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COUNTY COUNCIL OF TALBOT COUNTY, MARYLAND

Council Meeting

May 5, 2026; 1:30 p.m.

Council Chambers, Easton, Maryland

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Chuck F. Callahan - Via Telephone

Pete Leshner

Keasha N. Haythe

Lynn L. Mielke

Dave Stepp

Reported by

Diane Houlihan

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<p>1 TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS</p> <p>2</p> <p>3 MR. LESHHER: All right. I will call this</p> <p>4 meeting to order.</p> <p>5 Welcome. This is a special legislative</p> <p>6 day of the County Council.</p> <p>7 And I will ask if we could all rise.</p> <p>8 Ms. Haythe, if you will lead us in the opening.</p> <p>9 (Prayer and Pledge of Allegiance.)</p> <p>10 MR. LESHHER: All right. Welcome, again.</p> <p>11 Mr. Callahan, doesn't look like he is</p> <p>12 here. But he is, in fact, joining us by phone.</p> <p>13 First item is, Council, we have an agenda</p> <p>14 in front of us. Are there any additions or</p> <p>15 corrections to the agenda?</p> <p>16 MR. STEPP: Mr. Vice President, if I may</p> <p>17 make one request for a change, please. Item</p> <p>18 number six, update and request by Mid-Shore</p> <p>19 Behavioral Health. They are unable to make it</p> <p>20 today. So I'd like to remove them from the</p> <p>21 agenda, please.</p>	<p>1 MS. HAYTHE: No.</p> <p>2 MR. LESHHER: Hearing none, the chair moves</p> <p>3 that the disbursements be approved by unanimous</p> <p>4 consent.</p> <p>5 Next up we have a proclamation for</p> <p>6 Motorcycle Safety and Awareness Month. And</p> <p>7 Mrs. Moran, if you would read that into the</p> <p>8 record for us, please.</p> <p>9 SECRETARY: Motorcycle Safety and</p> <p>10 Awareness Month, May 2026.</p> <p>11 Whereas, motorcycles provide an efficient</p> <p>12 and economical mode of transportation, leading</p> <p>13 to decreased fuel consumption, less road</p> <p>14 deterioration, and help alleviate traffic and</p> <p>15 parking congestion in our community.</p> <p>16 And whereas, Talbot County supports and</p> <p>17 endorses initiatives that promote motorcycle</p> <p>18 safety, rider education, and public awareness.</p> <p>19 And whereas, it is important that all</p> <p>20 residents of our county and State become</p> <p>21 mindful of motorcycles on our roads and</p>
Page 3	Page 5
<p>1 MR. LESHHER: We've got a motion to remove</p> <p>2 one item --</p> <p>3 MS. MIELKE: Second.</p> <p>4 MR. LESHHER: Ms. Moran, would you call the</p> <p>5 roll, please.</p> <p>6 SECRETARY: Mr. Leshher.</p> <p>7 MR. LESHHER: Aye.</p> <p>8 SECRETARY: Mr. Stepp.</p> <p>9 MR. STEPP: Aye.</p> <p>10 SECRETARY: Ms. Mielke.</p> <p>11 MS. MIELKE: Aye.</p> <p>12 SECRETARY: Ms. Haythe.</p> <p>13 MS. HAYTHE: Aye.</p> <p>14 SECRETARY: Mr. Callahan.</p> <p>15 MR. CALLAHAN: Aye.</p> <p>16 MR. LESHHER: All right. The agenda is</p> <p>17 approved as modified.</p> <p>18 Council, we have disbursements of May 5th</p> <p>19 in front of us. Are there any questions on the</p> <p>20 disbursements?</p> <p>21 MR. STEPP: None here.</p>	<p>1 appreciate the significance of safe motorcycle</p> <p>2 practices.</p> <p>3 And whereas, the local representatives and</p> <p>4 members of the Mid-Shore Chapter of ABATE of</p> <p>5 Maryland, Inc. play a vital role in serving the</p> <p>6 community by advancing motorcycle safety</p> <p>7 education and public awareness initiatives so</p> <p>8 that through collective action, all roadway</p> <p>9 users can contribute to a more secure</p> <p>10 environment on the roads of Talbot County and</p> <p>11 across Maryland.</p> <p>12 Now, therefore, we, the County Council of</p> <p>13 Talbot County, do hereby proclaim May 2026 as</p> <p>14 Motorcycle Safety and Awareness Month in Talbot</p> <p>15 County and call upon all motorists and citizens</p> <p>16 to join together in a community wide effort to</p> <p>17 improve safety and awareness on our roadways.</p> <p>18 Given under our hands and the great seal</p> <p>19 of Talbot County this 5th day of May in the</p> <p>20 year of our Lord, 2026.</p> <p>21 MR. LESHHER: Council, is there a motion to</p>

Page 6	<p>1 approve the proclamation?</p> <p>2 MS. MIELKE: So moved.</p> <p>3 MR. STEPP: And a second.</p> <p>4 MS. HAYTHE: Second.</p> <p>5 MR. LESHHER: Mrs. Moran, would you call</p> <p>6 the roll?</p> <p>7 SECRETARY: Mr. Leshher.</p> <p>8 MR. LESHHER: Aye.</p> <p>9 SECRETARY: Mr. Stepp.</p> <p>10 MR. STEPP: Aye.</p> <p>11 SECRETARY: Ms. Mielke.</p> <p>12 MS. MIELKE: Aye.</p> <p>13 SECRETARY: Ms. Haythe.</p> <p>14 MS. HAYTHE: Aye.</p> <p>15 SECRETARY: Mr. Callahan.</p> <p>16 MR. CALLAHAN: Aye.</p> <p>17 MR. LESHHER: Okay. And we have members of</p> <p>18 the Mid-Shore Chapter of ABATE here. Mr. Eaton</p> <p>19 and your colleagues, if you would come forward.</p> <p>20 Welcome back.</p> <p>21 MR. EATON: Thank you. I ask if you all</p>	Page 8	<p>1 Our members are dedicated to promoting safety,</p> <p>2 education, training, and public awareness</p> <p>3 throughout the State. We believe that sharing</p> <p>4 the road safely is a responsibility shared by</p> <p>5 everyone.</p> <p>6 Our local chapters are the foundation of</p> <p>7 our organization. We're especially proud of</p> <p>8 our Mid-Shore Chapter, which has been active in</p> <p>9 supporting this event for the past few years.</p> <p>10 Their efforts, including the distribution of</p> <p>11 motorcycle safety yard signs seen throughout</p> <p>12 the communities, make a meaningful impact.</p> <p>13 As the weather improves and more</p> <p>14 motorcycles take to the roads, it's critical</p> <p>15 that we all increase our awareness of</p> <p>16 motorcycle safety. With that in mind, we offer</p> <p>17 a few reminders.</p> <p>18 For motorists, stay alert. Motorcycles</p> <p>19 are smaller and can be harder to see at</p> <p>20 intersections. Stay focused, avoid</p> <p>21 distractions, and keep your attention on</p>
Page 7	<p>1 could indulge me for a minute or so just to</p> <p>2 help spread this message a little bit because</p> <p>3 it's near and dear to us for sure.</p> <p>4 So good afternoon, Council Members. My</p> <p>5 name is Ken Eaton. I'm the executive director</p> <p>6 of ABATE of Maryland, Incorporated and the</p> <p>7 local director of the Mid-Shore Chapter.</p> <p>8 I have some representatives here from the</p> <p>9 chapter as well. And we're here today to</p> <p>10 recognize May as Motorcycle Safety and</p> <p>11 Awareness Month.</p> <p>12 This is a national movement, and we're</p> <p>13 proud to have Talbot County make this</p> <p>14 proclamation. All four counties in our</p> <p>15 Mid-Shore Chapter have stepped up and helped</p> <p>16 raise awareness. In addition, our Governor has</p> <p>17 also made a Statewide proclamation.</p> <p>18 For over 50 years, ABATE of Maryland has</p> <p>19 been the only organization in the State solely</p> <p>20 focused on representing the rights and</p> <p>21 interests of Maryland's motorcycling community.</p>	Page 9	<p>1 driving. Use your signals, clearly communicate</p> <p>2 your intentions. Give space. Maintain a safe</p> <p>3 spot following distance and allow room for</p> <p>4 maneuvering.</p> <p>5 For motorcyclists, get trained. Hands-on</p> <p>6 training and strong riding skills are</p> <p>7 essential. Stay aware. Be vigilant and always</p> <p>8 watch for potential hazards. Manage risk.</p> <p>9 Recognize your vulnerability and ride</p> <p>10 defensively, anticipating others's actions.</p> <p>11 And follow all traffic laws and show mutual</p> <p>12 respect to motorists.</p> <p>13 To everyone on the road, please share the</p> <p>14 road and remember to look twice, safe a life.</p> <p>15 We appreciate the ongoing support of</p> <p>16 Talbot County. By acting responsibly and</p> <p>17 respecting one another, we can ensure a safe</p> <p>18 and enjoyable riding season for all.</p> <p>19 MR. LESHHER: Thank you, Mr. Eaton.</p> <p>20 MR. EATON: I would like to point out we</p> <p>21 have a lady rider in the crowd today.</p>

