

**CITY COUNCIL BUDGET SESSION  
CITY OF WATERTOWN  
May 9, 2016  
6:00 p.m.**

**Mayor Joseph M. Butler, Jr. Presiding**

**Present:** Council Member Cody J. Horbacz  
Council Member Stephen A. Jennings  
Council Member Teresa R. Macaluso  
Council Member Mark C. Walczyk  
Mayor Joseph M. Butler, Jr.

**Also Present:** Sharon Addison, City Manager

**City staff present:** James Mills, Michael Sligar, Fire Chief Herman, Deputy Fire Chief Randall, Eugene Hayes, Patrick Keenan

**DISCUSSION**

**Proposed FY 2016-17 Budget Update**

James Mills, City Comptroller, reviewed the memo given to Council. He explained the first page shows there was a decrease of \$10,770 in taxable assessed value due to some corrections since the release of the proposed budget and this increased the proposed tax rate by \$0.0001. Regarding page 2, he indicated that if Council adopted the proposed budget at the tax cap limits with none of the other changes that have been discussed, the property tax would decrease by \$0.12 per \$1,000 of taxable assessed value. He pointed out under the Property Tax Freeze Credit Program if a property tax bill decreases then the property owner of a house with a taxable assessed value of \$100,000 would get a property tax freeze credit of \$0.97. In addition, he showed Council the results of keeping the tax rate the same, which would increase the levy to approximately 2.5% but this would require passing the tax cap override. He confirmed for Mayor Butler that the tax cap refers to the levy and not the tax rate. He advised that Council needs to determine if their goal is to stay within the tax cap and how the homeowners' bill will compare to prior years. Regarding the Sewer Fund and the Capital Projects Fund, Mr. Mills informed Council the Lachenauer Pump Station Rebuild (page 290) will be proposed until FY 2017-18 because the estimates that have been received are greater than expected. He explained the result is a \$35,000 reduction in the transfer to the Capital Fund and a decrease in the amount of appropriation for the Fund Balance. Lastly, he presented Council with a historical chart of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the last ten years.

**Fire Department – page 84**

Mayor Butler welcomed Fire Chief Dale Herman and Deputy Fire Chief Russell Randall and asked if they had any opening remarks.

Chief Herman reviewed the accomplishments for 2015-16 and the goals and objectives for 2016-17 in detail, mentioning it was carved down to one page so some items were taken out. He informed Council that the Department of Homeland Security is strategically placing response trailers to respond to emergencies throughout the state and one will be placed with the City of Watertown's Fire Department. He clarified that Watertown firefighters would staff the vehicle, but the City would be reimbursed for the staff's training, direct and indirect wages, such as the overtime needed to backfill, any materials used

or needed to restock the trailer, the use of equipment and the maintenance of the trailer. He said it will be parked at Fire Station 2. In addition, he discussed the upgraded radio systems within the vehicles that were done recently in order to communicate with other municipalities and how the department is transitioning from Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) to tablets. For goals, Chief Herman discussed recent grants that were sought for equipment purchases. He provided Council with an update on the delivery of the new Fire Pumper Truck and mentioned the Risk Assessment For Emergency Response (RAFER) that the department will be conducting. He mentioned the Fire Department will be celebrating its 200<sup>th</sup> year in 2017 and touched on some of the plans for this. Advances in technology were discussed and Chief Herman explained several applications of this to the department's equipment, highlighting the Bluetooth capabilities in the air packs and improvements in the radio equipment.

Chief Herman answered questions regarding the use of the Rescue Boats, explaining various scenarios when they were used, as well as the different areas of the Black River in which the boat can be deployed and the sections of the river that are very dangerous.

Council Member Jennings noted the overtime expense increased over 13% from last year and asked how the use of sick time impacts this.

Chief Herman replied that sick time is not the only driving force for overtime. He stressed it is due to staffing in general and reviewed the staffing for each platoon, mentioning the number of members that are out due to long-term injuries.

