



**Office of the County Executive  
Steuart Pittman**

*Prepared remarks for the Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Video, April 28, 2022*

Hello Anne Arundel County taxpayers. I'm your County Executive, Steuart Pittman, and I have some very good news for you.

Tomorrow, I am introducing to your County Council a budget proposal that - removes our structural deficit, reduces borrowing, increases reserves, lowers taxes, and provides record investments - in education, public safety, parks, health, and smart infrastructure.

I often say that we are working together to make Anne Arundel County the best place for all. Today, I am saying that we have worked together to create the Best Budget - For All.

Three years ago I said that this county had failed to deliver the infrastructure and services that its growth required. We stepped up that year and invested in teachers, first responders, and a new permanent public improvements program.

Two years ago we were hit by COVID-19. Revenue projections were slashed and we tightened our belts.

Last year our conservative budgeting was rewarded with surpluses that allowed us to get back on track and even increase our reserves.

Those three budgets finally, after 51 years of trying, put our county on solid enough footing that we were able to convince Moody's to upgrade our bond rating to triple-A. With triple-A ratings from the two leading analysts in the country, we will pay lower interest when borrowing for major improvements, saving our taxpayers money.

That rating upgrade was partly a reflection of our fiscal condition. Having the lowest income and property tax rates in our region, a record-high revenue reserve fund, and reducing our borrowing to an affordable level all helped.

But a bond rating reflects more than just that. We got that triple-A because our county has a resilient economy, has engaged residents in support of a smarter, greener, and more equitable development plan, is actively preparing for the impacts of climate change, and is aggressively working to create a healthy, well educated workforce.

In other words, we got this historic upgrade because we invested wisely in ourselves.

This budget continues to do just that, but triple-A is not enough. We must be more resilient to future economic downturns, more smart, green, and equitable, and more sure that every young person in this county becomes a healthy, well-educated contributor to our future success.

I'll start with how this budget impacts you as a taxpayer, now and into the future.

Since our county established the property tax revenue cap in 1993, the rate has been set at the maximum level allowed in 24 out of 28 years. This year that rate for homeowners is 96.2 cents per \$100 of value.

In this budget, we are setting the actual rate almost 3 cents lower than that, at 93.3 cents - that's farther below the cap than any budget in the county's history, putting \$27 million back into taxpayers' pockets, and saving the average homeowner \$100. That keeps our property tax rate significantly lower than any of our central Maryland neighbors.

Last year I worked hard to pass the Tax Relief for Working Families Act in the Maryland General Assembly. This year we are using the bill's new authority to lower our income tax rate on the first \$50,000 of taxable income for every taxpayer, from 2.81% to 2.70%. The cost to the county is \$9 million and the savings to each taxpayer is \$50. That keeps our income tax rate the lowest in the region.

This budget also protects taxpayers into the future. We lowered recurring expenses \$20 million to remove what some call a structural - or possible future - deficit, and we are, for the first time in county history, reducing the amount of new borrowing.

We accomplished this by using our record fund balance to pay for capital projects like parks, schools, and roads up front. In budget-speak we call that paygo, short for Pay As You Go. We more than doubled our historical paygo record with a \$205 million investment in our future.

Oh, and that record rainy day fund that was so impressive to our bond rating agencies will grow again with this budget - to the maximum allowable amount.

These numbers may suggest that we took a chainsaw to county programs, or are holding things together with duct tape. But in fact, we delivered on much of what we heard from our residents in our Budget Town Halls and continued to invest in education, public safety, the environment, and health.

## EDUCATION

Let's start with education.

COVID has taken a heavy toll on students, parents, and the educators that serve them. This budget completes the four-year commitment that I made to restore back step increases and makes all units of AACPS employees whole. It also fully funds the Board of Education's request for pay increases for all teachers, staff, and school bus drivers. We must send a signal to our educators that we value their work.

We're also fully funding our obligations under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, which includes comprehensive changes to Maryland's early childhood and public schools to provide promise and opportunity for all children.

But we don't just meet our obligations. We go further.

Including:

- 119 new special education positions
- 29 new social/emotional learning positions
- 48 new pre-k positions to convert half-day programs to full-day pre-k classrooms
- 20 new English language development positions
- 3 new bilingual facilitators
- 140 new classroom teacher positions, including the final year of staffing required to fully open Crofton High School

Overall, this budget sets a new county record of \$50 million over the state maintenance of effort requirement, which is also a record \$50 million over last year's budget.

On the Capital side we did even better.