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1 Ms. Barbie Mann just recently started riding
 2 and she's getting her skill set.
 3 MR. LESHER: Very good. You follow in the
 4 footsteps of my own sister.
 5 MS. MANN: Hopefully I do her proud.
 6 MR. LESHER: Any questions or comments
 7 from Council?
 8 MS. HAYTHE: No. That it's just good to
 9 have you come in every year, Ken, just to make
 10 everybody aware about motorcycle safety.
 11 And I've been saying it for the last past
 12 three years that I'm going to take lessons, and
 13 I have not. But maybe she'll encourage me to
 14 go ahead and take those lessons so that I can
 15 get on a bike.
 16 My husband has been a rider for a number
 17 of years, and he's about ready to buy a Harley
 18 now. So he gave up the sports bike and now
 19 it's time for a Harley.
 20 But thank you so much for coming in and
 21 sharing this every year. Appreciate it.

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1 MR. EATON: I encourage you to sign up
 2 early for classes. They fill up fast.
 3 MS. HAYTHE: Okay. All right. I will do
 4 that.
 5 I just saw a friend of mine just finished
 6 her class. She took her test and passed it.
 7 So I am going to do that. That just
 8 reignited me a little bit when I saw her
 9 posting on social the other day. So with you
 10 coming in, that just reminds me. I will do
 11 that, sign up early.
 12 MR. EATON: Maybe you can help me talk to
 13 the MVA about getting that price down of the
 14 class.
 15 MS. HAYTHE: For the class. I know. It
 16 is expensive. Last time I looked, it is quite
 17 expensive.
 18 MR. EATON: 350 to 400 and some dollars.
 19 MS. HAYTHE: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Let's talk
 20 to the Governor about that fee.
 21 MR. STEPP: If I could, Mr. Vice

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1 President, I'd like to add.
 2 So number one, thank you, guys, as always.
 3 Every year you're here religiously. Thank you
 4 for bringing the awareness.
 5 Also like to call out, too, that as a
 6 motorcycle license holder myself, I got my
 7 email here, too. So there's free advanced
 8 motorcycle training going through coming out
 9 from MDOT as well. So anyone who is out there
 10 who does have their Class M certification. I
 11 believe they even offer a ride alongside law
 12 enforcement, if I'm not mistaken. So just for
 13 advanced riding techniques and whatnot. So I
 14 wanted to make sure everyone knew about that
 15 one, too.
 16 MR. EATON: It's called the Motors
 17 Program.
 18 MR. STEPP: Motors Program, yup.
 19 MR. EATON: It's the motorcycle officers
 20 that are teaching people to enhance their skill
 21 set. So once you know how to ride and you have

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1 your license, we're giving you the opportunity.
 2 And these are free, and there's one right
 3 here in Easton at the VFW. Giving them an
 4 opportunity to just get more skills, more tools
 5 in the toolbox.
 6 MR. STEPP: Love it. The more education,
 7 the more experience, the better. So thank you,
 8 guys.
 9 MS. MIELKE: It's always a pleasure to
 10 give you this proclamation every year. And
 11 it's also good that, you know, we've got these
 12 born to be wild guys. So we've got a woman
 13 now. That's great. Cool, cool.
 14 MR. LESHER: All right. Well, thank you
 15 very much.
 16 And if you'd like to come forward for
 17 photographs, we've got a proclamation to
 18 present to you.
 19 SPEAKER: You're going to be in the
 20 middle. There you to.
 21 MS. KILMON: All right. Ready? One, two,

Page 14	<p>1 three. Perfect.</p> <p>2 MS. HAYTHE: Thank you.</p> <p>3 MR. EATON: Thank you so much. Appreciate</p> <p>4 it.</p> <p>5 MR. STAMP: Thank you.</p> <p>6 MR. LESHHER: And now we have our</p> <p>7 proclamation for Correctional Officers and</p> <p>8 Employees Week. Ms. Moran, would you please</p> <p>9 read the proclamation.</p> <p>10 SECRETARY: Proclamation, Correctional</p> <p>11 Officers and Employees Week, May 3rd through</p> <p>12 the 9th, 2026.</p> <p>13 Whereas, correctional officers and</p> <p>14 employees staff the Talbot County Detention</p> <p>15 Center for the purpose of maintaining custody,</p> <p>16 security, control of every inmate every hour of</p> <p>17 every day of every week of every month of every</p> <p>18 year.</p> <p>19 And whereas, the correctional officers and</p> <p>20 employees of the Talbot County Department of</p> <p>21 Corrections are essential to the county's</p>	Page 16	<p>1 is worthy of and deserves our utmost respect.</p> <p>2 Ands whereas, Talbot County is most</p> <p>3 fortunate to employ this highly-professional,</p> <p>4 deeply-committed, and extremely-capable cadre</p> <p>5 of correctional officers and employees.</p> <p>6 Now, therefore, we, the County Council of</p> <p>7 Talbot County, do hereby proclaim the week of</p> <p>8 May 3rd through the 9th, 2026, as Correctional</p> <p>9 Officers and Employees Week in Talbot County</p> <p>10 and encourage all citizens of the county to</p> <p>11 recognize, acknowledge, and appreciate the many</p> <p>12 contributions made by these individuals to the</p> <p>13 safety of our community and to the quality of</p> <p>14 life enjoyed by all residents of and visitors</p> <p>15 to Talbot County.</p> <p>16 Given under our hands and the great seal</p> <p>17 of Talbot County this 5th day of May in the</p> <p>18 year of our Lord, 2026.</p> <p>19 MR. LESHHER: Thank you.</p> <p>20 Council, I need a motion to approve the</p> <p>21 proclamation.</p>
Page 15	<p>1 criminal justice system and public safety by</p> <p>2 not only maintaining custody, security, and</p> <p>3 control of individuals committed to the</p> <p>4 Detention Center, but also by creating</p> <p>5 opportunities for inmates to resolve those</p> <p>6 personal issues that led to their</p> <p>7 incarceration.</p> <p>8 And whereas, the correctional officers and</p> <p>9 employees of the Talbot County Department of</p> <p>10 Corrections are responsible for the</p> <p>11 administration and operation of a variety of</p> <p>12 programs and services beyond the walls of the</p> <p>13 Detention Center, including, but not limited</p> <p>14 to, work release, electronic home monitoring,</p> <p>15 and community service.</p> <p>16 And whereas, the important work of</p> <p>17 correctional officers and employees rarely</p> <p>18 receives the recognition from the public it</p> <p>19 deserves. Yet the professionalism, dedication,</p> <p>20 and courage routinely exhibited by these</p> <p>21 employees in the performance of assigned duties</p>	Page 17	<p>1 MR. STEPP: So moved.</p> <p>2 MS. HAYTHE: Second.</p> <p>3 MR. LESHHER: Mrs. Moran, would you please</p> <p>4 call the roll.</p> <p>5 SECRETARY: Mr. Leshher.</p> <p>6 MR. LESHHER: Aye.</p> <p>7 SECRETARY: Mr. Stepp.</p> <p>8 MR. STEPP: Aye.</p> <p>9 SECRETARY: Ms. Mielke.</p> <p>10 MS. MIELKE: Aye.</p> <p>11 SECRETARY: Ms. Haythe.</p> <p>12 MS. HAYTHE: Aye.</p> <p>13 SECRETARY: Mr. Callahan.</p> <p>14 MR. CALLAHAN: Aye.</p> <p>15 MR. LESHHER: The proclamation is approved.</p> <p>16 And we have with us our director of</p> <p>17 correctional services, Mr. Joe Hughes.</p> <p>18 Welcome.</p> <p>19 MR. HUGHES: Welcome. Thank you, Council,</p> <p>20 for recognizing the correction officers for</p> <p>21 Correctional Officer Week.</p>

