

At a Special Meeting of the Board of Supervisors of Warren County held in the Warren County Government Center on June 10, 2025, at 5:00 PM

Present – Warren County Board of Supervisors and County Staff: Jerome K. Butler, Chair (Happy Creek District); John W. Stanmeyer, Vice Chair (Shenandoah District); Cheryl L. Cullers, Chair (South River District); Richard A. Jamieson, (North River District); also, Edwin C. Daley, County Administrator; Alisa Scott, Finance Director; Zachary Henderson, Deputy Clerk to the Board of Supervisors

Absent - Victoria L. Cook, (Fork District)

Public Hearing - Fiscal Year 2026 Budget:

Mr. Butler called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

Ms. Scott provided the Board with a budget presentation that detailed:

- A General Fund Summary including the totals adopted in FY 2025. Additional revenues with the amended FY 2025 totals, and the total FY 2026 Proposed budget
- A breakdown of Revenue Percentages (General Property Taxes, Local Taxes and Revenue, Charges for Services, Intergovernmental)
- A breakdown of Warren County Public Schools including operations, energy and school bonds, County funding etc.
- A breakdown of Warren County operations including WCPS portions, CSA / DSS portions, county departments, and differences from FY 25 and FY 26.
- The percentage ratio of expenditures (public safety, public works, community services, financial, administration, judicial, debt transfers, non-departmental), proposed capital improvements etc.
- Proposed Capital Improvements for Fire & Rescue and Parks and Recreation
- Proposed Asset Replacements (vehicles, financial systems, replacement vehicles etc.)
- Personnel Requests for Fire & Rescue

Below is a list of citizens who spoke at the Public Hearing for Fiscal Year 2026 Budget:

1. **Sara Jones** – urged the Board to prioritize funding public schools, emphasizing flat funding in the previous years and the needs of the students, and asked the Board to consider approving a \$1.2 Million increase to help schools begin to address the essential issues.
2. **Rebecca Hutson** – pleaded with the Board to fund as much of the school's budget as possible, emphasizing the increasing needs of the students with diminishing resources and support staff. Anything less than the \$4.2 million requested will require cuts within the school.
3. **Sean Roe** – spoke as the president of Chester Gap Volunteer fire department, stating that Warren County is getting one firefighter EMT and one firefighter paramedic for a fraction of the cost of one firefighter medic and company #1. And emphasized the longer response times for medical personnel should that paid staff go away from Chester Gap station.
4. **Lewis Moten** – talked about the difficulties of navigating the proposed budget on the County website and commented on a lack of transparency and vague budgeting, and no explanations with proposed budget cuts or shifts or increases.
5. **George Cline** – discussed toxicity and fiscal irresponsibility with wasting taxpayer money, spending without purpose, ignoring tangible needs, and pushing political agendas over constituent, and emphasized the hardships for Fire & Rescue and missing calls, vehicles in need of replacement, and teachers being asked to pay for supplies etc.
6. **Megan Budd** – urged the Board to approve the \$1.147 Million increase requested through the school board resolution that was approved on June 5th and acknowledged that while the original \$4.2 Million reflects the true needs, she understands the limited funding capabilities of the County.

7. **Jenni Bryant** – commented on the school’s budget increase request of the \$1.147 Million and the lack of funding is taking a toll on the teachers who are having to purchase their own supplies as class sizes are growing, and emphasized potential cuts to school’s programs such as music, arts etc.
8. **Elisa Bradford** – spoke on behalf of Dr. Funk, the Vice-Chair of the School Board, and emphasized that while funding requests from prior years were either reduced or flat funded, the need did not go away but only increased, and the budget provided by Dr. Ballinger and staff was clear, specific, and built on data and needs.
9. **Jessica Forbes** – spoke on behalf of Dr. Pence who was unable to attend the meeting and emphasized her full support of the budget that was approved on March 5th, 2025. She believes that the increase of \$4.2 million reflects the true basic needs for the school division.
10. **Alan Fox** - discussed the longevity of his career working for Warren County Public Schools, then commented on an accident where he would not have survived if not for Chester Gap VFD and Rappahannock County, urging for their continued support for them and the schools
11. **Janet Fox Monismith** – summarized the events of Mr. (Alan) Fox’s accident, stating that Chester Gap responded in record time and thanked everyone who responded that night and urged the Board to find a way to continue their services.
12. **Rob Chenoweth** – stated that Chester Gap VFD is very important to the community and area and expressed his, and neighbors, concerns about travel time when responding to emergencies. Additionally, voiced his support for Warren County Public Schools and their funding for child needs.
13. **Kris Fulton** – spoke as a representative of Chester Gap VFD and emphasized that this is a life and death decision, not just a budget decision and asked the Board to reaffirm the investment in the Chester Gap because it is cost effective and morally right.

There were no additional speakers from the public and the hearing was then closed.

Ms. Cullers stated that she has supported the budget that the schools brought forward, commenting that she wished taxes had a small increase and educated the public to let them decide if a tax increase can be supported at this time or not. Additionally, she has always championed the Chester Gap VFD program and expressed her concerns about losing the EMS side of Chester Gap should they not receive the funding.

Mr. Stanmeyer commented on the schools acknowledging their real struggle and wishing more could be done than what is proposed in the budget but is pleased with what could be offered, emphasizing competing needs within the County that are all worthy. Additionally, he stated that the County needs a revenue solution that needs to come from Economic Development and Tourism, emphasizing that it is the County’s biggest opportunity.

Dr. Jamieson commented on the austerity system situation the county is in and that it has grown tiresome and stated that last year he was in the unexpected situation of raising taxes that resulted in nine more firefighters. Additionally, he emphasized the unevenness of property reassessments with some residents who experienced a 10% increase while others received a 40% increase. The county contracted its budget by 3% and had that not happened, there would be less funding to consider for public education. When the budget is viewed from that point of view of all requests made by all departments, taxes would have to been increased by approximately 16%, which would not have been sustainable for citizens. Additionally, Dr. Jamieson commented on the Fire & Rescue situation with Chester Gap, acknowledging the points made in support and emphasizing there is no comfortable decision to be made.

Ms. Cullers stated that she respects the Fire Chief’s point of view on Chester Gap and while they disagree, they are handling it well with one another. Additionally, she commented on the ongoing issue regarding data centers and reaffirmed that no data centers are coming and expressed frustration with stalling out the hiring of the Tourism Director position.

Mr. Butler thanked both Sheriff Cline and Chief Bonzano for the work they continuously do and wished they could come up with the funding to meet their needs, especially with vehicles. Additionally, he commented on the limited benefits of data centers when compared to their numerous drawbacks, stating that he is against them coming anywhere in the County.

Adjournment:

On a motion by Mr. Stanmeyer, seconded by Dr. Jamieson, the meeting was adjourned at 6:17 PM