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ALERT

New Market to vote on \$2.8M budget plan at start of new fiscal year

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New Market Town Hall

Staff file photo by Katina Zentz

The New Market Town Council plans to vote on the town's proposed \$2.8 million fiscal year 2025 budget on July 1, hours after the fiscal year begins.

The proposed FY25 budget, which includes capital expenditures, is about 44% greater than the \$1.9 million budget in FY24.

New Market will maintain its tax rate of 12 cents per \$100 of assessed value, according to the budget report. Real property, personal property and public utility property rates are not increasing.

New Market Mayor Winslow Burhans III in a phone interview Wednesday said he anticipates the budget will likely be adopted, but “this has certainly been a more difficult budget cycle.”

If the Town Council does not adopt the budget at the July 1 meeting, he is unsure how funds will be used and town services will operate, he said.

“If it doesn’t get approved, I don’t have an answer,” Burhans said. “I’ve never in 23 years seen that situation come up.”

The Town Council by law has to allow two weeks after the budget is introduced to advertise the fiscal year budget, he said, but not all of the council members were available to meet until July 1, which creates a short timeline for the council to approve the budget.

Since the Town Council voted to introduce the budget with amendments at its June meeting on Monday, the mayor said he hopes “most of the heavy lifting is done.”

The council voted to not introduce the FY25 budget at its May meeting because of questions surrounding the Green Team — which pursues sustainable initiatives for the town — and special events committee’s expenditures, which each more than doubled since last year, Burhans said.

The council spent about two hours deliberating about \$31,000 worth of funds between these initiatives, he said.

Debra Butler, New Market's clerk-treasurer who prepared the budget, said it was amended after the May meeting to provide an itemized list of the special events committee's expenses, per the council members' request.

Town Council member Matthew Chance said in a phone interview that the council required more information about these "small but important issues" to ensure it had all of its questions answered before introducing the budget.

"Our jobs are to guard the public trust and the public monies, and we just didn't want to be making any rushed decision without having all the information," Chance said.

Services could potentially be delayed if funds are not appropriated, or formally set aside for a particular use, by the fiscal year's start, Burhans said, but the town will try to avoid any disruptions in service.

"I think [town staff] are committed to working at least to midnight July 1," Burhans wrote in a text message. "They, like me, know that a lot of people depend on them."

According to the budget report, New Market is in a "transition point," which causes expenditures to spike due to the town needing additional staff or services or for infrastructure such as road construction.

Staffing in New Market has stayed the same despite significant population increases, the budget report said. From 2003 to 2023, the town's population more than tripled from 472 to 1,641, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's population estimates.

The proposed FY25 budget addresses staffing issues in the town by increasing staff and adding additional hours, Butler said. It also adds a retirement plan as a benefit to town employees, according to the budget report.

“The town is growing, as is the whole New Market region, and that means that we need to hire more employees to provide an acceptable level of service, and they come at intervals,” Burhans said. “It's not a linear, straight line.”

New Market’s public works and parks, recreation and culture expenditures increased the most from FY24 due to more than \$498,000 combined in Capital Improvement Project programs in these sectors. The town anticipates \$1.15 million in capital projects in FY25, the report said.

Capital expenditures were a major factor in the overall budget’s increase, Burhans said.

CIP projects slated for FY25 include expanding Community Park’s parking lot, as well as a more than \$100,000 project to resurface and repatch Wicomico Court’s entire roadway and reconstruct two existing speed bumps.

The town has plans to resurface tennis courts, renovate Messanelle Park and its connection to public water under CIP expenditures. New Market also has more than \$321,000 from FY21 for a potential acquisition of park land.

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