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<p>1 This is something that they do. It's not 2 an easy job. It's something they don't get 3 recognized for a lot of times. 4 And nobody in the facility that is behind 5 bars, they don't want to be there, you know. 6 So we don't get the best attitudes there. So 7 it's a credit to the officers that they keep a 8 good attitude and perform in their duties as 9 they do as professionals. 10 Tomorrow we will be recognizing our 11 Officer of the Year. And so we'll be hopefully 12 bringing her back or that person back at the 13 next Council meeting. 14 MR. LESHHER: Terrific. Thank you. 15 Council, any questions or comments for 16 Mr. Hughes? 17 MS. HAYTHE: No. Just thank you. You 18 know, thank you to the correctional team for 19 all that they do to ensure the safety of the 20 workers. Well, to ensure the safety of those 21 that come in that are detained.</p>	<p>1 recognize the families of the officers, too. 2 MR. LESHHER: Well, we recognize, we 3 recognize you for this one week of the year, 4 but we know you're there every week of the year 5 and around the clock keeping this community 6 safe in the way that only you can do. 7 So thank you for, thank you for your good 8 work. 9 MR. HUGHES: Thank you. 10 SPEAKER: Thank you. 11 MR. LESHHER: And if you'd like to come 12 forward, we have a proclamation to present. 13 MR. STAMP: Mr. Council Vice President, I 14 think we have Chuck still on the line. Chuck 15 is still on the line I think. 16 MR. LESHHER: Chuck, a comment from Chuck. 17 MR. STAMP: Yeah. Maybe so. 18 MR. LESHHER: Chuck, do you have anything 19 you'd like to add? 20 MR. CALLAHAN: Yeah. Joe and the whole 21 crew, I'm sorry I couldn't be there.</p>
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<p>1 I know it's not an easy task, and I'm sure 2 that it is a challenge. 3 But we do want to recognize and thank you 4 for the hard work and dedication to your job. 5 MS. MIELKE: What she said. 6 MR. STEPP: And I'll add in. So Joe and 7 your team as always fill the courtroom. So 8 thank you all for being here. 9 I think you and Dana, who is sitting back 10 there now from the library, you guys go back 11 and forth on who can pack the courtroom for 12 proclamations the best. 13 So thank you, guys, all for doing that. 14 Thank you for what you do every day. 15 Appreciate you guys. 16 MR. HUGHES: Thank you. And we will be 17 trying to recognize the families of the 18 officers during the summer because they really 19 have to put up with a lot, too, because 20 officers, they might be called for last minute 21 overtime and things that like. So we try to</p>	<p>1 But once again, you guys go beyond work 2 and family. And we really appreciate you 3 hanging in there. And there's some good days 4 and bad days there. And, you know, all that 5 you do for us to keep us safe, that's the other 6 part. You keep us safe and actually keep, you 7 know, unfortunately the people that need 8 service from you guys, trying to keep them 9 safe. 10 So you got a big job to do, and I really, 11 this Council really appreciate all your hard 12 work. Thank you, guys. 13 MR. HUGHES: Thank you. 14 I'd like to just recognize the officers 15 that have attended today. There is Sergeant 16 Cephas, Sergeant Aaron, Captain Tondin, 17 Corporal Boyd. 18 MR. STAMP: That's a tall order. 19 SPEAKER: Lieutenant Slaughter. 20 MR. HUGHES: Slaughter. 21 SPEAKER: Sergeant Ireland, Corporal</p>

Page 22	<p>1 (indiscernible), Cephas, Captain Johnson, and 2 our officer manager Ray. 3 (Cross talk.) 4 SPEAKER: You know Cindy. 5 MR. HUGHES: Who is very important to me. 6 MR. STEPP: Come on up, y'all. 7 MR. STAMP: Mr. Council Vice President, 8 I'd like to just real quickly. I mean we have 9 over 400 full-time employees in this county. 10 And we love them all, and we love the 14 11 different departments. 12 But I will say the energy that's projected 13 by this group of people every year, and when we 14 talk about attitude, they exert positivity and 15 it's appreciated. So thank you. 16 MR. LESHER: Thank you, Mr. Stamp. 17 MS. KILMON: Keasha, can you scoot a 18 little bit that way? All right. Ready? One, 19 two, three. There we go. 20 MR. LESHER: Okay. We still have ten 21 minutes to go before we can start the</p>	Page 24	<p>1 SECRETARY: Mr. Stepp. 2 MR. STEPP: Aye. 3 SECRETARY: Ms. Mielke. 4 MS. MIELKE: Aye. 5 SECRETARY: Ms. Haythe. 6 MS. HAYTHE: Aye. 7 SECRETARY: Mr. Callahan. 8 MR. CALLAHAN: Aye. 9 MR. STAMP: I know I should have spoke 10 slower. 11 MR. LESHER: Well, we can elaborate on 12 this. 13 So we know that Mr. Johnson is already a 14 member of the college's Foundation Board, and 15 this -- so he's been thoroughly vetted. He's 16 already been supporting the college, and we 17 know that this simply elevates his service to 18 the community through his work with the 19 college. 20 And so we look forward to working with him 21 in that new capacity.</p>
Page 23	<p>1 advertised hearing on the Constant Yield tax 2 rate. 3 So I would like to jump down on the agenda 4 to county manager's report. Mr. Stamp. 5 MR. STAMP: Thank you, Mr. Council Vice 6 President, Members of the Council, and 7 President Callahan. Appreciate it. 8 Under this week's county manager report, I 9 only have one item for you today. And that is 10 requesting your consideration to send a letter 11 to the Governor in support of the application 12 of Darius Johnson to the Chesapeake College 13 Board of Trustees. 14 MR. LESHER: Do we have a motion? We 15 need -- 16 MS. MIELKE: So moved. 17 MS. HAYTHE: Second. 18 MR. LESHER: We have a motion and second. 19 Mrs. Moran, would you call the roll, please. 20 SECRETARY: Mr. Leshner. 21 MR. LESHER: Aye.</p>	Page 25	<p>1 MR. STAMP: We have Cliff here, if you'd 2 like him to say a few words. 3 MR. LESHER: Mr. Coppersmith, do you have 4 anything to offer for us? 5 DR. COPPERSMITH: I'm so happy to hear the 6 motion and voted on (indiscernible). 7 My name is Cliff Coppersmith. I'm the 8 president of Chesapeake College. 9 So yes. Very pleased to see Darius's name 10 moved forward. He's been a great help to us on 11 the Foundation, obviously well regarded in the 12 community, very strong leader. And most 13 important to me, is very excited about serving 14 as a trustee should his nomination make it 15 through the Governor's process. 16 So more than happy to help. I'm more than 17 help to respond to any questions. 18 MR. LESHER: Well, for the benefit of the 19 public, since we have you here, Chesapeake 20 College, as we know, is a collaboration of five 21 different counties. And I guess it's five</p>

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<p>1 different Councils or Commissions that appoint 2 then members of the Board for the college. And 3 this would be one of the representatives for 4 Talbot County. 5 DR. COPPERSMITH: That is correct. 6 There's ten total Board of Trustee members. 7 And trying to recall who Darius is -- oh, he's 8 replacing Blenda Armistead, Dr. Armistead, who 9 is coming off her third and final term. So 10 she's terming out at the end of June. 11 And so Darius, as soon as he's appointed 12 by the Governor, if that's what happens, would 13 take her place. 14 But we do have two Board members for each 15 county. We are supported by five counties. 16 MR. LESHHER: And the term, the term will 17 start at the beginning of the new academic 18 year? 19 DR. COPPERSMITH: It should begin on 20 July 1st, assuming things move timely. 21 The Governor's appointment process</p>	<p>1 invited to attend. 2 And then the commencement ceremony is at 3 2 o'clock. And at the last count, we have 136 4 students walking. 5 MR. LESHHER: Congratulations. That's 6 great news. 7 Any other questions for Mr. Coppersmith? 8 MS. MIELKE: No. 9 MS. HAYTHE: No. Working on my speech as 10 we sit here right now. 11 MR. LESHHER: Keasha. 12 DR. COPPERSMITH: Thank you very much. 13 MS. HAYTHE: Oh, yeah. Speak into the 14 mic, right? Yeah. 15 Working on my speech as we sit here right 16 now. Yeah. 17 DR. COPPERSMITH: Fantastic. 18 MS. HAYTHE: It will be ready. 19 MR. LESHHER: Very good. 20 Well, congratulations to all. And thank 21 you and look forward to working with</p>
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<p>1 sometimes can take a while. So she may not or 2 he may not be appointed and ready to go on 3 July 1st. It may be sometime after that. 4 MR. LESHHER: And these are exciting times 5 for the college. You're wrapping up another 6 semester. And I think is it just next week we 7 have commencement. 8 DR. COPPERSMITH: You're kind of stealing 9 my thunder for my appearance here in a few 10 minutes. But yes, we have commencement coming 11 up on May 20th. 12 And I'd like to point out that our own 13 honorable Ms. Keasha Haythe is going to be our 14 commencement speaker. Obviously a great leader 15 of the community along with Chesapeake. So 16 we're really happy to have her speak to our 17 students. 18 And you are all invited, by the way. 19 MR. LESHHER: Yes, indeed. Yes, indeed. 20 DR. COPPERSMITH: The event begins with a 21 Board reception at 12, which you are all</p>	<p>1 Mr. Johnson in this new capacity. 2 DR. COPPERSMITH: Thank you. All the 3 Council, thank you. 4 MR. LESHHER: Council, we have still a few 5 more minutes to fill before the public hearing. 6 We do have -- this is not pertinent yet to 7 the budget. We will have time for that, but we 8 can jump ahead to general public comment, which 9 we have ordinarily at the end of the meeting. 10 A have a couple of people signed up for 11 public comment. And the first is Mr. Phil 12 Rigginn. 13 MR. RIGGIN: Thank you, sir. Phil Rigginn, 14 29736 Sullivan Drive in Easton. I would like 15 to make one comment prior to talking about the 16 budget. 17 Ms. Haythe, Mr. Stepp, I appreciate how 18 many times you offer very relevant prayers to 19 this group before you begin your meetings here, 20 and I'm not sure that that necessarily gets 21 recognized on a regular basis.</p>