For the first time in our county's history we are funding 100% of the Board of Education's capital budget request for the coming year, including moving Old Mill Middle School North into the six-year schedule.

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*On site at the construction site for Old Mill West High School:*

*County Executive Pittman: It took an organized community of parents and a forward-thinking County Council majority to step up and do the right thing by funding Old Mill and all of our school construction projects.*

*Rachel Jennifer, Parent, Old Mill Community: Thank you for listening to our community. The new Old Mill West School building brings our children, our teachers, and our community a long-awaited upgrade that will give our kids the opportunities they deserve.*

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I will note here that I still have concerns. Irresponsible development decisions on the Route 3 corridor have put so much pressure on elementary schools there that Piney Orchard will be at an unacceptable 140% of capacity next fall. We have purchased land, fully funded, and fast-tracked permitting for West County Elementary to relieve the pressure. But in a school system with 10,000 empty seats, it's time for the Board of Education to confront the need for redistricting.

I'm also concerned about school transportation. We still need more bus drivers, and I'm not confident that the Board of Education compensation request will attract them. If we expect parents to return to the workforce, we must provide reliable transportation.

And then there's the problem of vacant teaching positions. We must, and we will, cooperate with the state to make Maryland a place where young people enter the profession and have good reasons to stick with it.

And finally, we have to address the fact that only half of the children entering kindergarten are assessed as ready to learn. This budget funds an early childhood initiative at the Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families, and a brand new Kindergarten Readiness Program at our libraries. Our team at Economic Development will assist startup pre-K programs in the coming years as we meet the Maryland Blueprint for Education's universal pre-K directive.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

The most fundamental obligation of government is to protect its people, to step up in times of crisis to save lives. When I ran for this office, that's what I signed up to do, and this budget delivers.

First, let's talk about our first first responders, the ones who take calls at our police and fire 911 call centers. A few seconds delay is a life and death matter in their work, and to improve efficiency we need to make two investments. First we must make their job a more enticing career, with better pay and a career ladder. That's why we introduced the bill that was unanimously approved by our County Council this month to reclassify their positions.

We must also combine the police and fire call-takers into one unified operation at a modern call center under the leadership of our Office of Emergency Management. That's why this capital budget includes design and construction of such a facility.

Emergency Management used to be an afterthought in this county. Its positions were grant-funded, turnover was high, and respect from past administrations was low.

I hired Preeti Emrick, not just to run OEM, but to modernize and elevate it. As a result, they were able to deliver effective coordination of county response during the pandemic, tornadoes, storms, and most recently for the Afghan refugees in our county.

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*On site at the Office of Emergency Management:*

*Preeti Emrick, Director, Office of Emergency Management: Emergency management is all about developing plans with a whole community approach. Our office works hand-in-hand with agencies and community partners to ensure that when an incident occurs, that residents and employees have the tools needed in order to prevent loss of life, destruction to property, and environmental impacts.*

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This budget continues our process of funding planner positions at OEM and creates a new disaster assistance fund.

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*On site at the Charles B. Butch Troyer Training Center:*

*County Executive Pittman: Our most fundamental obligation as local government is public safety. This last year we made extraordinary progress. Our sworn officer ranks rose to close to 100 more than when I took office, and we created a new community services bureau, and equipped all of our officers with body-worn cameras. The result was a drop in serious crime while it was rising across the region.*

*Amal Awad, Police Chief: As the County Executive said, we continued to set the standard for our region, as serious crime fell in Anne Arundel County last year by 11%. Our officers throughout our department provide a steady and consistent presence in our communities, engaging with our residents to build a safer Anne Arundel County.*

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Despite that success, it's an uncertain time for our officers. The Maryland Police Accountability Act establishes a new process for ruling on charges of officer misconduct, and its impact on their careers is unknown.

What I can promise is that implementation in our county will be done professionally. We will take this opportunity to create the kind of transparency and community engagement that builds trust and delivers justice. Our budget funds a Police Accountability Board Director and Assistant, as well as new staff to handle public information requests, body worn camera review, expungements, and victim witness support.

On the capital side of the budget we are delivering a replacement to the dilapidated firing range, a new forensics facility, and a new special operations facility.

To attract and retain the best officers in the region, we are finally delivering this year on a longstanding promise to provide cars to all of our officers, with a \$3.7 million investment in 55 new vehicles.

