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County budget plans vehicle tax rebate

Also includes \$2.5M boost to school funding

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Amherst County's projected fiscal year 2023-24 budget has no tax increases, gives \$2.5 million more to the county's public school system and is poised to

give county employees a 7% pay increase.

Interim County Administrator Jeremy Bryant presented the figures to the Amherst County Board of Supervisors on Feb. 21. Revenue is projected at \$56.1 million and expenses are forecasted at \$55.9 million, which would result in a surplus of \$165,539, according to Bryant's presentation.

"We've had minimal growth in

real estate tax revenues," Bryant said. "We've been down some in real estate taxes."

Real estate tax brings in 29% of county revenue, figures show. Bryant attributes the slight drop to two factors: the county reassesses real estate every six years, with the most recent reassessment coming in 2020, so unlike some localities the county has missed the bubble for inflated real estate values. Plus,

permanently disabled veterans and their spouses now receive a 100% homestead exemption and pay no real estate tax on their primary home.

Bryant said development-related permits are leveling off some compared to recent years, which affects revenue; the county is receiving increased federal and state assistance for Department of Social Services operations; and most

other revenue sources have seen incremental growth.

The budget plan, which begins July 1, also proposes a 20%

Please see **BUDGET**, Page A5

WATCH: For video of the county budget breakdown, point your smartphone at the QR code, then tap the link. **NEWSVU**



PHOTO BY LEE LUTHER JR., FOR THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

Former Lancer baseball coach and three-time state champion Jim Procopio, right, shares a laugh and embrace with former Lancer player DeWayne Kitts during a Feb. 23 celebration event at Amherst County High School.

LANCER LEGEND

Baseball program pays homage to Coach Jim Procopio

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For more than an hour Feb. 23 during "Jim Procopio Recogni-

tion Night," memories filled the old Amherst County High School gym with the same thrill of a home run off the bat or a pivotal play in the field.

The Procopio era that defined Lancer baseball was back in full force for a night of fellowship and family.

The legendary former Amherst baseball coach who led the

Lancers to three state championships and numerous district titles in baseball and football was the focus of stories, heartfelt speeches and laughter that shined a spotlight on his memorable career.

Procopio coached the baseball team from 1968 to 1985 and over the years was an extremely positive influence on the

student-athletes, some of whom went on to play and coach in the

Please see **PROCOPIO**, Page A3

WATCH: For video of the Jim Procopio Recognition Night event point your smartphone at the QR code, then tap the link. **NEWSVU**

School budget proposes 7% raise, more pay for bus drivers

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A 7% pay raise for Amherst County Public Schools employees is proposed in the division's 2023-24 fiscal year budget that Superintendent William Wells unveiled Feb. 23.

Priorities in the \$63.9 million proposal, a 1% increase from the current budget, include maintaining a competitive pay scale for staff, keeping class sizes at a level to ensure students' success and continuing to build programs that provide opportunities for children, Wells said in his first budget presentation to the Amherst County School Board since taking the division's chief role in July.

"We have to be competitive with our surrounding divisions," Wells said of the planned pay raise.

In order to ensure all the division's 700-plus employees receive it, since the state gives funding to a portion of those workers, more local dollars are needed, which Wells said is

Please see **SCHOOLS**, Page A5

WATCH: For video of the Amherst schools' budget presentation, point your smartphone at the QR code, then tap the link. **NEWSVU**

Amherst, Nelson supervisors discuss joint ag center project

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In a joint meeting of Amherst and Nelson counties' board of

supervisors described as a historic occasion, officials discussed potentially collaborating on a new shared agricultural complex to serve both jurisdictions and

agreed a working group of stakeholders is needed to further explore the idea.

During the Feb. 21 joint meeting in the Amherst County board's

meeting room, neither board was ready to commit to purchasing a property in northern Amherst

Please see **AG CENTER**, Page A5

WATCH: For video of the Amherst and Nelson board's joint discussion on the potential shared agricultural center point your smartphone at the QR code, then tap the link. **NEWSVU**

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LEE LUTHER JR. PHOTOS, FOR THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

Former Lancer players, left, stand and clap as today's present team at right joins in on honoring former coach Jim Procopio.