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1 Secondly, I appreciate the fact that
 2 you've decided today or this week to recognize
 3 correctional officers. As I was scrambling to
 4 find a job, my first job out of the military
 5 many years ago, I ended up in a Maryland
 6 penitentiary as providing psychological
 7 services, which meant that it was a very busy
 8 time because most people there required them.
 9 But correctional officers were remarkable, and
 10 I know what these people do.
 11 Regarding the budget, I want to
 12 congratulate you folks as a group for bringing
 13 in a budget or recommending a budget at
 14 \$159 million, which is I believe about a
 15 million dollars less than last year and is
 16 actually \$3 million less than fiscal year 24,
 17 as I recall. As presented. I'm not saying
 18 that you spent everything or whatever because I
 19 don't know that.
 20 It's obvious by looking at the documents
 21 that I've seen again that people who pay

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1 property tax and local income tax here in this
 2 county generate about 70 percent of the revenue
 3 that you have at your disposal for the year.
 4 And like I mean and those of us, like at
 5 least four of you I think as well as myself,
 6 also pay town taxes. So we do drive most of
 7 the revenue that is available to both agencies.
 8 I'm not here to do anything other than to
 9 acknowledge a few things that you have done and
 10 are continuing to do.
 11 The larger picture obviously shows Talbot
 12 County with the lowest property tax rate in the
 13 State of Maryland, which is significant, and
 14 certainly recognized by a lot of people who
 15 consider moving here. And has a second lowest
 16 local income tax rate in the State of Maryland.
 17 Second only to Worcester County, and I can only
 18 speculate that Ocean City drives most of that
 19 money in Worcester County to the extent that
 20 they can keep that rate as low as it is.
 21 And I also know that years past, Talbot

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1 was the leading group, the leading county
 2 government with local income tax until maybe
 3 four, five years ago.
 4 Again, just to congratulate you.
 5 And I would be remiss if I didn't also
 6 acknowledge your very, very capable Finance
 7 Department in putting this document together
 8 and in consulting with you on an ongoing basis
 9 as this budget gets developed.
 10 I do have some additional thoughts, which
 11 I will share with you later. And I understand
 12 I have until the 8th of May to submit something
 13 for the record. And I intend to do that
 14 because I have some thoughts about various
 15 things that I think deserve your attention.
 16 Again, congratulations. Thank you very
 17 much for the opportunity to be here. And I
 18 guess that's it.
 19 MR. LESHER: Thank you Mr., Riggien.
 20 MR. STEPP: Thank you.
 21 MR. LESHER: Mr. Callahan, thank you for

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1 joining us. Do you have anything further
 2 before we move on to the public hearing?
 3 MR. CALLAHAN: No. I'm good. Thank you,
 4 guys.
 5 MR. LESHER: Thank you for joining us,
 6 Mr. Callahan.
 7 MR. CALLAHAN: Yeah, yeah. No problem.
 8 Okay. Appreciate it. Thank you.
 9 MR. LESHER: Okay. It is now 2 o'clock.
 10 I can now call the public hearing to order for
 11 this afternoon.
 12 There are two public hearings today. If
 13 you wish to speak at any of these hearings,
 14 please state your name and address for the
 15 record. You will be given three minutes to
 16 speak if you are representing yourself or five
 17 minutes to speak if speaking on behalf of a
 18 group or association.
 19 The first is the Constant Yield. The
 20 County Council in fiscal year 2027 proposed
 21 budget is proposing to adopt a real property

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1 tax rate of 81.80 cents per \$100 of assessed
 2 valuation for all properties located outside of
 3 the incorporated towns.
 4 This includes an education supplement of
 5 1.47 cents for the increase in funding for
 6 Talbot County Public Schools, and is 1.48 cents
 7 higher than the current real property tax rate.
 8 This rate is 5.1 percent higher than the
 9 Constant Yield rate of 77.81 cents and will
 10 generate \$2,349,718 more in property tax
 11 revenues in fiscal year 27 from the
 12 unincorporated area of the county.
 13 Properties located within the incorporated
 14 towns will again be granted a tax rate
 15 differential, which remains unchanged from the
 16 prior year and sets their real property tax
 17 rates between 6.01 and 13.3 cents lower than
 18 the county rate.
 19 The County Council will not adopt the
 20 fiscal year 2027 tax rate today. The fiscal
 21 year 2027 tax rate will be adopted as part of

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1 fiscal year 2026 to 2027 annual budget and
 2 appropriation ordinance currently scheduled for
 3 adoption on Tuesday, May 26, 2026.
 4 I will now actually, before we open -- we
 5 will -- Mr. Stamp, would you like to introduce
 6 our finance director --
 7 MR. STAMP: Absolutely --
 8 MR. LESHER: -- for an introduction?
 9 MR. STAMP: -- President, Members of
 10 Council, thank you very much.
 11 It gives us an honor to be able to present
 12 on the FY27 budget today. A lot of hard work
 13 by our finance team, who'd I'd like to
 14 recognize as Kaitlyn and Martha have worked
 15 very hard on, along with the county manager
 16 staff and, Council, you. Several months we
 17 worked very hard to get to where we are today.
 18 I just want to take a minute before I hand
 19 it over to Martha, who will provide you with a
 20 fairly detailed overview of the proposed budget
 21 that you are considering to adopt.

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1 I think we went into this year, it's fair
 2 to say, that we tried to earnestly meet with
 3 all of our departments and agencies and
 4 organizations that are funded by the county to
 5 try to have a balanced approach. We tried to
 6 understand needs and tried to meet those needs
 7 to the best as we could, understanding that any
 8 wants would be best to be postponed at this
 9 point in time.
 10 And the reason for that is that we looked
 11 at certain risks that many people would
 12 understand right now.
 13 Currently we're seeing daily a shift in
 14 federal policy that translates into real life
 15 impacts on the local level across our country
 16 but certainly here in Talbot County.
 17 The State has a looming budget deficit.
 18 And the way they normally manage that, one of
 19 the ways is to shift responsibilities on to
 20 local jurisdictions, counties, by shifting the
 21 fiscal responsibility. And at some time, and

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1 sometimes actually taking some of the local
 2 authority away as well.
 3 The other issue is economic, general
 4 economic pressures. I mean we're seeing signs
 5 of some inflationary activities with gas
 6 prices, food prices. We have, you know, a
 7 number of economic pressures that we're
 8 witnessing.
 9 And then finally, workforce challenges.
 10 We still have a challenging task in front of us
 11 to retain our talent and to recruit it. And
 12 we've worked really hard over the last number
 13 of years to do that.
 14 So that takes me to strategies. Our
 15 strategies this year was to hold the FY27
 16 budget at or below the FY26 level. I think we
 17 were able to deliver that to you, again, by
 18 trying to meet the needs but postponing the
 19 wants.
 20 We've limited new positions, with the
 21 exception of several that had funding attached