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*On site at the Fire Department Training Academy:*

*County Executive Pittman: We invest in our fire department because they deliver for us, every single day, no matter how many calls come in and no matter what they're asked to do.*

*Trisha Wolford, Fire Chief: When we get the call, our team is always ready to respond - and we're thankful that the county has invested in hiring additional firefighters, training our paramedics, and providing us with the tools we need to get the job done.*

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In addition to the five stations in our six year capital budget, we are investing heavily once again in apparatus, not only on the land but also on the water. This budget includes \$2 million to replace our oldest fire boat and \$4 million for nine new vehicles, including a tower ladder truck.

Oh, and remember that fire boat that sank earlier this month on a training run? Our county delegation at the Maryland General Assembly got us covered - with a last-minute addition to the state budget to replace it.

All of our firefighters are heroes, but our emergency medical teams have been under the greatest stress the last few years. This budget continues to provide additional funds to train and certify new EMTs, and it also creates three new EMS supervisor positions to manage the growing operation.

Ann Colt Leitess and her team at the Office of the State's Attorney have consistently won important cases against the most dangerous offenders, with better training and support to her attorneys, a body worn camera team, and the best victim support in the state of Maryland. This budget includes a new counselor position for their Child Survivors Justice Program.

And I can't overlook the outstanding work at Detention. Despite staff vacancies that we are addressing with hiring bonuses and aggressive recruitment, the team at our two facilities is stepping up with new re-entry programs and an innovative mobile opioid treatment program that will treat our many inmates who suffer from addiction.

## ENVIRONMENT

Our future, and our childrens' future, depends on our stewardship of the 588 square miles of land and more than 530 miles of shoreline that we live on.

Like human beings everywhere, we thrive only if we protect and nurture our environment.

The Green Infrastructure Master Plan passed this month without the poison pill amendments that would have doomed it to failure. Much of that infrastructure contributes to the health and well-being of our residents through the work of our Department of Recreation and Parks.

The list of Rec and Parks capital investments is too long for even this long speech, but I have to note first, the creation of Crownsville Hospital Memorial Park.

We are tying loose ends on the plan to take control of this 550-acre treasure in the geographic heart of our county, along with a \$30.5 million contribution from the state of Maryland to help with remediation and improvements. This public space and health and wellness center will demonstrate the power of nature to heal, and I want to personally thank Governor Hogan, Speaker Jones, President Ferguson, and all of our county delegation for unwavering support for this vision.

We have two other new parks in this budget - Tanyard Springs and South Shore - and are making major investments in Bacon Ridge at Forney, Odenton Library Park, Deale Park, and the new Brooklyn Park Center.

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*On site at the future Brooklyn Park Center:*

*County Executive Pittman: Strong, safe communities are a result of people gathering together. Brooklyn Park asked for a place where residents of all ages could do just that, and that's why we're creating the Brooklyn Park Center, right here where we're standing.*

*Mizetta Wilson, Community of Hope Director, Brooklyn Park: After years of community advocacy, we're excited to finally make the Brooklyn Park Center a reality. This Center will serve as a space for our community members to meet, for our young people to play, and for our teens to access the resources they need.*

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Public water access is receiving record funding this year, with a combined site improvements total of \$7.8 million. We also recently announced that beginning this summer, Mayo Beach Park will have expanded days and hours open to the public, while continuing to host adaptive summer camps.

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*On site at Green Haven Wharf:*

*County Executive Pittman: We don't just need more public water access in our county, we need to improve the quality of the experience, so people will come back. And that's why when residents of Green Haven asked for this Wharf on Stoney Creek to be improved, we put it in the budget.*

*Ken Baughman, Vice Presidents, Green Haven Improvement Association: With these upgrades, our community will have a great space to kayak, fish, and enjoy the beautiful community that we live by.*

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The capital improvements in county parks exceeds last year's record with a total of \$99 million in FY23 and \$298 million over the next six years. It includes a long-overdue investment in making our parks accessible to visitors with disabilities, and upgrades to 25 of our playgrounds.

When I took office the county's Forest Conservation fund had been depleted with a check to purchase land at an inflated price from a man who had illegally clear-cut in the critical area - the Turtle Run fiasco.

I pledged to rebuild that fund and to put it to work protecting our waterways and cooling our planet. Today that fund is back, with a \$3.6 million balance and is making investments in conservation and planting.

Also working against the warming of our planet is the county fleet electrification, the forthcoming solar array on the Glen Burnie landfill, and the Executive Order I signed this month directing our agencies to either purchase or generate all renewable power by 2030. These initiatives save our county money in the long-run.

### ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Some say that going green limits economic opportunity. That's not true in Anne Arundel County. If it were we would not be leading the economic recovery and have upgraded our bond rating.

