

MINUTES
BUDGET LISTENING SESSION
Wednesday, February 4, 2026

A Budget Listening Session was held on Wednesday, February 4, 2026, at 10:00 am at the Bel Air Town Hall.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Commissioner Paula S. Etting, Chair
Commissioner Steve T. Chizmar
Commissioner Kristien S. Foss
Commissioner Gavin O. Hanley
Commissioner Jakob D. Taylor

David Anderson, Media & Public Relations Specialist
Charles Dawson, Deputy Director of Public Works
Edward Hopkins, Town Administrator
Stephen Kline, Director of Public Works
Michael Krantz, Director of HR & Administration
Lisa Moody, Director of Finance
Charles Moore, Chief of Police
Angela Robertson, Director of Economic Development
Kevin Small, Director of Planning
Jane Sudbrink, Recording Secretary

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Hopkins introduced the meeting and its purpose. He was pleased that all commissioners were in attendance. Chair Etting called the meeting to order at 10:01 am.

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

III. EMPLOYEE BUDGET LISTENING SESSION

A. Current/Active Town of Bel Air Employees Invited to Attend

1. Review and Discuss Upcoming Fiscal Year 2027 Budget

2. Listen to Employees Comments and/or Suggestions

a. Public Works Department

Mr. Dawson asked that the budget include money for minor repairs at the shop. He said another important item is construction of a structure that would cover the gas pumps and public works vehicles. He said that Mr. Kline is looking into grant opportunities to cover this cost.

Mr. Dawson said that he would like to propose restoration of the armory floor in the budget. Mr. Marr confirmed for Commissioner Foss that the floor restoration would take approximately two weeks

and had not been done since the pandemic. Ms. Potler added that installation of lighting is another possible request and she is waiting on a quote for the cost. Mr. Dawson continued that the armory marketplace toilets need to be replaced with commercial toilets.

For Rockfield Manor, Mr. Marr said the replacement of the handicapped-accessible walkway is needed and he is working on estimates. Mr. Marr said that right now yearly repairs on the walkway cost around \$4,000. Mr. Dawson said this cost may be shared with the Rockfield Foundation.

Mr. Dawson said the parking garage stairwells are in need of major repairs. In addition, a survey should be conducted on the overall condition of the garage. Mr. Dawson said he would like to request three fully funded vehicle purchases this year: a new trash truck, a mini dump truck, and a sewer van.

For the sewer fund, Mr. Dawson said there is a 1968 concrete line behind state property (former Double TT restaurant location). He said this line was last cleaned and inspected in 2012. He said it will cost \$250,000 to clean and put plastic in the line, which will extend the life of the line for fifty years.

Mr. Dawson said that the department is looking to do stream restoration behind English Country Manor Condominiums. He said he will put in a request for \$275,000 for the design project, which he believes can be funded via MS4.

Mr. Dawson asked the board to continue to fund raises for staff. In addition, Mr. Dawson said that the Public Works Department is running out of room at its location. He noted that this will be a bigger concern when the department takes on dumpster service and there will need to be additional spaces for two trucks and dumpsters. Mr. Dawson suggested the abandoned property adjacent to the department's facilities as a possible location for parking. He said that Mr. Kline has reached out to the property owners about such usage but has not heard back from them. Mr. Dawson said that the area in question is in a flood plain so it is not a buildable area. Mr. Kline said that the area is outside town limits and would have to be annexed. Mr. Mullaney added that that there should be an area allocated for sleeping quarters when staff must do long shifts during weather events.

In answer to Ms. Moody, Mr. Dawson said the approximate cost for the gas pump covering is \$270,000. Mr. Marr explained the practical needs for this covering when considering equipment and weather. Ms. Moody also noted that the Highway User Fund estimate is the same as FY26, so there are adequate funds for roadwork in town.

b. Police Department

Chief Moore said he is requesting two additional officers. He said recruitment is good in the department and it is important to maintain the quality of staff. He said the late shift, 3 pm to 11 pm, is struggling to keep up with calls for service, particularly in the area of retail thefts, and would benefit from four officers rather than just three. Chief Moore explained how crime statistics in the town have gone up along with a record number of arrests in 2025. He said this high number of arrests means more paperwork for the officers and less time patrolling the neighborhoods. In addition, Chief Moore said he would like to move the canine officers to cover the 7 pm to 2 am shift.