Procopio

From A1

scholastic, collegiate, professional and international levels, according to John Apperson, the Lancer team's current coach.

Many of those former players in attendance stood to applaud as Procopio entered the gym jubilantly.

Frank H. Fulton, Jr., who coached along Procopio in Amherst, served as master of ceremonies.

"I talked to a lot of people before we did this," Fulton said. "I said I cannot do this unless I start crying. It's going to happen. They said, 'Coach, you just go ahead and do it because we're going to cry anyway!'"

Fulton said former players and coaches who have a deep love for the game and played at various levels have been directly influenced by Procopio.

"They're all right here because of Coach Procopio," said Fulton, who was inspired to develop a book in honor of his friend and mentor.

Procopio referred to himself as "The Italian Stallion," a popular phrase from the iconic Academy Award-winning movie 'Rocky,' and was the Lancers baseball team's Italian general who was all the team needed and challenged them in various ways, Fulton said.

Fulton said he never saw baseball practice run like Procopio ran it, which was like football practice.

Buddy Bailey, an Amherst County High School graduate who played under Procopio and currently is manager of the Myrtle Beach Pelicans, said his beloved high school coach had nicknames for the players and was one of the three pillars of influence on his baseball career of more than 40 years.

"There's a lot of us that owe so much to you, it's incredible," Bailey said to Procopio. "I think of my success and what I've been able to do...I owe so much to you."

Bailey, who said Procopio was funny and disciplined as a coach and his personality and energy level was amazing. He added he can't say enough words about how important Procopio has been.

"I think you put Central Virginia baseball on the map. You put us on a level that all these



Former Lancer Bill Dawson, right, was a player on the last Amherst team in 1985 that coach Jim Procopio led. Dawson, now the Lancers' assistant coach, presented Procopio with an award for his accomplishments.

other coaches are fighting now to achieve," Bailey said.

DeWayne Kitts, who pitched for the Lancers during a championship season under Procopio in the 1970s, also spoke fondly of his former coach's influence and winning ways.

"You pushed me to be the best," Kitts said, sharing a warm embrace with Procopio.

Fulton encouraged current Lancer baseball players to take note of Procopio's legacy that reverberates after decades.

"It doesn't matter where we are in the world, we can pick up the phone and call. We call him and he tells us stories and he gives us information and he's our daddy... We're brothers and it's just a wonderful thing," Fulton said, telling current players: "This is one of the greatest things you will ever do is place baseball in this place right here and with this family that circles you."

Procopio spoke of the events that led him to Amherst more than 50 years ago and how he and his family had more than 20 addresses in the span of seven years as part of his baseball career. From big cities to rural Amherst, Procopio's baseball journey that included a long storied tenure as a Lancer leader "was meant to be," he said.

"There was no place around that had a better feeder system and more kids," Procopio said.

Procopio fondly recalled the strong community bond for the Lancer program and the filled



Former Lancer standout baseball player Buddy Bailey, left, hugs his former coach Jim Procopio, after paying him tribute. Bailey now is manager of the Myrtle Beach Pelicans.



Former Lancer baseball and football coach Jim Procopio, right, poses for a photo just before entering the gym at Amherst County High School for 'Jim Procopio Recognition Night' on Feb. 23.

the bleachers were fans and spectators. He added "once a Lancer always a Lancer."

Bill Dawson, the Lancers' current assistant coach, said his sophomore season playing ball at the high school in 1985 was Procopio's final season. Dawson said he learned more in that season under Procopio than any in his lifetime.

"If you paid attention and listened to the man, you learned everything you need to know about this game," Dawson said. "And he's meant so much to baseball in this area, this community and Central Virginia."



Lancer baseball coach Jim Procopio smokes a victory cigar along with a shoulder ride by his players after winning the 1978 state championship. The team would repeat again in 1979.

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