According to the most recent Census of Employment and Wages, our county had a 13% increase in wages, while the state of Maryland had a 1% increase in the third quarter of last year. We also have a much lower unemployment rate than the state's.

We have strong economic drivers here, but we also have extraordinary local government support for small business.

Our Economic Development team worked with us to strategically place \$33 million in grants where it would do the most good.

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*On site at Ashling Kitchen & Bar:*

*Saeed Ashrafzadeh, Owner, Ashling Kitchen & Bar: Thank you to the Anne Arundel Economic Development team and everyone there, without you guys it would have been very hard to keep our doors open. It's because of the grant money that was provided, also the resources from every individual there who reached out to us and said "hey, what can we do to help you?" It was*

*because of that that kept our doors open and allowed us to have marketing money and things of that nature to let our customer base know that hey, we're still here for you guys. Thanks Anne Arundel, we couldn't have done it without you and I look forward to partnering with you guys for many more things in the future.*

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Our new Inclusive Ventures Program is delivering training and mentorship to emerging minority and small business operators, so we're adding \$1.3 million to expand it this year.

Our Workforce Development team has performance metrics that show just how essential they have been, helping to connect jobseekers to businesses during the pandemic recovery.

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*On site at the Anne Arundel Workforce Development Career Center:*

*Keon Francis, AAWDC Client: Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corporation helped me get my CDL and helped me from the beginning to the end. They helped me along this journey to where I am today and I am very grateful and I hope this program is successful in teaching and helping other individuals, someone like me who lost their job and had their back against the wall and needed the help.*

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We've expanded many AAWDC programs this year, but the one that may have the most impact is the Summer Future Success Internship Program. I want to personally thank Congressman Anthony Brown for earmarking a \$500k expansion of this program in the federal budget.

## SMART GROWTH

We can only grow economically if we're smart about where development takes place. Plan2040 calls for smarter, greener, more equitable development, and we intend to implement it.

Our Year One Plan2040 Implementation Report is a truly impressive document. It's transit-oriented development, and the infrastructure to support it is already underway.

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*On site at the Odenton MARC Station:*

*Sam Snead, Director, Office of Transportation: Encouraging greater use of public transportation reduces traffic and lessens our impact on the environment. The Odenton Parking Garage will make the MARC station easier to use for many of our residents and foster future transit-oriented development projects.*

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We are absolutely serious about facilitating good development, redevelopment, transit-oriented development, and housing choices for ALL of our residents.

We know that this is hard. It requires community engagement BEFORE permit applications come in, and that's why we created our new stakeholder-driven region planning process. It's also a key feature of our new Glen Burnie Redevelopment legislation.

Over the years this county has piled regulation on top of regulation, to the point that the process of getting approved, whether it's for a deck on your house or a green, affordable small home community, is so complex and uncertain that the best kind of development never happens.

To achieve our smarter, greener, and more equitable land use plan, we must deliver a less cumbersome process. That means finally going digital and recruiting, training, and retaining adequate staff.

The Land Use Navigator online system is live at Inspections and Permits, and is scheduled to go live at Planning and Zoning before the end of this year. This new system puts applications in a place where everyone can see their progress through the system, or lack thereof. Applicants, neighbors, and reviewers can hold one another accountable and everyone will save time and money.

Both OPZ and I and P are actively recruiting and hiring to fill their vacant positions and to get back to the pre-great recession staffing levels needed to provide better customer service.

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*On site in Edgewater:*

*Meghan Noone, Homeowner, Edgewater Community: Last fall, my house in Edgewater was destroyed by a tornado. On top of dealing with all of the stresses of having just lost our house, we most importantly needed to rebuild. So the County Executive and Mark Wedemeyer with the county Inspections and Permits team worked closely with Bylt, who was my builder, and with me in order to streamline the whole rebuilding process. They made it much faster and much easier for us to get back into our house and get back to our lives.*

*Dick Roeder, Project Manager, Bylt: They helped us with the permitting to make sure we had all the i's dotted and t's crossed. And we went to work and in 5 months we had these houses back together. From tearing them all the way down to the ground, taking them away, and then putting them back together. The whole purpose was to get them back to where their lives were before it happened.*

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The word is out that we support housing choice in this county, including smaller, more affordable units that our workforce, our kids, and our seniors can afford to live in. We're not only a state leader in eviction prevention, but we've just purchased the county's first transitional housing facility for people returning to the workforce, have added major funding to support the county's main homeless family shelter, and with this budget, we are creating our first Affordable Housing Trust Fund with a \$10 million investment.