Chief Moore reported that the records clerk retired. He said this is a high-needs, time-sensitive position so he would like to hire two records clerks and cross train them. Chief Moore explained that the

town is becoming larger and people want to come to the town. Consequently, assaults have increased, as well as the number of protests that are held in town.

Chief Moore said he is requesting more funding for the Verkada camera system. He said the system is proving very successful in town. He said he will also be asking for a drone at a cost of \$35,000. Chief Moore said that the sheriff's office has been cooperative when sharing drone resources, but is not always able to respond to the town's requests. Chief Moore is also requesting a new speed awareness sign at a cost of \$18,000. He said the Neighborhood Management Traffic Program is getting increased requests for police services. Chief Moore said he will continue to capitalize on grant funding at \$400,000 to \$500,000. He said the grant funds cover numerous programs like the Explorers Program and provide necessary resources like equipment through the Body Armor Grant. Chief Moore and Ms. White concurred that the maintenance involved in grants has greatly increased.

Chief Moore said raises are important for the Police Department. He said it is crucial to keep the department competitive with other jurisdictions.

Detective Sergeant Marchesani emphasized the importance of the Verkada camera system. He said the system has helped clear difficult cases and asked that it be funded to the fullest extent. Chief Moore confirmed for Commissioner Chizmar that not all of the Verkada cameras are up yet (18 cameras are installed) while he continues to work on MOUs and negotiate with SHA. Commissioner Chizmar asked about the LVT system. Chief Moore replied that the LVTs are working but they are not as sophisticated as Verkada cameras. He said he will request a Verkada camera trailer that the town would own rather than lease. Chief Moore noted that he will have to work on the budget details to ensure that there is no lapse in having a camera trailer between the end of the LVT lease and the purchase of the Verkada. In answer to Ms. Moody, he said that the cost will be around \$50,000 to \$60,000. Ms. Moody suggested that the Verkada camera trailer be purchased this fiscal year, which will incur a cost this year, but will mean savings next fiscal year when the LVTs are no longer leased.

Officer Maro, spoke as police union president. He said that for the past few years the town has made positive progress from an employee relations standpoint. He noted that raises for employees are really just a measure to keep up with the cost of living. Officer Maro said it is not economically practical for officers to live in Bel Air. He also asked that the employee healthcare plan remain strong. Chief Moore said that a starting salary for non-lateral police officers is \$52,000, while salary for lateral officers is higher. He agreed to send Chair Etting the exact numbers so that she can compare the salaries with other agencies.

Chair Etting said the Police Department is a great place to work because, unlike other agencies, the department is supported by people who live and work in the town. She noted how employees do not have to pay a premium for their healthcare. In addition, Chief Moore said that town pays into social security while other agencies do not. Chair Etting also stated that at a recent county council meeting, the police advisory board annual report listed 41 officers with 91 incidents, none of which were from the Bel Air Police Department.

Commissioners discussed how they have received some complaints that the Verkada camera system is similar to "Big Brother" watching the town. They stated that the data are used solely by the town, not the company, and the camera data are only reviewed when there is an incident.

Sergeant Farrell asked about the pension. In particular, whether there are measures to make the pension better for retirees. He suggested COLA raises or the DROP program. He said that there are

numerous retirements in the near future and he would not be opposed to raising the employee contributions to fund these measures.

Chair Etting said this question is under the purview of the Boards of Trustees for the pensions. Ms. Moody said these issues were discussed at the last Board of Trustees Sworn Officers meeting in December with the actuary. She said the actuary is proposing to conduct an experience study for both pensions, which will review the assumptions that go into the valuation plan, such as mortality rates and investment rates. She said the Board of Trustees Sworn Officers approved the actuary to also look at COLAs for retirees. Ms. Moody said the finalized study proposal should be sent to her this week and both Boards of Trustees will then vote on approval of the study for each pension plan. She said the studies will take about eight weeks. Ms. Moody noted that COLAs are typically expensive.

Ms. Moody added that the goal is longevity of the plans. She said the actuary will be looking at reducing the investment rate of 7% to 6.75% or 6.5%, which is on-trend with other plans. Ms. Moody said these measures are to protect the plan. She noted that a reduction in the investment rate would increase costs.

