

**COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
DECEMBER 14, 2009
7:00 PM**

MAYOR JEFFREY E. GRAHAM PRESIDING

PRESENT: COUNCIL MEMBER JASON R. BURTO
COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH M. BUTLER, JR.
MAYOR GRAHAM

ABSENT: COUNCIL MEMBER ROXANNE M. BURNS
COUNCIL MEMBER JEFFREY M. SMITH

ALSO PRESENT: MARY M. CORRIVEAU, CITY MANAGER

Mayor Graham opened the work session.

Health Officer

Mayor Graham welcomed and introduced Dr. Jon A. Emerton, who has agreed to the terms for being appointed City Health Officer. Dr. Emerton has met with Mr. McWayne and Attorney Burrows. The resolution appointing him will be before the Council at the next meeting.

Council Member Butler thanked Dr. Emerton for stepping forward and remarked that he appreciated Dr. Emerton's service and looked forward to working with him.

Mayor Graham thanked Council Member Butler for bringing the issue of the Health Officer compensation to Council's attention which resulted in a savings for the City.

Council Member Burto also thanked Dr. Emerton.

Crow Abatement Program

Mark Carrara, Supervisory Biologist, USDA, Wildlife Services, addressed the chair explaining that this is the 4th or 5th year for the program. The 2003 survey showed that the crow population was around 6,000. Last year, it was up to 13,000. This is happening across the country. Mr. Carrara commented that there can be thousands of crows in the city and if no one calls, there is no problem. However, if there is a call then there is a problem. He explained that the City of Auburn had 60,000 crows annually. He commented that the tools used in Watertown's program are harassment tools such as pyrotechnics, handheld lasers and amplified stress calls.

Mr. Carrara remarked that we were lucky that we had a very mild fall and higher than normal temperatures. He commented that crows are smart birds and this is not unique to Watertown. He answered questions concerning lethal methods. He explained that there is a registered restrictive use pesticide used for another type of bird that has not yet been registered in New York State to

be used for crows. It has been used with success in Virginia. There are also high powered pellet rifles that could be used in conjunction with the pyrotechnics.

Mr. Carrara explained that the crows don't do all that much damage to trees. However, the problem is the mess and the noise that the crows make.

Mayor Graham remarked that he is not wild about using pesticides.

Council Member Butler asked if perhaps the high powered pellet gun would be worth considering this year.

Mr. Carrara remarked that it depends on the amount of the problem and might be worth considering. The crows associate the sound of the pyrotechnics with the other birds being hit and falling.

Council Member Butler asked whose decision this would be.

Mrs. Corriveau responded that it would be a collective decision of staff and Council. However, she would advise that these pellet guns be used only in areas where Chief Goss deems it safe.

Mr. Carrara advised that he would forward some articles about the pesticide to Mr. Lumbis.

Self Funded Health Insurance

Mayor Graham asked why the proposed additional network would have to come before Council and why POMCO just couldn't put it in place.

Mrs. Corriveau explained that at this time, our plan document only has the POMCO network. This would change the plan document by adding another network and therefore, has to come to Council.

Mayor Graham asked if there was a solid way of tracking the annual savings.

Mrs. Corriveau explained that POMCO can track it. The national network would have already had an agreement with the providers, thus benefiting the employees/retirees. It would be a much better rate than the rate negotiated after the service had been provided.

Council Member Butler stated that he was curious to see what we really spent out of network. He asked if the costs could be supplied for the past five years.

Melanie Rarick, Brenda Harwood and Donna Dutton, members of the Health Insurance Committee, answered questioned posed by Council concerning the various proposed plan changes.

Mayor Graham remarked that the national provider network seems like a good thing and would result in a savings. He also commented that he believed that the proposal to revise the multiple surgery benefit would also result in savings and he would lean in favor of that.

Council Member Burto agreed that these two proposals should be added to the plan.

Council Member Butler remarked that he would like some additional information before agreeing to the multiple surgery proposal. He also asked if these additions should be discussed at the negotiations.