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<p>1 to them. And Martha will go into some more 2 detail on this.</p> <p>3 Focus on completing existing capital 4 projects. Council, I've been working with you 5 now for over the last three years. You're in 6 your fourth year. And we've worked really 7 hard.</p> <p>8 And we've developed an overarching plan, 9 which we call the 3Ps affectionately; 10 personnel, processes, and projects.</p> <p>11 And part of the projects piece of that was 12 to invest a significant amount of money into 13 infrastructure and other types of programs. 14 And so this year it's about finishing up what 15 we started. And so we didn't invest as much in 16 the capital program this year because, again, 17 we're finishing up these projects this year.</p> <p>18 And then finally, again, I'll just 19 reiterate the fact that this budget focused 20 heavily on prioritizing public safety and 21 education, as the Council normally does. And</p>	<p>1 construction of a new north EMS station in 2 Cordova. This facility will improve emergency 3 response times and enhance public safety for 4 residents in the northern part of the county.</p> <p>5 In addition, the county has entered into 6 an equipment purchase agreement for new heart 7 monitors, stair chairs, and power stretchers 8 for all paramedic units, replacing aging 9 equipment and enhancing EMS capabilities.</p> <p>10 Council also increased support to our 11 volunteer fire departments.</p> <p>12 Talbot County also continues to prioritize 13 the safety and maintenance of its 370 miles of 14 county roads. Routine maintenance and paving 15 occur annually, but the county also invests in 16 strategic roadway strengthening and widening 17 projects.</p> <p>18 In November 2025, Talbot County, in 19 partnership with the Town of Easton and 20 Mid-Shore Regional Council, completed a 21 multi-phase project to widen and strengthen</p>
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<p>1 we have leaned on our historic method of 2 budgeting conservatively here.</p> <p>3 So with that, I'm going to hand it over to 4 Martha Sparks. She's our finance director. 5 She's a rock star, and she's done a great job 6 here.</p> <p>7 So I'll hand it to you.</p> <p>8 MS. SPARKS: Good afternoon, Council.</p> <p>9 So I'd first like to go over the status of 10 our fiscal FY26 budget.</p> <p>11 The general fund budget for fiscal year 12 2026 is performing well. Revenues are 13 projected to come in slightly above estimates, 14 and expenditures are on track to meet budgeted 15 levels.</p> <p>16 The FY26 budget is supported and allowed 17 for meaningful improvements in government 18 services, community support, communications, 19 and overall government effectiveness.</p> <p>20 Some of the FY26 accomplishments were 21 earlier this year, Talbot County began</p>	<p>1 Goldsborough Neck Road. This enhances safety, 2 improves access, and supports future economic 3 growth associated with Mistletoe Hall Commerce 4 Business Park and Talbot Commerce Park.</p> <p>5 More recently, construction began on the 6 Chapel Road culvert replacement, which is 7 necessary to maintain safe roadway conditions 8 and proper water flow. Oh, I'm not going to 9 say this creek right. Wootenau, Wootenau 10 Creek. That's a tough one. I always say it 11 wrong.</p> <p>12 The St. Michaels Library opened in 13 March 2026, showcasing new features designed to 14 better serve the needs of the community.</p> <p>15 Improvements at county-owned pools in 16 Easton and St. Michaels are ongoing as the 17 county continues to invest in and maintain its 18 recreational facilities.</p> <p>19 And most recently, the Council established 20 the Office of Community Partnerships to serve 21 as a coordinating office that strengthens</p>

Page 42	<p>1 collaboration among agencies, nonprofit 2 partners, and community stakeholders, and 3 improve access to resources. 4 For the fiscal year 2027 budget strategy, 5 the general fund budget of 159.1 million was 6 developed using the county's longstanding 7 conservative budgeting approach, which has 8 consistently supported a strong financial 9 position. 10 The budget reflects input gathered through 11 meetings with departments, outside agencies, 12 finance, and the county manager, and work 13 sessions with Council. Each request was 14 carefully reviewed, and the budget before you 15 represents the priorities and decisions made 16 during those sessions. 17 Our budgeting methodology focuses on 18 modestly projecting revenues, evaluating the 19 need and the impact of expenditures, and using 20 reserves strategically. This disciplined 21 practice ensures that any new ongoing expenses,</p>	Page 44	<p>1 and 2024, and a 1.47 cent education supplement, 2 as approved by State law. 3 There is no change to the county's income 4 tax rate. Income tax revenues remain volatile, 5 and volatility is expected to increase due to 6 the State of Maryland approving higher tax 7 rates on high income earners. The last time 8 similar tax increases were enacted at the State 9 level, Talbot County's income tax revenue 10 declined by 40 percent the following year due 11 to an out migration and it took us ten years to 12 recover. Maintaining a low local income tax 13 rate helps to reduce risk of out migration of 14 high income earners. 15 There are also no changes in the county's 16 schedule of fees. 17 Talbot County reserves at the end of FY25 18 totaled 106 million, which includes 19 24.9 million in the rainy day reserve, which is 20 20 percent of general fund expenditures before 21 other financing uses, 7.5 million in the risk</p>
Page 43	<p>1 such as full-time positions, are added only 2 when a funding source is found and it is 3 clearly justified. 4 As a result, Talbot County has been able 5 to maintain low property and income tax rates 6 and keep other fees down. This approach has 7 also supported healthy reserve growth, 8 positioning the county to withstand fiscal 9 uncertainty at the State and federal levels. 10 Council's reserve policies adopted last 11 year provided clear guidance for funding 12 decisions and risk mitigation strategies that 13 help shape this budget. 14 Some highlights of the fiscal year 2027 15 budget. Talbot County property tax revenues 16 are calculated in accordance with the Talbot 17 County Charter and the Maryland Education 18 Article. 19 The calculation includes a two percent 20 increase above SDAT certified revenues, an 21 additional one cent approved by voters in 2020</p>	Page 45	<p>1 mitigation reserve, 4.8 million in the 2 permanent public improvement reserve, and 3 44.3 million in unassigned reserve. 4 These reserves are calculated according to 5 the reserve policy adopted by Council in 6 February 2025 and provide 30 percent coverage 7 of general fund expenditures before other 8 financing costs. 9 FY25 reserves also included 21.6 million 10 assigned to the FY26 budget and 2.7 million in 11 non-spendable reserves. 12 Reserves should only be used for 13 non-recurring purchases, projects, or payments 14 and not for ongoing expenses that are difficult 15 to reduce, such as personnel or education 16 funding. 17 Talbot County's reserves provide several 18 benefits to the county and its residents. It 19 demonstrates strong financial management to 20 credit rating agencies, supporting the county's 21 ability to secure favorable interest rates and</p>

Page 46	<p>1 reduce borrowing costs. It provides the</p> <p>2 ability to fund small capital projects and</p> <p>3 capital outlay without borrowing, and it serves</p> <p>4 as an essential tool in the county's</p> <p>5 conservative budgeting approach.</p> <p>6 The largest portion of Talbot County's</p> <p>7 recurring operating expenditures supports</p> <p>8 Talbot County Public Schools. For FY27, TCPS</p> <p>9 funding and school-related debt service account</p> <p>10 for 43 percent of the county's recurring</p> <p>11 expenditures.</p> <p>12 FY27 funding attributable to K through 12</p> <p>13 education includes the required adjusted local</p> <p>14 share at 57 million, capital projects totaling</p> <p>15 1.8 million for the Easton Middle School roof</p> <p>16 and the Education Center exterior repairs,</p> <p>17 teachers' pensions at \$619,000, which is a</p> <p>18 former State responsibility that's been shifted</p> <p>19 to the counties, universal pre-k at \$377,000,</p> <p>20 also a State-mandated increase up from the</p> <p>21 \$29,000 in FY26. This is not eligible for</p>	Page 48	<p>1 policy changes, the State's budget deficit, and</p> <p>2 broader economic pressures.</p> <p>3 Property taxes remain the county's largest</p> <p>4 revenue source, and the education supplement is</p> <p>5 included within the property tax revenues. The</p> <p>6 education supplement resets to zero each year.</p> <p>7 The revenues received from each year's</p> <p>8 education supplement are folded into total</p> <p>9 property tax revenues and become part of the</p> <p>10 county's cumulative property tax rate going</p> <p>11 forward. But revenues received from the</p> <p>12 education supplement are each year dedicated</p> <p>13 exclusively to education funding. They are</p> <p>14 used to pay for a level of funding that does</p> <p>15 not decrease.</p> <p>16 The county has two primary sources of</p> <p>17 revenues. Those are property taxes, which</p> <p>18 comprise 46.5 percent of general fund revenues,</p> <p>19 and income tax revenue at 25.1 percent. Other</p> <p>20 local taxes, such as recordation, transfer, and</p> <p>21 others, account for 9.4 percent of the general</p>
Page 47	<p>1 inclusion in the education supplement.</p> <p>2 In FY25, out of the 24 school districts in</p> <p>3 the State of Maryland, Talbot County was the</p> <p>4 12th highest in total per pupil funding and the</p> <p>5 fourth highest in local per pupil funding.</p> <p>6 Some more FY27 budget highlights include a</p> <p>7 three percent cost of living adjustment and one</p> <p>8 performance-based step for county employees.</p> <p>9 No new government, general government</p> <p>10 positions without unidentified funding source.</p> <p>11 And the use of fund balance reserves are</p> <p>12 invested in 5.5 million for capital outlay</p> <p>13 purchases, 4.6 million for capital projects,</p> <p>14 and 2.2 million for the recreation fund.</p> <p>15 Total revenues for FY27 are projected at</p> <p>16 159.1 million. Revenue estimates have been</p> <p>17 increased based on historical trends. This</p> <p>18 approach slightly adjusts the county's</p> <p>19 traditional conservative budgeting methods,</p> <p>20 while relying on reserve policies to help</p> <p>21 protect against uncertainties, such as federal</p>	Page 49	<p>1 fund revenues. Recordation and transfer taxes</p> <p>2 are volatile and strongly tied to the</p> <p>3 performance of the real estate market in Talbot</p> <p>4 County.</p> <p>5 The net increase in education funding to</p> <p>6 Talbot County Schools, teachers' pensions, and</p> <p>7 universal pre-k is 1.8 million.</p> <p>8 Operating costs for the county have</p> <p>9 increased five percent, mainly as a result of</p> <p>10 the fixed costs related to our workforce.</p> <p>11 Capital outlay has increased 2.4 million.</p> <p>12 Capital outlay includes one-time or</p> <p>13 non-recurring costs for vehicles, equipment,</p> <p>14 and small improvements. Included in the</p> <p>15 5.5 million in capital outlay is Talbot</p> <p>16 County's contribution of 2.3 million to the</p> <p>17 construction of the Queen Anne Technical Center</p> <p>18 at Chesapeake College, which will support</p> <p>19 improvement of short-term workforce focus</p> <p>20 courses and programs appealing to adult</p> <p>21 learners, career changers, incumbent workers to</p>

