community health.



## ALICE HOUSEHOLDS

We live in a special community, where people care for one another. We know that to be a truly healthy Frederick County, we must look out

for all of our vulnerable populations. This budget addresses some of the biggest obstacles faced by our seniors, parents, children, and the people who work paycheck to paycheck – our Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, or ALICE households.

Our seniors' wellbeing relies on connecting them to the community. For our active seniors, that means learning about the many programs and

activities the County provides to enhance their quality of life. Those who are more vulnerable may need services brought to them, where they are. This budget provides funding to assist our seniors and veterans, including those whose primary language is something other than spoken English to



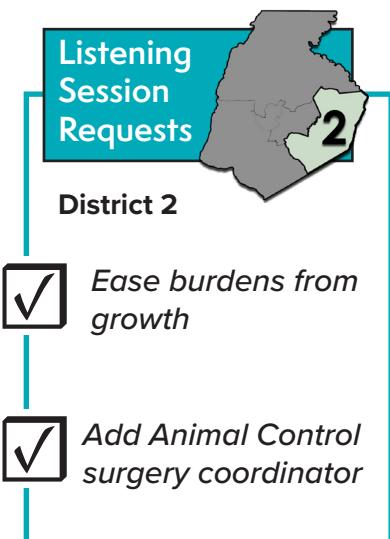
better serve our deaf and immigrant communities. Earlier this year, we launched a new senior service coordination model, which we expect to expand to bring services to more people in their communities, making sure they can age in place on their own terms.

As we think about the health of our community, we have to remember our youngest residents, too. This budget includes funding for the Division of Family Services to expand assistance to children, youth, and caregivers. We are also in the middle of a comprehensive childcare study that will guide us as we find solutions that fit the unique needs of Frederick County.

## EDUCATION

I am proud to continue our focus on our youth, especially through the historic investment we have already made in our schools. Since taking office a little over a year ago, I have increased funding to Frederick County Public Schools by nearly \$60 million more than required by Maintenance of Effort (MOE). By making this strategic investment in education early in my term, funding is assured every year moving forward, especially as Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS) works to implement the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and manages the extraordinary enrollment growth we have seen in recent years.

In this upcoming year, Frederick County must give an additional \$21.2 million to FCPS, or approximately one-third of the entire budget growth over last fiscal year, just to meet our MOE obligation. My proposed budget invests an additional \$10 million over our enhanced MOE obligation – providing over \$30 million in additional funding for FCPS over the FY24 proposed budget. I am proud that Frederick County now ranks among the top five counties in Maryland for funding above MOE!



I am excited to announce another initiative to support our students. This budget includes funding to expand a youth apprenticeship program within County government in partnership with FCPS. This was one of the most requested items in our Balancing Act survey, and it is a program that will help meet our Blueprint goals and build career pathways and a stronger workforce.



We are also making strides on the school construction front. We will be breaking ground later this month for replacement schools at Green Valley and Valley Elementary. Both are slated to open for students in August of 2025. A limited renovation of Monocacy Elementary and an addition to Crestwood Middle will be ready for the start of the next school year. In addition, this summer we will begin construction on limited renovation projects at Ballenger Creek and Spring Ridge Elementary Schools, and later this year construction begins on the replacement of Yellow Springs Elementary School.

Everywhere I go, I hear people talking about how important it is to invest in our aging infrastructure, especially our older school buildings. We fund new schools and additions through impact and mitigation fees that developers pay. The County, however, is not permitted to use those funds to renovate or repair existing schools, many of which were built 40 to 50 years ago.

This budget puts us on a path to addressing this challenge. While most of our neighboring counties have increased their property tax rates to account for rising costs, our overall rate has not increased in nearly 20 years. We are proposing a property tax rate of \$1.11, which will generate nearly \$21.5 million in additional revenue annually, that will be dedicated solely to school construction projects. This allows us to enhance and advance community priorities above and beyond our current Capital Improvement Program. We heard loud and clear throughout our budget listening sessions that the state of our schools matters. A majority of the County Council has committed to this change to ensure we continue to put our students first.

I am thrilled to announce that I was able to include the new Board of Education request for a \$134 million replacement Brunswick High School project within our six-year Capital Improvement Plan. Once we have the State's promise to contribute to the construction costs, we will move forward with the project. This is good fiscal management, and it ensures that we maintain a shared commitment with the State to fund much-needed school construction projects.

A healthy life includes lifelong learning, and that is why the FY25 Budget invests in Frederick Community College with an additional \$1.5 million to

## Listening Session Requests

### District 3

- Boost library funds for materials & construction*
- Increase funding for education & housing*



advance the strategic goals of the Board of Trustees. This will help the college fulfill their mission, recruit and retain the most talented staff and it will keep tuition affordable.