Senior Officer Rhodes, Vice President of the Police Union, asked that the employee benefits package and step increases be fully funded in the budget so as to attract lateral officers in particular. He spoke about the operations portion of the budget, which includes gear and equipment. He said the Police Department's equipment is top-notch and asked that those items continue to be funded.

Deputy Chief Hughes appreciated the board's support and asked that benefits for retirees be considered in the pension plan. He particularly emphasized medical retirement benefits. Although rare, Deputy Chief Hughes said an officer who is critically injured in the line of duty may have difficulty finding work. He asked that the DROP program be considered and noted that the program is also a recruitment tool. Deputy Chief Hughes said the department has great resources and support from the community but he remained concerned about the "backend" and the support needed for retirees.

Mr. Krantz thanked the board for approving a significant contribution toward compensation. He said that compensation, benefits, and succession planning are very important. Increasing staff to prepare for succession planning is an option but it is expensive. He said that another way to prepare for succession planning is to not allow benefits "to be eroded." Mr. Krantz said the town is in a good position now, maybe not as competitive as compared to the counties, but the town has a great culture. He said in order for there to be a great culture, compensation and benefits must be foremost in the budget. Mr. Krantz said the COLA increase will also be very important this year. He said all of these measures will aid in succession planning.

c. Economic Development Department

Ms. Robertson said there will be minor changes in the budget for her department. She said she will ask a few-thousand-dollar increase in the marketing budget to continue to fund a program that works on the available space inventory. She explained to Commissioner Hanley that the funds are for a company called We Simplify that manages the data. She said this program is much more user-friendly. Commissioners and Ms. Robertson discussed the empty buildings in town and how misinformation is frustrating. She said that, in reality, many of the spaces have been rented but the public does not know this information yet. She noted that some owners want their properties vacant. Ms. Robertson described the positive changes that are happening with some of the properties. She said such measures encourage business owners to come to town.

Ms. Potler asked that the budget continue to fund WeddingWire and theknot.com, her two primary sources for armory wedding rentals. Commissioner Hanley asked about the lighting at the armory. Ms. Potler and Mr. Marr replied that they are working on quotes. Commissioner Hanley said it makes sense to ask for lighting and audio upgrades at the same time. Ms. Potler said she has not gotten quotes for audio yet, and she is satisfied with just the lighting upgrades at this point.

d. Planning Department

Mr. Small said he would like to request a part-time code enforcement officer. He said this position would benefit his department as well as the Police Department. Mr. Small said this position would also be beneficial to the Public Works Department in terms of property maintenance issues. Mr. Small said his department does not have the time to follow up on code violations. He noted that Ms. Thompson is also researching how other municipalities manage code enforcement.

Ms. Robertson said that the ECDC drafted a vacant property registry but did not move forward with it because there is no one in place to enforce the registry. Mr. Dawson said this position could be full-time considering the needs in all the departments. Commissioner Chizmar asked further about vacant property enforcement. Ms. Robertson said owners would need to register their properties annually, pay the fee, submit to inspections, and then would face fines if they are not in compliance. Mr. Kline added there could also be fines for those property owners who do not shovel their sidewalks.

Ms. Moody said she appreciated these meetings every year and hearing from staff. She assured everyone that she is aware of their requests and needs, and she and Mr. Hopkins do their best to fund everything. Ms. Moody said the real estate tax assessment will arrive on February 14. She said this is the first year of the reassessment phase, so the numbers should go up, but the issues with vacancies at the Harford Mall could negatively affect the numbers. Ms. Moody said the worker's compensation mod rate will go down in 2025, which means more money in the budget. Ms. Moody also noted that staff's requests are not outrageous and she is keenly aware of the importance of raises and benefits.

3. Identify Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Concerns

4. Answer Employee Questions

IV. MISCELLANEOUS

V. COMMISSONERS' COMMENTS

Chair Etting thanked all the staff for their input. She appreciated the opportunity for the board to meet with the staff informally and for the care they show to the town.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Taylor motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Chizmar seconded the motion. All in favor. The meeting adjourned at 11:19 am.

APPROVED: February 17, 2026

Signature on file
Paula S. Etting, Chair
Board of Town Commissioners

Signature on file
Michael L. Krantz, Town Clerk