

BUDGET PROCESS

The annual operating budget is one of the most important documents presented to the Board of Supervisors. It is primarily intended to create a financial plan that reflects the priorities established by the Board of Supervisors for the County. It reflects the County's commitment to maintaining necessary services and improving the quality of service while keeping the impact of taxes to the citizens at a minimum.

The County operates under an annual budget adopted in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Virginia. The budget is the legal basis of the budgetary accounting system and the standard by which proposed expenditures are measured. The balanced budget must be adopted prior to the beginning of the fiscal year. The budget is subject to public inspection and a public hearing prior to its adoption. The budget is considered balanced when net revenue equals appropriations.

The budget is adopted on a departmental basis and is prepared using the modified accrual basis of accounting for all funds. Departmental appropriations that have not been expended by the end of the fiscal year shall be returned to the County's fund balance. Unspent grant revenue or awards are subject to carryover, but must be presented to the Board for "re-appropriation."

Appropriations designated for capital projects do not lapse at the end of the fiscal year but remain appropriations until the completion of the project or until the Board of Supervisors, by appropriate resolution, amends or eliminates the appropriation. Upon completion of a capital project, staff is authorized to close out the project and transfer to the funding source any remaining balances.

Department Heads and Constitutional Officers may approve transfers within their own operating budgets (with the exception of transfers affecting salaries and related accounts.) The County Administrator is authorized to transfer budgeted amounts between departments, but any revisions that alter total expenditures must be approved by the Board of Supervisors through legislative action. All supplemental appropriations must be reported in a public meeting of the Board of Supervisors and made a matter of record in the minutes.

The preparation of the budget not only requires structured guidelines but also the participation and cooperation of many participants and a carefully scheduled series of events. The following summarized budget cycle is followed by the County in the formulation of the budget.

Gather Historical Data

During the first phase of the budget process the accumulation of past financial information is prepared and analyzed. Expenditure data is segregated by operational departments to be used by department heads and management for performance evaluation and projection of resources required to meet departmental objectives. Revenue data is segregated by fund and reviewed to identify historical trends.

Preparation of Departmental Requests and Revenue Estimates

Specific instructions and general guidance for budget preparation are communicated to department heads by the County Administrator and Finance Department based on the Board of Supervisors' adopted goals and objectives. Department heads prepare comprehensive request documentation through the County's budgeting software with detailed transactions for each line item request and attached documentation as necessary. Estimating departmental year-end expenditures for operating and capital outlay expenditures is the primary responsibility of the department head, as are budget requests for the new budget year. Personnel expenditure estimates and all revenue estimates are prepared by the Finance Director and reviewed by the County Administrator.

Consolidate Preliminary Budget

Departmental requests are submitted to the Finance Director and consolidated with revenue projections into an overall worksheet. At this point the focus of attention shifts from the departmental basis to the fund basis. Departmental requests are analyzed in coordination with the County's Capital Improvement Plan and the formal budget reviews begin.

Evaluate Service Priorities and Objectives

The evaluation of service priorities and objectives is an important step in developing a fiscal plan that will achieve the County's desired program of service for the ensuing year. The County's Comprehensive and Strategic Plans are compared to departmental requests to ensure that the budget document reflects the service priorities of the Board of Supervisors and the citizens of Northampton County.

Balance Proposed Budget

After the County's program of service priorities has been re-evaluated and established, a balanced plan for funding must be formulated. Through careful assessment of funding requirements and financing opportunities, a proposed budget document is organized into final format and submitted to the Board of Supervisors for legislative review.

Legislative Review

The Board of Supervisors reviews the budget thoroughly and may request special work sessions with the County Administrator and Finance Director. The Board may also appoint a subcommittee for this purpose. Departmental goals and objectives are reviewed by the legislative board at this time to ensure their adherence to County goals and policies. A copy of the proposed budget will be available for public inspection and a public hearing will be scheduled prior to the formal adoption of the budget.

Budget Adoption

The adoption of the annual operating budget is the culmination of extensive reviews of budget requests by department heads, Administration and the Board of Supervisors. Adoption of the budget and related appropriation resolution by the Board establishes the legal authority to incur expenditures in the ensuing fiscal year.

Budget Amendments

Department Heads and Constitutional Officers may approve transfers within their own operating budgets (with the exception of transfers affecting salaries and related accounts.) The County Administrator is authorized to transfer budgeted amounts between departments, but any revisions that alter total expenditures must be approved by the Board of Supervisors through legislative action. All supplemental appropriations must be reported in a public meeting of the Board of Supervisors and made a matter of record in the minutes.

Per the Code of Virginia, any supplemental appropriation which increases the total budget by more than \$500,000 or 1% of the total budget will be advertised for a public hearing at least seven days prior to the Board of Supervisors approval of appropriation.

If deficits appear to be forthcoming within a fiscal year, recommended spending reductions would be proposed by the County Administrator during the fiscal year in order to sufficiently offset the deficit.

BUDGET CALENDAR

November:

- ✓ Finance Director and County Administrator establish schedule
- ✓ Preliminary revenue estimates are formulated
- ✓ Current budget reviewed and expenditure targets verified

December/January:

- ✓ Distribute budget instructions to department heads and constitutional officers
- ✓ Budget requests and goals and objectives are formulated by department heads and constitutional officers
- ✓ School Board budget is requested
- ✓ Request all outside agencies to submit requests for contributions

January/February:

- ✓ Receive budget requests and year-end estimates from departments and constitutional officers by February 15th
- ✓ Request School Board's estimate of request for local contribution
- ✓ Finance Department reviews department budget submissions and goals and objectives
- ✓ Revenue estimates are revised

March:

- ✓ The Finance Director and County Administrator balance appropriations to estimated revenues to develop a recommended budget
- ✓ Revenues are refined

April/May:

- ✓ Receive School Board's official budget request
- ✓ County Administrator submits a recommended budget to the Board of Supervisors
- ✓ If necessary, Board of Supervisors holds work sessions to review the proposed budget and make necessary changes
- ✓ Public Hearing on the budget is advertised at least seven days prior to hearing

May/June:

- ✓ Public Hearing is held
- ✓ Board of Supervisors adopts the budget and appropriation resolution, and fixes tax rates and other fees for the fiscal year
- ✓ Staff posts budget in accounting system in preparation of the new fiscal year beginning July 1st