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<p>1 expand learning in the construction trades. 2 And I felt that that was very worthy to 3 highlight that included in this budget. 4 There are also one-time increases of 5 2.3 million in transfers to the recreation fund 6 for capital outlay and CIP projects for the 7 Community Center and Hog Neck Golf Course and 8 to support recreation programs that are run 9 through the Community Center. 10 These general fund expenditure categories, 11 as you see in this graph, are consistent 12 between our budget ordinance and our annual 13 comprehensive financial statement. In those 14 financial documents, education expenditures 15 include Talbot County Public Schools, Talbot 16 County Free Library, and Chesapeake College, 17 which is 43.7 percent of all general fund 18 expenditures. 19 Public safety accounts for 26.9 percent of 20 general fund expenditures and illustrates this 21 Council's strong support for our public safety,</p>	<p>1 revenues from the education supplement are 2 dedicated to the appropriation for education 3 funding and teachers' pensions. 4 Here is a history of a Talbot County tax 5 bill for a home assessed at \$300,000. The 6 year-over-year property tax increase is \$44.40, 7 with \$44.10 of that amount directed directly 8 funding increases to Talbot County Public 9 Schools and teachers' pensions. 10 Since 2019, the property tax on a \$300,000 11 home has increased by \$635, with \$480 of that 12 increase attributable to the education 13 supplement and \$155 supporting County services, 14 facilities, and programs. 15 Counties in Maryland have very limited 16 tools for generating revenue, and property tax 17 is the most predictable and stable revenue 18 source available. 19 Education funding is a large recurring 20 expense that grows every year. The county 21 cannot reduce education spending in response to</p>
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<p>1 which includes strong support to our local 2 volunteer fire departments. 3 General government expenditures comprise 4 11.7 percent, and Public Works is at 5 5.6 percent. 6 The total county property tax rate has 7 been calculated at .8180, which includes an 8 education supplement of .0147. Talbot County 9 property tax rates are calculated in accordance 10 with the Talbot County Charter and with the 11 Maryland State Education law. 12 Two percent additional over SDAT certified 13 revenues, one cent to the calculated property 14 tax rate approved by the voters in 2020 and 15 2024. 16 The education supplement includes any 17 increases for education funding or teachers' 18 pensions. 19 And as mentioned previously, the education 20 supplement is not cumulative in the rate 21 itself. That rate resets each year. Any</p>	<p>1 economic shifts. And it is for this reason 2 that Talbot County intentionally places 3 increases in education funding into the 4 education supplement. It ensures a reliable, 5 predictable revenue stream for an expenditure 6 the county is legally obligated and unable to 7 reduce. It keeps education-related increases 8 separate and transparent. 9 Income tax revenue, by contrast, is highly 10 volatile, and the county does not earmark it. 11 But it does rely on the flexibility within 12 county operations to cut or reduce spending if 13 income tax revenues decline. 14 Talbot County does offer property owners 15 located within a municipal boundary a tax 16 differential based on parallel services offered 17 by both the county and the town. For fiscal 18 year 2026 -- excuse me. In fiscal year 2025, 19 the total benefit to those property owners was 20 calculated at \$4.1 million by the Department of 21 Legislative Services.</p>

Page 54	<p>1 This is a sample tax bill illustrating the</p> <p>2 county tax rate and education supplement based</p> <p>3 on a home assessed at 300,000.</p> <p>4 Talbot County has remained the lowest</p> <p>5 property tax rate in Maryland for many years.</p> <p>6 However, this is changing due to the increased</p> <p>7 educational costs mandated by the State of</p> <p>8 Maryland through the Blueprint for Education.</p> <p>9 Talbot County is structurally different because</p> <p>10 its Charter-mandated revenue cap limits</p> <p>11 flexibility in a way most Maryland counties do</p> <p>12 not face.</p> <p>13 Some counties are proposing to lower</p> <p>14 property tax rates in FY27, which happens to be</p> <p>15 an election year.</p> <p>16 These counties have more flexibility</p> <p>17 because they are not bound by the same Charter</p> <p>18 restrictions as Talbot County.</p> <p>19 Talbot County's Charter revenue cap</p> <p>20 allows, as I've mentioned before, no more than</p> <p>21 a two percent increase in property tax revenues</p>	Page 56	<p>1 top earning taxpayers, which makes this revenue</p> <p>2 source highly volatile.</p> <p>3 Income tax revenues have become even more</p> <p>4 unpredictable because of the State of Maryland</p> <p>5 approved higher tax rates on high income</p> <p>6 earners in 2025.</p> <p>7 As mentioned previously, the last time the</p> <p>8 State increased taxes on high income residents,</p> <p>9 Talbot County's income tax revenue dropped by</p> <p>10 40 percent the next year due to outward</p> <p>11 migration.</p> <p>12 By maintaining a low income tax rate, the</p> <p>13 county aims to reduce the likelihood of losing</p> <p>14 high income taxpayers and protect this</p> <p>15 sensitive revenue stream.</p> <p>16 In May 2024, the county went out to bond</p> <p>17 for Chapel Elementary renovations and</p> <p>18 improvements. And during that bond process, we</p> <p>19 are rated by Fitch and Moody's rating agencies.</p> <p>20 And in Fitch's analysis of the county,</p> <p>21 they noted, first of all, they affirmed the</p>
Page 55	<p>1 or one additional penny on the tax rate each</p> <p>2 year.</p> <p>3 The county cannot exceed these limits</p> <p>4 under any circumstances. If Talbot County</p> <p>5 chose not to take the two percent increase or</p> <p>6 the additional penny in one year, the county</p> <p>7 cannot make up that lost revenue in future</p> <p>8 years, even if education or other mandated</p> <p>9 costs rise sharply. This structural limitation</p> <p>10 prevents large year-to-year swings in tax bills</p> <p>11 and enforces strong fiscal discipline on the</p> <p>12 Council, the county manager, and all county</p> <p>13 departments. However, it also reduces the</p> <p>14 county's flexibility compared to other Maryland</p> <p>15 counties.</p> <p>16 Talbot County has the second lowest income</p> <p>17 tax rate in Maryland at 2.4 percent. The</p> <p>18 county's last income tax rate change occurred</p> <p>19 in 2013.</p> <p>20 A significant share of Talbot County's</p> <p>21 income tax revenue comes from a small number of</p>	Page 57	<p>1 county's credit rating at AAA. And they noted</p> <p>2 that the AAA, IDR, and general obligation</p> <p>3 rating affirmation reflects Talbot County's AAA</p> <p>4 financial resilience, unpinned by ample</p> <p>5 budgetary flexibility and Fitch's expectation</p> <p>6 that the county will sustain reserves at or</p> <p>7 above 7.5 percent of expenditures.</p> <p>8 They also noted that we have long-term</p> <p>9 liability profile that is assessed at strongest</p> <p>10 and that our revenue volatility was assessed as</p> <p>11 weak due to the significant proportion of</p> <p>12 revenues derived from the local income tax.</p> <p>13 Moody's analysts also affirmed the</p> <p>14 county's credit rating at AA1, noting the</p> <p>15 following credit strengths. There was a strong</p> <p>16 management team that maintains formal policies,</p> <p>17 conservative budgeting, and long-term financial</p> <p>18 and debt plans, that there is robust per capita</p> <p>19 property wealth and manageable leverage and</p> <p>20 fixed costs.</p> <p>21 There will be another public hearing this</p>

