

## City passes \$38.6M budget

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### Content

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Lancaster City Council approved second reading of its 2023-24 budget at its June 27 meeting, making it official. The \$38.6 million budget will not raise taxes.

The city won't be raising taxes, because it can use \$1.5 million in reserve funds it held onto by spending conservatively during the pandemic.

The budget raises the starting salary for local police by 23.5% in an attempt to increase retention of local officers and entice new hires. Lancaster's officer starting salary was non-competitive for the area before the raise.

The hospitality tax fund is also increasing by 8.3%, to fund more city events each year.

City Finance Director Kirk Medlin also said there are rollover funds, which is common each fiscal year. The total for rollover costs this year is \$1,073,644, across seven capital improvement projects (CIP).

The first CIP rollover project is \$390,000 to buy land for the city's third fire station. The second CIP project is \$240,000 for six patrol vehicles. The city is still waiting for those vehicles to be delivered.

The third CIP rollover project is \$115,000 for the upfitting and equipping of five new vehicles for the city. The vehicles are on a long backlog, and Medlin said they are not sure when they will get those vehicles.

The fourth CIP rollover project is \$55,000 for improving audio and video equipment in council chambers. The fifth CIP rollover project is \$4,000 for the downtown facade grant, given to the new owner of the old K Beauty shop on Main Street. The owner plans to fix the awning and front siding in the next few weeks.

The sixth CIP rollover project is \$18,000 for downtown Christmas decorations. The seventh CIP rollover project is \$12,100 for a new downtown revitalization art project, which was presented at council that night.

## **Traffic control box project**

Christina Chastain, owner of Chastain's Studio Lofts, and Alize Thomas, city director of communications, presented their revitalization art project at the meeting.

Chastain, a local artist, hand painted several canvases that will be screenprinted onto vinyl wraps once completed. The vinyl wraps will be placed on five different traffic control boxes around downtown Lancaster, displaying artwork that honors Lancaster's history, as well as QR codes that residents can scan for fast facts.

"Each one will be something different about Lancaster," Chastain said. "When I first moved here in '93, there were several things I did not know about Lancaster.

"There's a lot going on in Lancaster that people who have lived here their whole life don't even know," she said. "And I think these boxes can bring some of that to the front, and I also think that it can encourage street traffic."

Chastain presented five different designs, which she specified were a first draft. Chastain said she was eager to hear input on what council would want to see on these boxes, and open to collaborative thinking.

The first box, at Meeting and Main streets, displayed a colorful nature scene with "Welcome to Lancaster" in big letters. Chastain said the QR code could contain information about Lancaster's historical figures and name.

The second box, at Dunlap and Main streets, portrays a Native American woman and the inscription "Home of the Catawbas." It would be outside of the Native American Studies Center.

The third box, at Gay and Main street, has a vivid painting of the waterfront, paying homage to the natural water source that Lancaster has. It also depicts spider lilies and Forty-Acre Rock.

The fourth box, at Arch and Main streets, urges visitors to "Discover the wildlife" with a colorful hummingbird. It will outline the agriculture, farming, birds and wildlife in the area.

The fifth box, at Chesterfield and Main, has an astronaut with the phrase "See the moon." Chastain said it honors Charles Duke, the Apollo 16 astronaut from Lancaster who visited the moon in 1972.

Chastain said the last design is very timely, because she realized many of Lancaster youth do not know about Duke, even though he is a major historical figure here.

Councilwoman Octavia Jones said she wanted to make sure the multiple box designs also incorporate Black culture in Lancaster, as Black people make up 55% of Lancaster's racial make-up.

“I think what you presented shows that we have all kinds of possibilities of what it can be to integrate out of the community and then at the same time, emphasizing different parts of the community,” Lancaster Mayor Alston DeVenny said. “I think it’s an excellent idea.”