Mrs. Corriveau explained that this is not a topic for negotiations. This is the health insurance committee proposing a change in the plan. This plan is the plan for everyone.

Committee members explained that they had reviewed the plan over the past two years and proposed the changes based on the fact that it had been in place since 1992 and there have been different changes in the industry standards over that time. They also explained that the committee didn't take the task lightly. They also advised Council that members do pay premiums and portions of the cost.

Mayor Graham commented that air ambulance coverage could end up costing the plan tens of thousands of dollars.

Mrs. Corriveau responded that there is nothing to say that Council could vote to have the plan pay ½ of the cost.

Council Member Butler remarked that he believes that child immunizations can be covered at the Public Health Clinic for \$5.00 a visit.

Mrs. Harwood remarked that while this is logical thinking, others may not have vacation time or may not want to take their child out of school. She commented that well baby clinics are held before and after school.

Council Member Butler asked Mrs. Harwood how she would rate the plan on a scale of 1 to 10.

Mrs. Corriveau advised that this was not a fair question.

Mrs. Harwood responded that while she wouldn't put a number on it, the plan does lack coverage when compared to other plans. There is no dental and the eye glass/eye vision part of the plan is very limited.

Mayor Graham questioned how many people would use the cardiac rehab coverage.

Mrs. Corriveau remarked that if Council wanted, they could vote to pay a certain amount under the plan.

Council Member Butler asked for additional figures and data.

Mrs. Corriveau will contact POMCO for the information.

Yard Waste Vehicles

Council reviewed the report submitted by Superintendent of Public Works, Eugene Hayes regarding the purchase analysis and recommendation for the yard waste vehicles.

Mr. Hayes answered questions posed by the Council. He explained that grants for hybrid vehicles are usually available for commercial enterprise, but not municipalities. If this were a school bus or transit bus, there might be a grant. However, there are no grants for packer replacements. He also explained that the analysis is based on the total cost of the vehicle which resulted in the diesel being the cheapest and least expensive to maintain. He said the diesel has no hidden costs and is proven technology.

Discussion was held concerning the fact that these were originally in the 2007-08 budget.

Mr. Hayes explained that they had been looking at a DEC grant at the time to cover the costs. However, the grant was not approved.

Mrs. Corriveau remarked that the problem is now that we waited a couple of years and both packers need to be replaced.

Mr. Hayes explained that in 2007-08, they were showing signs of wear. Now, they are falling apart. He explained that he would like to get rid of the worst one and put the other one up in Thompson Park.

Mayor Graham asked if other communities provide yard waste pickup.

Mr. Hayes responded that for the most part, they do.

Council Member Butler wondered if this could be contracted out.

Mr. Hayes commented that if you pay enough, someone would do it.

Council Member Butler remarked that he really appreciates the benefits of what the DPW folks do. However, at the same time, he hates the costs of the trucks.

Mrs. Corriveau advised that a bond ordinance would have to come before Council.

Capital Planning

Council reviewed the letter from the Office of the State Comptroller.

Mrs. Corriveau commented that they were pleased to see the flexibility of our plan with the example of when the front-end loader which was scheduled for replacement in the following year, required \$17,000 in unexpected repairs. Since the current year capital plan included

funding for the purchase of a \$90,000 dump truck, staff came back to Council and those funds were substituted for the front-end loader.

Council concurred to the recommendation proposed by the Office of the State Comptroller to establish a capital assets policy and asked Mrs. Corriveau to prepare it.

Cuts in State Aid

Mayor Graham referred to the governor's announcement concerning withholding 10% of the state aid payment, which would result in a reduction of \$60,000.

Mrs. Corriveau commented that she is more concerned to the payments due in March for \$2.8 million and in June for \$1.5 million. She remarked that it would be a big hit if the state keeps 10% of that.

Debris in Thompson Park

Council Member Butler asked about this.

Mrs. Corriveau advised that they were in the process of cleaning it up. Now, they are dealing with the snow. However, it will be picked up as time allows.

Work session ended at 9:10 p.m.

Donna M. Dutton

City Clerk