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<p>1 evening at 7 p.m. at Easton Elementary School 2 cafeteria. 3 Final budget deliberations will be held by 4 Council on Tuesday, May 12th. And the budget 5 adoption will be on Tuesday, May 26th. 6 The public is invited to submit written 7 public comments by Thursday, May 8th, to 8 publiccomment@talbotcountymd.gov. And for more 9 information, you can go to the FY2027 proposed 10 budget on our website at 11 www.talbotcountymaryland.gov. 12 MR. LESHHER: Thank you, Ms. Sparks. 13 Ms. Sparks, could you elaborate on one 14 other item? You talked about how Talbot 15 County's property tax rate may no longer be the 16 lowest because of the Blueprint and such. 17 Could you also talk about how the impact of 18 Talbot County's I think unique homestead 19 property tax credit? 20 MS. SPARKS: Sure. So the homestead tax 21 credit throughout the State of Maryland, each</p>	<p>1 that assessment from shortly after they first 2 purchased the property? 3 MS. SPARKS: That is correct. And that is 4 also -- I'm not sure the reason why Talbot 5 County set that at zero. But once you get the 6 homestead credit and you claim your residence 7 in Talbot County as your primary residence, 8 then that also means that you will pay income 9 taxes, Talbot County's income tax rate. So 10 that also brings -- it also makes that a more 11 solid revenue stream as well. 12 MR. LESHHER: Thank you. 13 Any other questions for Ms. Sparks? 14 MR. STEPP: No. 15 MS. HAYTHE: No. 16 MS. MIELKE: No. 17 MR. LESHHER: Thank you very much. 18 A reminder now that we have two public 19 hearings. The first one is simply on the 20 Constant Yield tax rate. We will then get to a 21 second hearing on the budget itself.</p>
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<p>1 county can give up to from zero or ten percent 2 up to that cap. So Talbot County's is zero. 3 So that means if you bought a house 20 4 years ago at \$300,000, you file the paperwork 5 to have that homestead tax credit that that's 6 your primary residence in Talbot County. 7 So for every year, no matter how much your 8 assessments go up, your property tax bill will 9 be based on a \$300,000 home assessment. 10 So while your tax rate is going up, it is 11 going up because you may pay more in taxes on 12 your bill, but it is because the rate is going 13 up, and it's not related to your increase in 14 assessments. But that's only if you have the 15 homestead tax credit. 16 MR. LESHHER: So a business owner or 17 somebody who has a second home here or an 18 investment property, they're going to be paying 19 on the most recent assessment. But those 20 impacted, those who have primary residence, 21 those who have the credit will be paying on</p>	<p>1 Is there anybody here who wishes to speak 2 on the Constant Yield tax rate? If so, you can 3 come forward to the table and introduce 4 yourself. 5 MR. STEPP: Any mathematicians in the 6 room? 7 MR. LESHHER: Seeing none, I will close the 8 hearing on the Constant Yield tax rate, though 9 the record remains open, as we've stated 10 before. 11 We will now move on to Bill 1625. 12 Mrs. Moran, would you please read the title of 13 Bill 1625 into the record. 14 SECRETARY: Bill Number 1625, an act to 15 establish the 2026-2027 annual budget and 16 appropriation ordinance. 17 MR. LESHHER: Thank you. All right. 18 I will now open the public hearing to 19 comments from the general public on Bill 1625. 20 I'll ask you to please state your name and 21 address for the record. You will be given</p>

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1 three minutes to speak if you're representing
 2 yourself, five minutes if speaking on behalf of
 3 a group or association.
 4 The first one that I have signed up for
 5 doing this now is Dr. Cliff Coppersmith.
 6 DR. COPPERSMITH: Mr. President, Members
 7 of the Council, my name is Cliff Coppersmith.
 8 I reside at 145 McKinney Lane in Centerville,
 9 Maryland.
 10 MS. SMITH: I'm Karen Smith. I reside at
 11 5141 Feather Lane, Tilghman, Maryland.
 12 DR. COPPERSMITH: So before I start my
 13 formal comments, I just want to recognize Karen
 14 Smith. This is her last iteration of the Cliff
 15 and Karen show in Talbot County.
 16 And I just want to thank her so much for
 17 her great work for Chesapeake College, most
 18 recently as our Vice President for
 19 administrative services. She's been a
 20 fantastic help to me and a wonderful team
 21 member and a fantastic leader who has gotten us

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1 through some really changing times, just
 2 beginning with the pandemic. And, you know,
 3 the fun just never stops.
 4 So Karen has been a wonderful person for
 5 me. I did not come from a strong budget
 6 background, and she's been really fantastic for
 7 me as the president of the college. And I wish
 8 her well in her retirement, which is much
 9 deserved and she's got all kinds of plans.
 10 So Mr. President and Members of the
 11 Council, on behalf of the students, faculty,
 12 and staff of Chesapeake College, I want to
 13 express my sincere gratitude for your approval
 14 of our fiscal year 2027 budget proposal.
 15 Your steadfast support is vital as we
 16 continue to provide high-quality, accessible
 17 education and workforce training for the
 18 residents of Talbot County and our other four
 19 service counties.
 20 As I reflect on the past eight years of my
 21 administration, I am incredibly proud of what

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1 we have achieved together. Our partnership has
 2 been the cornerstone of a transformative era
 3 for the college. And through our collective
 4 work, we have significantly expanded our reach
 5 and our impact.
 6 We successfully launched and enhanced
 7 critical programs in the skilled trades,
 8 including marine, advanced manufacturing,
 9 welding and metal fabrication, and construction
 10 trades, along with our long-running health
 11 professions portfolio, ensuring that our
 12 curriculum evolved alongside the needs of our
 13 local economy.
 14 With your support, we have modernized our
 15 facilities, including the recent addition of a
 16 state-of-the-art skilled trade lab that kind of
 17 bridges the gap between what we had before and
 18 what we hope to build in the next several years
 19 and a mobile welding laboratory that brings
 20 training directly to the community.
 21 We are also grateful for the county's

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1 support of the new and improved Queen Anne's
 2 Tech Building project which will provide a
 3 generational resource for skilled trades
 4 instruction for the next 30 years. We are
 5 executing the design phase of the project even
 6 as we speak with construction to begin next
 7 year.
 8 Our collaboration has strengthened dual
 9 enrollment and career articulation agreements,
 10 clearing pathways for Talbot County students
 11 and residents to transition seamlessly from
 12 high school to higher education and meaningful
 13 careers.
 14 And together we have reinforced
 15 Chesapeake's role as a regional hub for
 16 innovation, sustainability, and economic
 17 growth, contributing over \$118 million in
 18 income to the local economy annually.
 19 This budget approval is more than a
 20 financial commitment. It is a renewal of our
 21 shared vision to empower every student and