Council Member Jennings commented that there is a pattern of excessive use of sick leave and some firemen are out seven days per year and some are out double digits every year from 2010 forward. He said this could be controlled better to bring down the numbers. He noted that every time someone calls in sick it creates overtime.

Deputy Chief Randall said that he does not know what data Council Member Jennings is looking at because he knows of no incidents in which there were double digit absences for individuals in multiple years that were not excused. He clarified that an excused absence is when a note from a physician is provided.

Chief Herman discussed the sick leave policy put in place in 1993, indicating that if a member is out on sick leave for more than seven unexcused absences then that individual would be required to bring in a sick slip for any continued absences. He has advised the department that if an individual is out sick and is seen by a doctor, then they should bring a note in because it changes the unexcused absence to an excused absence. He pointed out that due to HIPAA, he cannot ask the employee what the medical condition is that requires them to be absent.

A detailed conversation occurred over the use of sick time by the Fire Department and it was noted that these employees only work 184 calendar days per year so the question was posed as to why they cannot schedule their doctor appointments on their days off to avoid conflict.

Council Member Macaluso remarked that she feels seven days of sick time is too much.

Deputy Chief Randall advised that he has spent a lot of time looking at this and he discussed the results of his annual report. He pointed out that in this line of work there are requirements for performing the

job that might cause someone to use a sick day more than if they were working at a desk job. He used the example of allergies, stating that a fireman must be able to breathe clearly in order to wear a SCBA but allergies could affect their breathing ability.

Ms. Addison responded to Council Member Jennings' original question that in 2015 approximately \$91,000 of overtime costs were due to sick time and in 2014 it was approximately \$107,000. She also pointed out that a sick day for a firefighter is an average of 12 hours versus an 8 hour day for most other City employees.

Deputy Chief Randall argued the increase in overtime is directly related to the decrease in personnel in the Fire Department, citing figures from 2012 through 2014. With the decrease in staffing, he said, there is no buffer for when someone is off due to sick time because there is not enough staff to cover the absences.

Council Member Macaluso noted the minimum manning clause of 15 has an effect on this as well.

Further discussion on sick leave and the department's policies for monitoring it occurred.

Mayor Butler questioned the number of false alarms and suggested an ordinance allowing the City to fine repeat offenders.

Chief Herman warned that this would cause some people to deactivate faulty alarms systems.

The effect of this on Code Enforcement was discussed as well as the previous role of the Fire Department in performing building inspections. Deputy Chief Randall argued that the Fire Department could assist with this responsibility again.

The Command Vehicle on page 88-a was reviewed and Council agreed to grant this request.

In response to Council Member Walczyk, Chief Herman explained the following budget line items: natural gas, telephone, Westelcom, electric and the individual items listed under contracted services.

Council Member Walczyk questioned the need for the Station 1 heating/cooling system evaluation for \$15,000, especially if the replacement is not planned in the near future.

The improvements done recently at the Fire Stations were reviewed as well as the stainless steel plow that is requested under Equipment.

Chief Herman explained the membership dues that are paid as well as the Technical Rescue Training and the tuition expenses included in the budget. He pointed out the travel reimbursement expense includes the cost of picking up the new pumper truck and travel for training courses.

Regarding the evaluation of Station 1 heating and cooling system, Chief Herman said this was a request put into the budget by the City Engineer. He added the current system is still working so he would rather have the money put towards other items, such as a fire truck or storage building.

Ms. Addison explained the heating/cooling system is estimated at \$200,000 and is planned for next year. She added this could be discussed further under the Capital Budget discussion.

In response to Council Member Horbacz, Deputy Chief Randall advised that DPW performs the repairs of the fleet as much as they are capable. Otherwise, he said a specialty group is used.

Lastly, a discussion of 24 hour shifts and how days off are earned took place.

**Budget Work Session**

Council decided to schedule another budget session for Tuesday, May 10 at 6:30 p.m.

Work session ended at 8:56 p.m.

**Ann M. Saunders**

City Clerk