

# FY2021 Budget Preparation: Commissioner Prioritization

The following have been brought to the attention of the County manager and budget office for consideration as part of the FY2021 budget cycle. Unless otherwise noted, these items are not included in the FY2021 First Pass budget. These items will be discussed at the April 7, 2020, Board of Commissioners pre-meeting (4 pm).

## **Transportation (3)**

### **1. Fare-free transit (City of Asheville): \$1,000,000+**

The City of Asheville currently charges a fare for riders of the Asheville Rides Transit (ART) system. Fares generate revenues for the City of Asheville. These fare revenues assist in offsetting the operating and capital costs of the ART system and the costs of ADA Complementary Paratransit Services. Payment of fares can be a barrier to use of public transit. The proposal is intended to provide revenue funding to replace the fare revenues collected in order to allow for the execution of a fare free fixed route system. The City's acceptance of County funding support, in lieu of fare collection, would require City of Asheville service demand analysis of the impacts of fare free transit in order to evaluate the public transit system's ability to meet fixed-route and ADA Complementary Paratransit services demand with current capital, contractual arrangements, and staffing levels.

### **2. Subsidize ADA complementary paratransit (City of Asheville): \$395,000**

Buncombe County provides ADA Complementary Paratransit Services for the City of Asheville through Mountain Mobility under a July 1, 2014 Transportation Agreement. Under the Transportation Agreement, the County bills the City of Asheville at a rate of \$1.92 per shared service mile for services operated during regular hours and \$4.00 per shared service mile for services operated after-hours and holidays. Buncombe County actual costs to operate all services are anticipated to increase July 1, 2020 as we enter a new operating contract with our provider. Buncombe County can establish a shared service mile billing rate with the City of Asheville that maintains, reduces or eliminates County subsidy of the operating contract costs.

### **3. Reynolds transit extension: \$155,000**

Buncombe County operates three deviated fixed-routes (Trailblazers). Services to the Reynolds community could be offered as another Trailblazer route. The addition of a "Reynolds Trailblazer" would incur initial startup costs (capital (vehicle, cameras, radios, etc.) acquisition estimated at \$104,000) as well as operating costs. Grant funds for expansion vehicles are not currently available but could be available in FY 2022 (provided application in the fall of 2020). No additional grant funds are available for operating costs, so an additional estimated \$51,000 in operating would also be necessary to provide eight (8) runs per day, five (5) days per week. In FY 2020, the Reynolds Route is estimated to cost \$31.21 to \$92.22 per rider (dependent upon weak to strong ridership trends) compared to the other Trailblazer routes with estimated cost of \$17.74 to \$27.50 per rider.

## **Additional conservation easement expansion: \$790,000**

Buncombe County departments of Soil and Water Conservation and Planning (as a recommendation from the Land Conservation Advisory Board (LCAB)), are requesting expansion of available funding for conservation easements. The requests include:

- Soil & Water Conservation: 6 easements – \$120,000 in transaction costs and \$500,000 for easement purchase
- LCAB: Riverlink: 2 easements at \$15,000 request for transaction costs
- LCAB: Conserving Carolina: 2 easements at \$30,000 request for transaction costs
- LCAB: Southern Appalachian Highland Conservancy (SAHC): 5 easements at \$40,000 in transaction costs per easement.

Soil and Water Conservation currently has 27 conservation easement projects representing 2,289 acres on its waiting list. Staff estimates that without the barriers of funding, the county could move forward with 6 easements representing 400-500 acres of conserved farmland in FY21. Currently, State grant funds are limited to 2 conservation easement applications per entity. If Buncombe County increased both the transaction costs allocation and the easement purchase allocation, then Buncombe County could significantly increase the farmland preservation impact. Soil and Water Conservation would like to request \$120,000 in additional funding for transaction costs and \$500,000 for easement purchase. This request would allow for expansion to the Buncombe Farmland Preservation Program and increase protected farm and forest land acreage, in alignment with the Strategic Plan Tier 1 Goal of Maintaining Farm and Forest Land.

For the LCAB request, the list above denotes their original request totaling \$290,000. Currently in the First Pass budget is \$120,000 towards the request. Of the 9 requests from local land trusts that have utilized funding from the County through LCAB in the past, details regarding the proposed easements were only provided for two of the requests. The remaining 7 requests were just funding requests with no further detail or information provided regarding the proposed easements.

