

**CITY COUNCIL BUDGET SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
May 8, 2021
9:00 a.m.**

Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith Presiding

Present: Council Member Sarah V. Compo
Council Member Ryan J. Henry-Wilkinson
Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero
Council Member Leonard G. Spaziani
Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith

Also Present: Kenneth A. Mix, City Manager

City staff present: James Mills, Police Captain Michael LaBarge, Fire Chief Matthew Timmerman, Yvonne Reff, Patrick Keenan, Peter Monaco

DISCUSSION

Police Department – page 81

Police Captain LaBarge explained that the proposed budget adds the four police officer positions back that were eliminated last year, reinstates training to the level it was prior to last year and includes the purchase of body cameras and in-car video. He pointed out the department has recently had many motor vehicle accidents, not of the City's fault, so it needs to replace several vehicles. He explained the new models are hybrid so they will run on battery when sitting idle, which will be a gas savings for the City. He mentioned they are currently tracking the savings and it is about half of the normal gas consumption. Responding to Council Member Ruggiero's inquiry, he said that the vehicle replacements for last year have been order but not received yet.

Body cameras were discussed, and City Comptroller James Mills pointed out on page 301, where it shows the total expense and that it will be funded by the General Fund and not through a bond.

Mr. Mix pointed out the proposed budget also adds a second School Resource Officer, but it is contingent upon Watertown City School District funding as well.

Discussion turned to the addition of a second part-time parking enforcement officer which would be revenue neutral due to the fees collected through tickets. The current system used for parking reinforcement, such as the chalking of tires, was reviewed, and Mayor Smith suggested doing parking enforcement through the use of a kiosk system, similar to what other municipalities use. He said it is easier and takes less time so it would be a more efficient method.

Captain LaBarge said this system had been talked about with previous Councils, but it has never come to fruition.

Noting that in the past the City used parking meters to enforce parking time limits, Mr. Mix stated the parking meters have all been removed, but the ideal way to manage parking is through paid parking.

Council Member Compo and Council Member Ruggiero agreed that other communities use a kiosk system for parking. Council Member Compo added that some kiosk systems work through an app on a smart phone which allows you to pay and add additional time.

It was noted that this would change the philosophy of parking in the downtown area and further discussion took place. Mayor Smith asked Mr. Mix to look into what is available and to report back to Council.

In response to Mayor Smith's inquiry regarding pending retirements, Captain LaBarge said there is one definite retirement which should occur in August, and that there were seven to eight officers additionally who were eligible. He stated that the police must have the new vehicles and the body cameras which are part of the police reform, but he proposed adding only two new police officers plus one for the pending retirement instead of adding four police officers.

Conversation took place regarding the body cameras and in-car videos and who would be responsible for downloading that data. Captain LaBarge explained it could be downloaded in real time or at the end of the shift. He added that it is stored in the cloud and that it would not take much time to accomplish. In response to Council Member Ruggiero's question, he said it may take additional time to evaluate the data for the discovery of evidence.

Mayor Smith suggested the use of a dictation system for police reports and wondered if it would be time saving for the officers.

Captain LaBarge indicated that the department is currently looking into this.

Mayor Smith summarized that he would propose adding three police officers instead of four police officers in this proposed budget.

The effect on the department of cutting four officers last year, the use of overtime and the length of time it takes to have a new officer trained and on the road by themselves was discussed.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson, Council Member Compo and Council Member Spaziani agreed with the Mayor's proposal.

Mr. Mills confirmed that this would decrease the budget by \$89,000.

Fire Department – Page 88

Fire Chief Matthew Timerman explained the changes from last year in the proposed Fire Department budget as follows: the addition of the Deputy Fire Chief position; 2% increase in most line items for inflation; request for a F250 crew cab truck; fire alarm monitoring for each station; increase in electric, plumbing/HVAC repairs for Station 2's AC unit; increase in hardware/software maintenance for a new records system; increase in travel expenses because staff is encouraged to use their own vehicles; increase in Academy training; increase in turnout gear based on a gear assessment study; bail out upgrade request; increase in hazardous monitoring equipment; and purchase of hydraulic tools as the department moves towards battery-operated tools.

He explained a new system that he will be implementing in an effort to standardize the fleet of vehicles to F250 crew cab trucks. He said the new trucks can be used as the service vehicle on the line and the older vehicles will be rotated down into plow and staff vehicles. Mentioning there is no need for sport utility vehicles for his department, he recommended eliminating the Chief and Deputy Fire Chief vehicles and using the older trucks instead.

Turning to page 280, Mayor Smith pointed out the Engine 2 refurbishment is scheduled for FY 2022-23 and he recommended moving it up to this year since the bond rates are so low.

Mr. Mills confirmed that the payments for a bond do not start until the following year of the bond.

Further discussion occurred regarding the replacement of vehicles and whether the new model would be gas, diesel, or possible hybrids like the new police vehicles. Fire Chief Timerman noted the current plan was for gas, noting the issues that have occurred with the diesel vehicles since they are only driven a short distance each time they are used, and stated he is looking into hybrid models. He answered questions regarding the five non-fire apparatus vehicles and provided details of each one's use. He gave more reasons as to why he wants to standardize the fleet to F250 crew cab trucks. One being that now each vehicle can tow the trailers because some of the current vehicle types cannot, so the department has to be mindful of the towing vehicles' use and location.

