



Kamenetz's \$2.6 billion spending plan dips \$60 million into reserves

Council sets schedule for departmental reviews

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(Enlarge) County Executive Kevin Kamenetz makes his budget address to the County Council on Thursday. (Photo by Steve Schuster)

Baltimore County will take a deep dip into its reserve funds — some \$60 million — to balance its budget in the coming fiscal year, according to County Executive Kevin Kamenetz.

On Thursday, Kamenetz unveiled his first county budget as executive, a \$2.6 billion operating budget and a \$659 million capital spending plan.

The executive said that while the budget dips into reserves, the fiscal 2012 plan includes no increase in property or incomes taxes, and no layoffs or furloughs of county employees.

In his message delivered to the County Council, Kamenetz, a Democrat, noted his 16 years of budgets as a member of the council, and said, "We managed our budgets through mostly good times, and some tough times.

"But at no time in those 16 years did we face difficulties that equaled the magnitude of the declining revenues and increasing costs of today," he said.

Kamenetz said increasing fuel prices, contractual obligations and a growing county population were all reasons for the county dipping into the reserves.

Before the budget address, he had told a group of reporters, "The good news is that this is why this money is there."

He said the county is expected to maintain its AAA bond rating.

The budget includes \$78.7 million in infrastructure improvements — including \$25.1 million for countywide roadway resurfacing and \$9.6 million for bridge repair — \$104.5 million in school construction projects and \$20 million to fund community college improvements.

51 cents of every dollar to schools

Kamenetz said Thursday that the budget will direct 51 cents of every taxpayer dollar to education.

The education aspects of the budget package include "maintenance-of-effort" funds — essentially keeping financing levels, percentage-wise, the same as the previous year — for the Board of Education, at \$666.9 million; full support of increment and longevity increases for school employees; and \$6.5 million to complete the renovation and addition of Hampton Elementary School in Towson.

Still, on Thursday, Kamenetz asked Baltimore County Public Schools administrators to find efficiencies and savings.

Earlier this month, Kamenetz told state legislators that money from Annapolis will not be enough to save roughly 200 Baltimore County teaching positions slated to be eliminated through attrition, and transferring teachers into those open slots.

Still, Kamenetz said before the budget address that classroom sizes next year would still be lower than other jurisdictions, including Harford, Anne Arundel, Carroll, Prince George's and Montgomery counties, and Baltimore City.

Kamenetz encouraged School Superintendent Joe Hairston "to reexamine the administrative functions of Greenwood (the system's headquarters) to ensure that our students are best served by the capable employees, teachers and administrators that constitute our school system."

Though he did not mention the recent hiring of Renee Foose, a deputy superintendent, at a salary of \$214,000, Kamenetz told the council, "In my conversations with education stakeholders, there appears to be a desire to reduce the level of non-classroom administrators and shift their responsibilities to classroom functions."

Hairston was not immediately available for comment. But Kamenetz said Hairston indicated he would be willing to work with the county executive's office.

State of the county is 'strong'

Despite current economic conditions, Kamenetz told the council he believes "the state of the county is strong."

"We can all be confident that Baltimore County is poised to become an economic engine that can fuel the growth and resurgence of this entire region," he said.

Still, he said, "Every employee in every agency will have to work harder and smarter to maintain the high standards that people of this county expect."

The budget now moves to the County Council for its review. The council can make cuts to the budget, but cannot add to it.

Immediately after Kamenetz's presentation, several council members offered their initial take on the package.

"I appreciate the fact that property tax rates are not being increased," said 5th District Council member David Marks, a Republican who represents Towson and Perry Hall. "I also think it's good we are continuing to make investments in basic infrastructure."

"I knew it was going to be a lean budget. There is not a whole lot of money to do anything new with," said Council Chairman Johnny Olszewski of the 6th District, a Democrat representing Dundalk and Middle River. "I think the county executive is heading in the right direction when he says we have to do more with less."

"These are definitely tough economic times. ... (Kamenetz) is being very fiscally responsible and very prudent, and watching every dollar," said 1st District Councilman Tom Quirk, a Democrat representing Catonsville and Arbutus.

Budget hearing April 26

The County Council will host a public hearing on the 2012 operating and capital budget proposal on Tuesday, April 26. The council will meet in its regularly scheduled work session at 2 p.m., and will have a budget overview presentation at 3 p.m.

Then, at 7 p.m., a public hearing will be held in the council chambers, in the Historic Courthouse, 400 Washington Ave., Towson.

The County Council is expected to vote on the budget adoption at a Thursday, May 26, meeting, at 10 a.m.

Throughout May, the council will host a series of departmental budget reviews. The full schedule is below:

FY 2012 BUDGET SCHEDULE

APRIL 14 THURSDAY

10:00 am — EXECUTIVE BUDGET MESSAGE

APRIL 18 MONDAY

7:00 pm — LEGISLATIVE SESSION

APRIL 26 TUESDAY

2:00 pm — WORK SESSION
3:00 pm — BUDGET OVERVIEW
7:00 pm — BUDGET HEARING (COUNCIL CHAMBERS)

MAY 2 MONDAY

2:00 pm — SHERIFF
2:30 pm — INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
3:00 pm — PERMITS, APPROVALS, & INSPECTIONS
7:00 pm — LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MAY 5 THURSDAY

2:00 pm — FIRE
2:30 pm — CORRECTIONS
3:00 pm — ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION and SUSTAINABILITY

MAY 10 TUESDAY

2:00 pm — PLANNING
2:30 pm — LIBRARY
3:00 pm — RECREATION & PARKS
3:30 pm — PUBLIC WORKS
4:00 pm — CAPITAL BUDGET/DEBT SERVICE

MAY 12 THURSDAY

2:00 pm — POLICE
2:30 pm — COMMUNITY COLLEGE
3:00 pm — ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
3:30 pm — ORGANIZATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS
4:00 pm — RETIREMENT
4:30 pm — INSURANCE

MAY 17 TUESDAY

2:00 pm — WORK SESSION
3:00 pm — EDUCATION
4:00 pm — BUDGET DELIBERATIONS

MAY 23 MONDAY

SEND BUDGET MESSAGE TO PRINTER

MAY 26 THURSDAY

10:0 am — LEGISLATIVE SESSION: COUNCIL BUDGET ADOPTION

This story has been updated



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