

MontCo approves \$4.4 B budget, spectators 'boo' council president

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The Montgomery County Council approved a \$4.4 billion budget Thursday that will raise property taxes and fees on residents and force government employees to pay more for benefits to fill a \$300 million shortfall.

"We're going to have taxpayer pain," said Councilwoman Nancy Floreen, D-at large. "We are cutting programs dramatically. Let's not kid ourselves."

The plan cuts \$107 million from the school system's budget request and calls for school employees to pay more for health benefits and take a reduction in pension benefits, along with other county government employees.

Government workers will pay 5 percent more for point of service health care plans, 2 percent more for defined benefit pensions and invest 2 percent more next fiscal year for 401(k)-style arrangements.

After voting on the budget, Council President Valerie Ervin, D-Silver Spring, went around the council table and thanked each member for their contribution. When it came time for Ervin's spotlight from another council member, a handful of spectators in the council hearing room booed loudly and were asked to leave the room. When they didn't leave — or stop booing — the full council stood and clapped for Ervin to drown out the noise.