

**CITY COUNCIL BUDGET SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
May 11, 2023
1:00 p.m.**

Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith Presiding

Present: Council Member Patrick J. Hickey
Council Member Clifford G. Olney III
Council Member Sarah V.C. Pierce
Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero
Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith

Also Present: Kenneth A. Mix, City Manager

City staff present: Matthew Roy, Suzie Renzi-Falge, Michael Lumbis, Kyle Meehan, James Mills

DISCUSSION

Civil Service (page 48)

Human Resources Director Matthew Roy advised that this budget has increased approximately \$25,000, mainly due to the new employee in Civil Service opting into the health insurance. He explained the remainder of the increase is due to additional training for the new employee to keep informed of the civil service process. He responded to questions posed by Council Member Olney regarding civil service testing, provisional appointments and the process of hiring new Police Officers. The new recruiting platform that is being used to reach more qualified candidates was reviewed as well.

Council Member Olney discussed what he termed as a philosophical belief in regard to filling vacancies, noting that 22 positions were added to the budget last year, but some are not filled.

Mr. Roy commented that vacancies are created by current staff leaving and/or positions added to the budget, and he assured Council that his department does everything that can be done to fill a vacancy.

Discussion occurred between Council Member Olney and Mayor Smith regarding their differing opinions of hiring more staff versus outsourcing the work, especially with engineering projects.

Council Member Ruggiero remarked that she recently attended a presentation at Jefferson Community College about the use of Handshake to seek employees and said she would pass the information on to Mr. Roy.

No changes were made to this budget.

Human Resources (page 51)

Mr. Roy indicated there was an overall decrease of approximately \$40,000 because he eliminated the position of Safety Officer since it has been difficult to find a qualified applicant. He explained that he will continue to use the Safety Consultant that the City has used for many years. He also pointed out the addition of \$20,000 for an employee learning management system which would centralize the annual required training modules and help keep the City in compliance.

No changes were made to this budget.

Library (page 250)

Library Director Suzie Renzi-Falge explained there were no major changes to the Library budget compared to last year and informed Council of the new “Fine-Free” policy. She explained that the revenue from fines has been very low the last few years. She turned to the Capital Budget and discussed the need for the cornice repainting project listed on page 346.

Council Member Ruggiero asked about the marble fencing in front of the Library and its discoloration.

Ms. Renzi-Falge noted it is cleaned every year, but it becomes discolored due to the pollen that falls from one of the large trees in front of the building. She pointed out that the marble fence is 120 years old, which led to a discussion of the upcoming celebration of the Library’s 120th anniversary. She also responded to Council Member Olney’s questions about the fountains and advised that they are currently not functioning due to an electrical problem, which is being investigated.

Turning back to the Capital Budget, Ms. Renzi-Falge explained the need for the roof replacement of the historic part of the Library listed on page 345.

The roof was discussed further, and, in response to Council Member Olney’s questions and comment that this type of roof should last longer than 23 years, Mr. Mix confirmed that the Engineering Department has looked at it.

Mayor Smith remembered that the Library was used in the past for events, such as the hospital introduction of new physicians to the area, and he suggested that be promoted as a revenue source.

Ms. Renzi-Falge clarified that the Library does have an event policy with a fee of \$500 but that this policy is underutilized.

Further discussion of the promotion of events occurred.

No changes were made to this budget.

Zoning (page 140)

Planning and Community Development Director Michael Lumbis pointed out the increase in the zoning account, noting this account is for Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). Mentioning the number of ZBA meetings has increased in the past year, he explained there is additional cost for transcription services and security.

Council Member Olney suggested the ZBA members be paid for their service.

Council Member Ruggiero said that she does not agree with the members being paid but feels the City should hold a volunteer appreciation ceremony.

No changes were made to this budget.

Planning (page 179)

Mr. Lumbis indicated that there were no staffing changes in the Planning Department and the main difference in the budget is an increased amount for grant writing. He reviewed other line items in the operating budget, pointing out that security is needed for Planning Commission meetings since they

have moved to the evening. He also mentioned that the Route 3 Wave Restoration project appears again because the high water prevented it from being completed. At the request of Council Member Hickey, Mr. Lumbis provided an overview of the services the grant writer will be performing, as well as the type of grants.

Council Member Ruggiero inquired about the use of the Accela software.

Mr. Lumbis explained that Planning has not implemented it in their department yet, but IT is working on possibly using it for zoning applications.

Further discussion ensued about grants that the City should seek and the use of the grant writer. Court Street reconstruction and the use of reverse angled parking was also talked about at length.

No changes were made to this budget.

Community Development Fund (page 258)

Mr. Lumbis reviewed this budget, noting that most of the projects listed are from the CDBG Annual Action Plan. He also highlighted the Restore NY – 75-79 Public Square Project which was recently awarded by the State. He responded to questions about the availability of other Restore NY funding and provided an update on the Masonic Temple project.

Turning to capital projects, Mr. Lumbis reviewed the Town Clock Face Restoration and Repair project listed on page 295 and he pointed out the CDBG portion of the Burlington Street Reconstruction project on page 315.

No changes were made to this budget.

CitiBus (page 132)

Transit Director Kyle Meehan informed Council that the biggest increase in this budget is due to the hiring of two additional employees, which will allow for an additional bus route once the new bus arrives. He said that the additional bus route will also increase the fuel and maintenance expenses. He advised that the new route would go out to the Washington Summit Complex, which has been requested by the public. Turning to the Capital Budget, Mr. Meehan reviewed the proposed locations for new CitiBus stop shelters/enclosures, which are listed on pages 293 and 294. Mr. Meehan also mentioned that Paratransit will run a third bus, which will also increase the fuel and maintenance cost.

COVID transportation funds, as well as FTA funding, were reviewed, and in response to Mayor Smith's question about offsetting revenue to pay for the additional bus route, Mr. Meehan stressed that the hope is to increase ridership. He explained that there is no recommendation to increase the fares at this point, but it is something that the City will want to consider in the upcoming years.

Conversation led to advertising and other initiatives to increase ridership and Mr. Meehan stressed the need to work with a regional system, which might be in place by late 2024. The desire to have longer hours for the bus routes, the sale of advertisements on the inside of the buses and paratransit as a revenue source were discussed.

Mr. Meehan responded to questions about the use of credit cards and a mobile app as well as the capital expense for a CitiBus genfare electronic, mobile and app-based payment systems upgrade (listed on page 304) was discussed. He also provided more information about equipment purchases listed on page 136, in particular the need for security equipment.

Further discussion ensued about the cost of the additional route and regional expansion. Mayor Smith expressed concern that the City taxpayers and businesses were subsidizing a system to provide transportation to businesses outside the City. He questioned whether the Town of Watertown was paying for a part of this expansion. Funding from a federal level was reviewed.

No changes were made to this budget.

Budget session ended at 2:55 p.m.

Ann M. Saunders,
City Clerk