Page 66	<p>1 enrich the vitality of the Eastern Shore.</p> <p>2 Thank you for your continued leadership</p> <p>3 and for being such dedicated partners along our</p> <p>4 journey.</p> <p>5 As we near the end of the academic year, I</p> <p>6 again invite all of you to attend our May 20th</p> <p>7 commencement, beginning with the trustees</p> <p>8 reception held in the Dorchester Administration</p> <p>9 Building boardroom that starts at noon with our</p> <p>10 ceremony beginning at 2 o'clock. Again, with</p> <p>11 our honorable Ms. Keasha Haythe providing the</p> <p>12 commencement address. We recognize her for her</p> <p>13 contributions as a county leader as well as an</p> <p>14 honored alum of Chesapeake College.</p> <p>15 Those are my comments. I'm more than</p> <p>16 happy to take any questions or comments if you</p> <p>17 have them.</p> <p>18 MR. LESHHER: Thank you, Dr. Coppersmith.</p> <p>19 Any questions for him?</p> <p>20 And congratulations, Ms. Smith.</p> <p>21 MS. SMITH: Thank you.</p>	Page 68	<p>1 very much for that support.</p> <p>2 We also want to acknowledge your support</p> <p>3 of the staff with the COLA and merit increases.</p> <p>4 Without those increases every year, we really</p> <p>5 can't stay competitive. We're not competitive</p> <p>6 as it is with our salaries given that we're in</p> <p>7 the public service field. But without those</p> <p>8 increases, we can't really sustain, you know,</p> <p>9 cost of living. So thank you very much for</p> <p>10 that.</p> <p>11 And I also want to say thank you for your</p> <p>12 support of the Chesapeake Children's Book</p> <p>13 Festival and invite you to the festival. I</p> <p>14 don't have the flyer, but it will be out here.</p> <p>15 So please grab one. It's always the first</p> <p>16 Saturday in June. So please come. We really</p> <p>17 do want our Council representatives there to</p> <p>18 see the children and the families and what an</p> <p>19 impact that festival has. And your</p> <p>20 contribution, though small, very small, \$2,000,</p> <p>21 really helps to put that festival on. So thank</p>
Page 67	<p>1 DR. COPPERSMITH: Thank you.</p> <p>2 MR. STEPP: I'll add the congratulations.</p> <p>3 Well deserved.</p> <p>4 MS. SMITH: Thank you.</p> <p>5 MR. LESHHER: I will call up any other</p> <p>6 institutional representatives. Ms. Sherman or</p> <p>7 Ms. Newman from the library.</p> <p>8 MS. NEWMAN: My name is Dana Newman. I</p> <p>9 live at 6295 Bozman Neavitt Road in Neavitt,</p> <p>10 Maryland.</p> <p>11 I think we'll have others tonight.</p> <p>12 So I just want to keep my message very</p> <p>13 simple and straightforward. We really, really</p> <p>14 appreciate from the bottom of our heart your</p> <p>15 support of the St. Michaels Library. The</p> <p>16 expansion there is going to serve us for the</p> <p>17 next 25 and 30 years in St. Michaels.</p> <p>18 And the broader Bay Hundred community</p> <p>19 really thanks you. And I think you probably</p> <p>20 saw that with the opening. We had such</p> <p>21 wonderful community support. And so thank you</p>	Page 69	<p>1 you so much for that support. And just overall</p> <p>2 of the library in general.</p> <p>3 And I'm going to turn it over to Terry,</p> <p>4 who is on our wonderful board.</p> <p>5 MS. MOORE: Terry Moore at 236 Dodson</p> <p>6 Avenue, St. Michaels, Maryland.</p> <p>7 Again, just really just tag onto what Dana</p> <p>8 said. We really appreciate the support that</p> <p>9 the Council provided regarding the</p> <p>10 St. Michaels Library. It's beautiful. It's</p> <p>11 just, it's going to really make a big</p> <p>12 difference, as it has, in St. Michaels.</p> <p>13 And certainly we appreciate the</p> <p>14 acknowledgement that you brought to Shauna, who</p> <p>15 certainly that's going to leave a big legacy</p> <p>16 for her for sure.</p> <p>17 And again, just mention the staff</p> <p>18 increase. We certainly, again, appreciate the</p> <p>19 Council's support on that.</p> <p>20 And just want to give a big thank you.</p> <p>21 MS. NEWMAN: I also want to thank you for</p>

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<p>1 your support of the teachers' pensions. I</p> <p>2 know it's not easy for the county to have to</p> <p>3 swallow that passed down from the State, but we</p> <p>4 are a part of the teacher pension program. So</p> <p>5 thank you very much for you and your support of</p> <p>6 that.</p> <p>7 The only other thing I want to say is</p> <p>8 thank you to Susan Sherman. You've seen her</p> <p>9 face for the last four years helping to</p> <p>10 advocate for the St. Michaels Library in</p> <p>11 particular. This is her last tenure on our</p> <p>12 board. So she's been with us for a long time.</p> <p>13 So thank you, Susan.</p> <p>14 MR. LESHER: Thank you, Ms. Newman,</p> <p>15 Ms. Moore.</p> <p>16 The only other institutional</p> <p>17 representative I see is Chief Lowery. If you</p> <p>18 are here to speak, I'll give you the</p> <p>19 opportunity.</p> <p>20 CHIEF LOWERY: I have nothing, sir.</p> <p>21 MR. LESHER: Okay. With that, I will open</p>	<p>1 Cliff Coppersmith had signed up for it.</p> <p>2 MR. STEPP: Just wanted to doublecheck.</p> <p>3 Thank you.</p> <p>4 MR. LESHER: We got the names off there.</p> <p>5 MS. HAYTHE: Only comment. I need a nap</p> <p>6 before 7 o'clock.</p> <p>7 MR. LESHER: Mr. Stepp, anything further?</p> <p>8 MR. STEPP: Nothing here. Looking forward</p> <p>9 to seeing everyone tonight at seven at Easton</p> <p>10 Elementary School.</p> <p>11 MR. LESHER: Ms. Mielke.</p> <p>12 MS. MIELKE: I just wanted to say that the</p> <p>13 Cordova fireman's birthday party, 100 years,</p> <p>14 was fabulous. It had, you know, Easton Middle</p> <p>15 School band, lots of fire trucks and fire</p> <p>16 companies, even classic fire trucks. And it</p> <p>17 was just a joy to be there. And they had</p> <p>18 delicious food. It was a good time.</p> <p>19 MR. LESHER: And even a real fire call</p> <p>20 that they had to respond to.</p> <p>21 MS. MIELKE: Exactly, exactly.</p>
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<p>1 it up to the public. Again, please state your</p> <p>2 name and address. Anybody is welcome to come</p> <p>3 up to the podium to speak on the budget today.</p> <p>4 Anybody?</p> <p>5 Hearing none, written comments will be</p> <p>6 accepted by the County Council until Friday,</p> <p>7 May 8th, at noon. Emailed comments can be sent</p> <p>8 to publiccomment@talbotcountymd.gov.</p> <p>9 The public hearing on Bill 1625 is now</p> <p>10 recessed. The public hearing on Bill 1625 will</p> <p>11 continue at 7 o'clock p.m. this evening at the</p> <p>12 Easton Elementary School cafeteria located at</p> <p>13 307 Glenwood Avenue in Easton.</p> <p>14 Bill 1625 is eligible for a vote on</p> <p>15 Tuesday, May 26, 2026.</p> <p>16 And with that, we can move on to Council</p> <p>17 comment, if there is any.</p> <p>18 MS. HAYTHE: No comment this evening.</p> <p>19 MR. STEPP: Did we have anyone from the</p> <p>20 public sign up for this for public comment?</p> <p>21 MR. LESHER: That was Phil Riggins and</p>	<p>1 MR. STAMP: Mr. Lesher, also just want to</p> <p>2 recognize Council Member Haythe for her insight</p> <p>3 and initiative to put on a housing fair for our</p> <p>4 community. It was very well attended,</p> <p>5 represented. So just a shout out to you and</p> <p>6 the staff that helped wrap around and put that</p> <p>7 together for Council.</p> <p>8 MS. HAYTHE: Yeah. I echo that. Sarah</p> <p>9 and Jess and Brennan, Bryce, Cassandra. If I</p> <p>10 start naming names, I'll probably forget.</p> <p>11 Nancy. The whole team.</p> <p>12 It was indeed a success, really it was.</p> <p>13 So thank you for your support, Council.</p> <p>14 MR. LESHER: Okay. Thank you very much.</p> <p>15 And we are recessed until 7 o'clock.</p> <p>16 (Meeting concluded at: 2:39 p.m.)</p> <p>17</p> <p>18</p> <p>19</p> <p>20</p> <p>21</p>

1 STATE OF MARYLAND
2 I, Diane Houlihan, a Notary Public in and
for the State of Maryland, County of Talbot, do
3 hereby certify that the within named, Talbot County
Council Audio, personally appeared before me at the
4 time and place herein set according to law, was
interrogated by counsel.

5
6 I further certify that the examination was
recorded stenographically by me and then transcribed
7 from my stenographic notes to the within printed
matter by means of computer-assisted transcription
in a true and accurate manner.

8
9 I further certify that the stipulations
contained herein were entered into by counsel in my
presence.

10
11 I further certify that I am not of counsel
to any of the parties, not an employee of counsel,
nor related to any of the parties, nor in any way
12 interested in the outcome of this action.

13 AS WITNESS my hand Notorial Seal this 19th
day of May, 2026, at Easton, MD.

14

15



16

Diane Houlihan
Notary Public

17

18

19

My commission expires September 16, 2029

20

21

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