**Dorchester County Council Budget Meeting, April 10, 2025 Notes – Submitted By Sharon Smith, CAN**

Present: George Pfeffer, President; Mike Detmer, Vice President; Rob Kramer, Jr; William Nichols; Ricky Travers; Jerry Jones, County Manager; Irene Barnes, Administrative , Specialist; Karen Tolley, Director of Finance

The budget meeting began with the following situation:

 Projected 2026 Revenue $88,217,135

 Projected 2026 Expenses $91,993,833

 Projected Deficit $ 3,776,698

The county manager and staff were able to remove the deficit and create a balanced budget by taking several steps, both increasing revenue and decreasing expenses.

In addition to “belt-tightening” on operating expenses, many capital improvement expenses were deferred to future years. This includes replacing vehicles for police, and parks and rec; replacing one ambulance; and replacing two new excavators for solid waste and pw/roads. County staff are developing a long-term capital equipment plan for the future. Road maintenance was discussed at length – the county has 167 miles of roads in “poor” condition. Repaving one mile with asphalt costs $137,000 – tar and chip is less expensive but less durable.

Revenue increases include:

1.) Raising the property tax rate from $1.00/100 assessed value to $1.03/100 or 3%.

2.) Increasing the monthly 911 tax per line to $4.25 (the entire fee goes into public safety, not the general fund).

3.) Increasing the local income tax rate (piggy-back tax) from 3.20% to 3.30% or 3 1/8%.

Additionally, $1,134,388 of Dorchester County town differentials and rebates can be deleted from the county budget and potentially pushed to the towns as follows: Cambridge -$986,939, Hurlock -$141,399, and all others -$6,050.

The council stressed that with the higher-than-projected Blueprint for education in the state, and deferring some capital expenses, next year’s budget challenges may be even greater. They are asking the state government for a special dispensation from the Blueprint.

The meeting can be viewed in its entirety at Townhallstreams.com.

Please note the upcoming budget meetings which the public is encouraged to attend.