Money allocated to LCAB provides a portion of expenses towards the establishment of an easement. How the expansion funding of \$170,000 dollars is spent depends on how the money is ultimately allocated. If the expansion is not approved, planning will work with LCAB to determine the allocation and prioritization of funding according to active requests.

The FY2021 First Pass budget includes \$240,000 for conservation easements, split evenly between Soil & Water Conservation and LCAB. This is an increase over FY2020 conservation easement funding. The cost to include all easements listed above is an additional \$790,000.

## **UNC-Asheville renovation and expansion of Karl Straus Track: \$750,000**

UNC-Asheville has requested that Buncombe County enter into a Memorandum of Agreement to partner with the City of Asheville, the Buncombe County TDA, and UNC-Asheville on the renovation and expansion of the Karl Straus Track. The track is located in the center of their new "Hub of Well-Being" (Master University Facility Plan 2050) that includes academic (Heath & Wellness), athletic, and recreational programs and facilities. The estimated cost of the track project is \$4M including equipment. The request of Buncombe County is \$750,000. *(could be deferred to FY2022)*

## **School Resource Officer (SRO) expansion (3): \$122,000**

The County Manager received a request from Dr. Tony Baldwin, Buncombe County Schools (BCS). BCS received notification that they will qualify for \$166,665 of allocation from the NC School Safety Grant Program to fund

additional school resource positions. The grant stipulates that a 0.5 matching dollar allotment must be provided by the local school unit and specified to the salaries and benefits of the additional officers. BCS is prepared to pay the \$83,333 required for the match.

For each position, there are \$72,834 in recurring costs and \$51,277 in one-time, FY2021 costs. The request is for three positions. The net cost in FY2021 is \$122,335. Should the one-year allocation not be extended in FY2022, the costs in future fiscal years will be at least \$223,000 per year.

### **Elementary & Intermediate Schools Playgrounds: \$110,000**

Individual requests were made for improvements to playgrounds at Pisgah and Johnston Elementary schools at an approximate cost of \$10,000. The Pisgah Elementary request is estimated at \$2,500. The remaining \$7,500 is only an estimate for Johnston as no specific value was identified by the requestor.

Buncombe County School principals and Parent-Teacher Administrations or Organizations have made a request to add playgrounds at the Intermediate school level to facilitate more physical activity amongst 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders at North Windy Ridge, Joe P Eblen, Charles T Koontz and Enka Intermediate Schools.

### **Detention Center position for expanded visitation: \$75,000**

In an effort to accommodate more face to face visitation at Buncombe County's Detention Center, the Sheriff's office has indicated that one new Detention Officer position would be needed to facilitate movement of visitors and inmates through the non-public areas of the Detention Center. Because face to face visitation would occur at the various housing units within the facility and some of the visitation hours would occur outside normal business hours an additional position would be necessary. Currently offered is one free video visitation at the facility per inmate per week. If this request is approved the Detention Center will also be able to offer each inmate one free face to face visit per week.

### **Solar projects on county buildings: \$50,000 (FY2021), \$3,800,000 (future costs)**

The Office of Sustainability has requested \$2.9M in capital funding for the purposes of installing fourteen (14) renewable energy (Solar Photovoltaic) systems on various County owned facilities. The County's **Renewable Roadmap** identified aggregated procurement of on-site energy generation as a key component of reaching its goal of 100% Renewable Energy for County operations by 2030. The facilities identified for these projects have been thoroughly vetted and represent the best near term opportunity for solar installation. The cost saving of these 14 projects is estimated to be over \$4.7M during the lifecycle of the Photovoltaic systems. All of these projects are a part of a larger collaborative effort between Buncombe County, the City of Asheville, Asheville City Schools, Buncombe County Schools, and AB Tech to install approximately 50 renewable energy systems on public facilities throughout the County.

This item can be debt financed. If debt financed, debt issuance costs will be incurred in FY2021 and are approximately \$50,000. The remaining debt service costs are approximately \$3,800,000, and will be paid over a 20-year period. Based on preliminary estimates, the payback period for this project is 26 years, meaning the County will have achieved dollar for dollar savings by the 26<sup>th</sup> year of the project.