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*On site at the Doll Apartments:*

*Clif Martin, CEO, Housing Commission of Anne Arundel County: The Housing Commission is extremely excited and eager to work here at the Doll Apartments, soon to be Heritage at Madison Park. This community is going to house in furnished apartments 16 of the county's most vulnerable homeless families. We're going to add with that a layer of services using the house as a resident service center. Then, after one year of service here, we're going to transition these families into a permanent housing solutions so that we can begin work on another set of families.*

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## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Economic opportunity is wonderful, but one thing our local businesses have discovered in this growing economy is that without a healthy pool of employees, nothing moves forward. That's why our health and wellness agenda and our economic development agenda are interdependent. It's also why the bond rating agencies wanted to hear about both.

First, we all owe a debt of gratitude to our front line health workers for the lives saved from the COVID-19 virus.

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*On site at the Department of Health Baymeadow Clinic:*

*County Executive Pittman: Our county lost over 1,000 of our neighbors to COVID-19, but thanks to our heroic team at the Department of Health our death rate was half that of many Maryland counties, and the third lowest in the state.*

*Curt Milines, Community Health Nurse Supervisor: Serving as a Community Health Nurse during the pandemic, we were able to get our residents the testing, vaccinations, and care they needed to stay safe. We're so grateful to our residents for the sacrifices they made that slowed the spread of COVID and ultimately saved lives.*

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Anne Arundel County was selected as a finalist this year for the Robert Wood Johnson Culture of Health Award. Their panel of experts spent two days interviewing our staff and community leaders about programs to confront the determinants of health, mental health, community health, and health disparities. We didn't win that award, but we will in the future because most of what impressed them is work that is just starting.

Our community health ambassadors program proved its value during COVID and is in this budget for half a million dollars. We're continuing to fund our multi-year plan to get school nurse

pay to a competitive level. And we've stepped up to fund and expand our crisis response system as demand for help has grown.

I mentioned Crownsville Hospital Memorial Park already as a Rec and Parks initiative, but it's more than that. It is a place for healing.

Today, we look back on the behavioral health strategies implemented there with horror, and we mourn the fact that since the days of mass institutionalization we've had mass incarceration. We as a society have failed to provide the behavioral health services that our communities need.

But smart, caring professionals have not given up. Hope House, Pascal, Gaudenzia, and Chrysalis House are working everyday right there at the Crownsville campus, improving the lives of people who suffer from addiction and mental health challenges. They are accompanied there by the Anne Arundel County Food Bank.

The old hospital left Crownsville, but it seems that the passion to heal remains in the very soil of that land.

That's why this budget includes \$3.5 million to restore a building on the campus to become the incubator for what will come. The Crownsville Health and Wellness Center will house emerging nonprofits, offer services to residents of the treatment centers operating nearby, and be a temporary home for the county team that will manage the restoration of the site.

It is this kind of work that inspired me to run for this office, and it is this kind of work that our county will be known for in the future.

## CONCLUSION

I want to close with a direct message to our taxpayers. Thank you. None of the education, public safety, environmental, or health initiatives undertaken by your local government agencies could take place without your money.

Government has been under attack in recent years, from both the left and the right. You've heard it before, and in this election year you'll hear it again. There will be candidates running for office telling you that they want to shrink or defund government, but offering no specifics.

My own viewpoint after 35 years in business and just three years and four months in government is that they're not that different. You just don't get something for nothing.

Our government institutions need the same kind of investment, responsible management, discipline and nurturing that businesses and nonprofits need to succeed in their missions. And I'm proud to report that in Anne Arundel County that's what they're getting.

But, it IS your money.

That's why I've invited you to 29 Budget Town Halls and listened to your ideas about how to spend it. A whole lot of those ideas are in this document, including, by the way, that full time veterinarian for animal care and control, and the livestock trailer as well!

It's also why we created Open Arundel for you to view performance metrics in every department, and recently launched a new budget tool that allows you to drill down and track every dollar in every department.

This Best Budget For All is what I and my staff believe we need to make government work effectively - to fulfill the needs you've expressed to us. But today it is no more than a proposal.

The County Council will begin deliberations upon receiving this document, and will hold two public hearings - on Monday, May 9th and Wednesday, May 18th. Please, speak up.

The County Charter requires that the Council pass a balanced budget by June 15.

Never before has this county been in such a strong fiscal position that we could remove a structural deficit, reduce borrowing, increase reserves, lower taxes, and provide record investments in services and infrastructure.

We are able to do all of this because we made the right fiscal decisions to get here. We have worked together to make our county the best place for all. And our reward for a job well done is this budget - the Best Budget - For All.