

Council Resolution 223 Fiscal Analysis

Introduced: November 3, 2025

Fiscal Manager: Owen Kahn

Legislative Intent: This resolution endorses the County Executive’s plan to pursue: a land acquisition at the Columbia lakefront for a new Central Branch Library; a land swap with the Howard Research and Development Corporation for the construction of affordable housing in Downtown Columbia; and a financing plan for the construction of a new Central Branch Library.

ANALYSIS

Fiscal Impact:

This legislation will not have an immediate impact on the County budget because it only endorses action by the County Executive to pursue land acquisition, negotiate a land swap, and begin the planning for a new Central Branch Library located at the Columbia lakefront. **Approval of this resolution will result in three significant long term fiscal impacts: the costs of the land acquisition, the costs of the land swap, and the total costs of the capital project to construct the new Central Branch Library.**

Estimated fiscal impact of New Central Branch Library capital project, using 2023 cost estimates and 2025 Administration testimony

FY2027: Land acquisition at Columbia Lakefront	~\$14 million to \$16 million; source of funding to be decided in FY2027	Approximated numbers based on 2023 land valuation
FY2027: Land swap for existing library site and Merriweather parcels	Marginal legal fees and other indirect costs	Based on Admin. testimony
FYs 2027 – 2031: New Central Branch Library capital project	~\$143 million (see table below)	Approximated numbers based on 2023 plans
FY 2031 and ongoing: Annual operating costs after construction is complete	~\$600,000 from general fund and HCLS operating budget	Approximated numbers based on Admin. testimony

In 2023, the \$143 million was proposed to be funded in the following methods:

	Prior years	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	Total
Bonds	\$0	\$8.67	\$8.67	\$8.67	\$26.00
TIF	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$80.00	\$80.00
Grants	\$10.00	\$7.00	\$7.00	\$2.00	\$26.00
Other	\$1.44	\$3.33	\$3.33	\$3.33	\$11.44
TOTAL	\$11.44	\$19.00	\$19.00	\$94.00	143.44

The \$80 million from the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) would be generated from the Downtown Columbia plan adopted in 2016. This is revenue generated by new development in the Downtown Columbia district. TIF revenues are not appropriated directly from the County's budget but come out of the new development constructed in the TIF district. [According to the Administration](#), "The Central Library project is consistent with the intended use of the TIF funding, which provides funding for the creation of public spaces, transit improvements, parks, and parking from the revenue generated by the area's development."

Proposed lakefront land acquisition for new Central Branch Library

The resolution endorses the County Executive's efforts to close a land acquisition deal for the site of the new Central Branch Library. The proposal is to purchase approximately 2 acres of land at the Colombia Lakefront from the Howard Research and Development Corporation (HRD). In 2023, this land was valued at \$14,170,000 by the County and valued at \$16,300,000 by HRD.¹ An updated valuation is currently underway and will be shared with the Council when finalized.

The exact details of the land acquisition are still being negotiated with HRD. The Administration indicated they expect the deal to be finalized before the FY2027 budget is proposed. The County Council will be required to approve the deal. Once the deal is approved, the land acquisition is expected to be finalized and financed after July 1, 2026.

Proposed land swap for mixed income housing

In addition to the land acquisition at the lakefront, this resolution endorses the plan to convey the existing Central Branch Library site to HRD in exchange for the C-1 parcel located in the Merriweather District. Both sites would then be conveyed to the Howard County Housing Commission for use mixed income housing. There will likely be relatively small costs associated with the land swap, such as any necessary legal fees. These costs have not yet been determined by the Administration.

New HCLS Central Branch Capital Project

The Resolution endorses action by the County Executive to prepare a financing plan for the full Central Branch Library project. Currently, [capital project L0020-FY2021 "New HCLS Central Branch and Relocation"](#) is funded at \$10.48 million for research and design. \$10 million of this is from a State grant and the remaining \$.48 million was from the Permanent Public Improvement Fund, philanthropy, and pre-paid planning and design work. If this legislation is approved, the County Executive will propose a full financing plan for this capital project for the FY2027 capital budget.

In [2023, the County Executive proposed a total construction cost of \\$143 million](#) to complete the new library.² This estimate assumed that Howard Hughes would be the developer responsible for picking the construction firm, which may have affected the cost estimates at the time. These initial plans will only be

¹ These valuations are available to Council Members but will not be part of Administration testimony until the new valuation is completed.

² Page 47.

used as inspiration and reference material for the upcoming design process. The Administration is preparing an updated analysis of the project to include updated information on program requirements, site planning, cost estimates, and parking strategies. Unlike in 2023, a competitive bidding process will be held to find the design and construction firm responsible for the new library.

The site of the new library is currently mostly parking lots. According to the Administration, Howard Hughes will pay any costs associated with building replacement parking.

State grant and relationship with CB69

In 2023, the County was awarded \$10 million in a State grant for the design of the new library. [CB36-2025](#) placed \$5 million of this money in contingency until progress was made on the land swap. This legislation would permit the County Executive to pursue the land swap that would fulfill that contingency and release the State funds. Concurrently with this legislation, the Administration has proposed [CB69-2025](#) to remove the time limit of September 2025 that was instituted in CB36. Please see CB69 Fiscal Analysis for further details.

Ongoing operating costs

Once the new Central Branch Library has been completed, the County estimates that the ongoing operating costs will be \$600,000 annually. This will be funded through the County general fund, as well as partially budgeted for the Howard County Library System operating budget. This number will be updated when the design and programming for the library is closer to completion. For reference, the total [FY2026 operating budget](#) for the Howard County Library System is \$30.6 million, which includes a combination of County general funds, State funding, grants, and program revenue.

Budget Implications:

- Adoption of this legislation will not have an immediate impact on the FY2026 budget.
- This plan will require significant appropriations beginning in FY2027. These future steps will require Council approval:
 - o In FY2027, the County will be responsible for the costs of the land acquisition and land swap.
 - o From FY2027 through completion of the project in approximately FY 2031, the County will need to approve the ongoing capital project costs.
 - o Beginning when the project is completed, County will need to cover the ongoing operating costs of the new library.
 - o In addition, any bonds issued for the capital project will require ongoing debt service. The exact amount will depend on the amount of bonds issued and the rate at the time of the issuance.

Other Notes:

- If the County does not commence construction of the new library within 4 years of completion of the land swap, HRD *may* request to purchase the lakefront property back from the County.

Full Timeline

- Fall 2025: County Council approved CR223 to approve the land acquisition plans and CB69 to remove the budget constraint.
- Winter 2025/2026: The County undergoes bidding process to find a design and build firm.
- Spring 2026: Finance plan is proposed for the capital budget, presented for approval during the FY2027 budget process.
- Fall 2026: Land acquisition completed.
- Summer 2028: Groundbreaking.
- Late 2030 or early 2031: Project completed.