

MTA approves service-focused 2018 budget

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The Mason Transit Authority approved its 2018 budget Dec. 19 during a meeting at the Transit-Community Center in Shelton.

MTA General manager Danette Brannin and administrative services manager LeeAnn McNulty noted several significant changes to the \$7.75 million budget from the draft presented at the MTA's meeting Nov. 21.

One change noted by MTA chair and Mason County commissioner Terri Drexler was the addition of \$10,000 of in-kind funds for an MTA program that utilizes volunteers who drive their own cars to transport seniors who are unable to drive themselves or use public transit to get to medical appointments or run errands.

"I'm especially appreciative of the increased contribution to the Volunteer Driver program because those are the folks who truly need the service," Drexler said. "They're our most vulnerable population, for sure."

The chair said she was also pleased staff were able to make cuts in strategic places that made it possible to add back two service positions, a dispatch/scheduler and a driver.

"They found the savings elsewhere," Drexler said.

The amended budget also included an additional \$20,000 to repair leaking windows at the Johns Prairie Road facility and reducing the unemployment allowance, insurance premium and the labor and industries premium.

The operating revenue of \$7,813,741 and operating expenses of \$7,758,001 left the MTA with a net income of slightly more than \$55,000.

All told, staff expects total operating expenses in 2018 to increase by 6.58 percent over this year, attributed to the cost of wage changes from labor agreements, projected technology investment and next year's service review analysis.

Drexler said she thought the budget was done well, and the board's involvement in amending it from its initial draft through work sessions paid off.

"I thought they showed the fruits of a lot of hard cuts, a lot of good decision-making," Drexler said. "When things came out where there was more money, I believe it was put in the right spots."

Also during the meeting, the MTA approved a resolution to conform its paid sick leave policy to new state standards that change how employers can discipline missed days of work.

Robert Johnson, legal counsel for the board, said the state law was aimed at employers who did not provide paid sick leave and intended to keep them from retaliating against employees for actually taking time off for illness.

Randy Neatherlin, board member and District 3 county commissioner, said though he didn't necessarily like the new policy, considering it could make it more difficult for the organization to address abuse of sick leave, it was necessary to pass the resolution to conform to state requirements.

As part of this change, the board also rescinded its previous attendance policy.

"We're going to trust our employees first," Brannin said.

At the end of the meeting, Brannin reviewed some of the most significant changes at MTA in 2017, including the construction of bus shelters at key locations, automatically tracking gas usage and organizational restructuring. She also took a look at what 2018 holds, including progress on the construction of a park-and-ride facility in Belfair.

Brannin said MTA plans to hold a public hearing in January to gather public input on what sort of intersection control may be necessary near the park and ride.

An online copy of the budget is available at www.bit.ly/2DdIOQq. The MTA's first meeting of the new year is scheduled for 4 p.m. Jan. 16 at the community center, located at 601 W. Franklin St., Shelton.



Courtesy file photo

One of the most significant changes to the Mason Transit Authority's 2018 budget was the addition of \$10,000 to its Volunteer Driver program.