I know the community is looking forward to May 4th when the new Middletown Branch Library will open! We are all excited to see this project finally completed. The next new library, which will be on the west side of the City of Frederick, is funded in our Capital Improvement Plan and is currently on schedule for construction in FY26. The operating budget includes an increase in the library system's materials funding formula so they can enhance their incredibly popular digital materials and reduce hold lists. Frederick County Public Libraries are all about building bridges with the community, expanding access to library services, and sparking excitement with their wonderful array of programing!



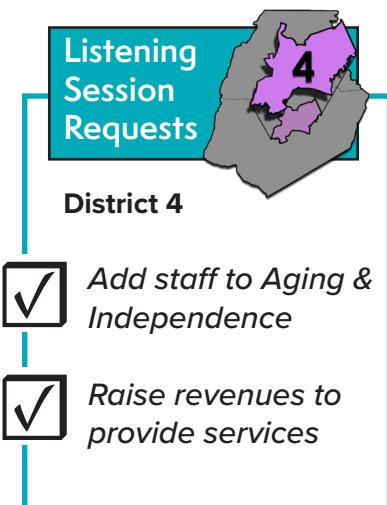
## COUNTY WORKFORCE

Just as our library staff is committed to their mission, our entire workforce is the heartbeat of Frederick County Government. A healthy workforce is happy and productive, dedicated to providing the best possible services to our residents. This budget supports the launch of an employee health clinic to provide accessible care while reducing our cost of insurance claims. Long-term health outcomes improved where this model has been implemented, and we expect to see lower absentee rates as a result.

Healthier, happier employees stay in their jobs longer, which helps us provide better service to all our residents. The clinic is not the only way this budget supports employee retention. We are conducting a comprehensive salary study of all non-uniformed positions and implementing our Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging strategic plan to make Frederick County Government a place where people want to work. Included in the budget is a 2% cost-of-living salary adjustment and a merit increase for all eligible County staff – one of the most requested items in the Balancing Act budget survey.

## HOUSING

We know having a job is key to having a good quality of life, but in some cases even a good job does not take away the stresses of finding affordable housing. The cost of housing is a major burden for many people in Frederick County, especially our ALICE households. Across the country, the cost of housing has risen dramatically since the pandemic, and Frederick County is no exception. That's why we are investing in a long-term strategy to tackle the issue, conducting a new comprehensive housing





needs assessment and creating an inventory of County-owned property that could be used to create more affordable housing opportunities.

Recognizing that housing affordability is a critical priority, this budget makes a strategic one-time investment of \$1.5 million in our Housing Initiative Fund. These dollars go directly to first-time homebuyer assistance, attracting additional affordable units, and helping people stay in their homes.

We are also focused on identifying strategies to bring high-paying, quality jobs to our community, and to support local entrepreneurs who want to start or expand here. Last month, I announced the creation of a first-of-its-kind partnership between the County, the State, and a private lender to offer micro-loans to small business owners who are graduates of our EmPOWER program. The EmPOWER Loan Program will be a vital tool in supporting minority-owned businesses, ensuring they have the resources they need to succeed and contribute to the prosperity of Frederick County.

Listening Session Requests	
District 5	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Preserve land & environment
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Build trails and infrastructure

#### A HEALTHY FREDERICK COUNTY

The budget is our roadmap to ensure a healthy Frederick County and to maintain and protect the things that make our County special, like our rich history as an agricultural leader. The farming community asked for an additional position in our newly launched Office of Agriculture to enhance customer service. The many programs within this Office have been incredibly successful in achieving the goal to expand the number of acres of farmland we preserve and support farmers as they innovate and grow their businesses. By providing additional staff support, we can keep up the momentum and continue serving this important mission.

It is vitally important that we protect our environmental health with an eye toward environmental justice. This budget includes air-quality monitoring stations, electric vehicles and infrastructure, a microgrid and resiliency hub, and for ALICE households, climate-resilient energy upgrades. These forward-thinking strategies will serve our community for the next century and beyond. A sustainable Frederick County is a healthy Frederick County!

I am proud that my proposed budget sets aside healthy reserve funds, meets our long-term pension obligations, and makes tactical investments to protect our AAA bond rating from all three rating agencies. The budget ensures our strong financial health, and it provides the programs and services our residents need to be healthy and safe. We maintain a significant investment in our infrastructure, while providing substantial funding for our schools, libraries, fire stations, roads, and more.

I want to thank our incredible team in the Budget Office and our entire FCG workforce for their diligence and expertise as we crafted this year's operating and capital budgets. I am proud to work with you every day and grateful for the service you provide to our residents.

I am pleased to submit to the County Council a proposed budget that reflects community input and invests in our people. With this strategic and responsible approach, we can ensure Frederick County remains one of the healthiest places to live in Maryland-- a vibrant and unique community where everyone can live, work, and thrive while feeling a strong sense of place and belonging.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jessica Fitzwater". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Jessica" on the top line and "Fitzwater" on the bottom line.

Jessica Fitzwater  
Frederick County Executive