Mayor Smith argued that five non-fire apparatus vehicles are too many vehicles, and he said he is not sure if the department needs a vehicle designated for plowing. He commented that DPW has vehicles that could help plow the fire stations in an emergency.

In response to Council Member Ruggiero, Fire Chief Timerman indicated that the newest non-fire apparatus vehicle is four years old and that the rest are 2006 or 2007 models. He also provided the condition of each of these vehicles. He replied to Council Member Spaziani's question that the F550 houses much of the equipment that was on the Heavy Rescue Truck and the Battalion Chief's truck and another truck kept inside hold most of the other equipment. He added that these trucks have the ability to tow a trailer as well. He told Council Member Ruggiero what each trailer is used for, the equipment stored on each and how they respond depending on the type of call.

Council Member Ruggiero said she supports the request to replace the vehicle.

Fire Chief Timerman advised that if Council wants him to reduce the number of non-fire apparatus vehicles, he would recommend replacing one this year due to the condition of the vehicle to be replaced and work towards downsizing the total number over the next few years.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson agreed that this one should be replaced now and downsize the fleet over time.

Mayor Smith agreed with the replacement of one vehicle now but suggested that two of the older vehicles be taken out of service in place of the new truck.

Mayor Smith reviewed the number of calls per year and amount of overtime for both the Fire and Police Departments and noted that the Police Department responds to double the number of calls. He asked why the Fire Department's overtime is so high.

Fire Chief Timerman replied that it is driven by minimum manning.

Staffing levels and the number of calls that are responded to in comparison to the Police Department were discussed.

Regarding the addition of a Deputy Fire Chief position, Fire Chief Timerman provided his reasons why he thinks this position is necessary. He listed everything that he is not able to keep up with appropriately because there are not enough hours in the day. He stressed that he will always give 110% and does not mind doing the hard work but he cannot provide the level of service that is needed and that he feels the public deserves from him. He expressed concern that something might happen as a result of this causing a liability for the City. Responding to questions about when he has a day off, he stated he still receives phone calls, and on most days off, he ends up spending time on the computer doing work duties. In response to Council Member Ruggiero noting the Police Chief has a second in charge to fill in when he is not available, Fire Chief Timerman said he is worried about what would happen if he were to be off for an extended period of time.

Mayor Smith remarked that he understands the Fire Chief's concerns, but he is not sure there is a need to hire someone for a salary of \$103,000 to make it all happen. He recommended that other departments, such as Planning and Engineering, could help with the planning of capital projects for the buildings and that the Battalion Chiefs should take on overseeing the inconsistencies among the four platoons. He reiterated that he does not agree with the need to hire another person for that amount and discussed the differences when comparing the operations of the Fire Department and Police Department. Mentioning the grievances that the Fire Union have filed, including a recent one wanting two captains on the ladder truck because it has extra personnel assigned to it, Mayor Smith expressed frustration with working with the Fire Union versus the other unions within the City.

Mr. Mix commented that he understands the Mayor's frustrations but most of it is with the union and not with management. Noting that management is tasked with the operations of the department, he stressed the Fire Chief needs assistance and explained the salary amount is set at \$103,000 because the Battalion Chiefs make \$98,000.

Council Member Ruggiero offered support for adding the Deputy Chief's position.

Fire Chief Timerman discussed responsibilities that have been pushed down, or he plans to push down, to the Battalion Chiefs, as well as some things he cannot give to the Battalion Chiefs. In response to Council Member Ruggiero, he talked about the standard operating procedures (SOP's) for the department and what needs to be changed and/or updated.

Council Member Spaziani stated he would like to see the Fire Chief get the Deputy Fire Chief position, but it needs to be a give and take. He commented that the Firefighters talk about safety for the City but most of them live outside the City, not requiring the same standard of safety from volunteer Fire Departments. He also suggested that other departments help the Fire Chief with grant writing.

Council Member Compo said she is sympathetic to the situation, but it was a significant amount of money for the salary. She mentioned that many Department Heads are overworked, and the City needs to look at shared services between the departments.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson suggested creating an administrative assistant position that is not in the chain of command of the Fire personnel, which is what is driving the price.

Fire Chief Timerman advised that some of the duties cannot be done by a clerk, but he has looked at the option of an Administrative Captain. He explained that this would be similar to the Police Department's Administrative Sergeant, but it is not a management position. He explained it could take some of the load off, but it would not be as good as having a Deputy Fire Chief.

Further discussion occurred regarding an Administrative Captain and whether it would have to be a new position or could be paid out of title. The cost differences between a Captain and a Firefighter were reviewed and it was noted the difference was approximately \$13,000 (\$16,000 with benefits). Mr. Mills added that a Deputy Fire Chief with benefits would cost approximately \$156,000 versus a Captain with benefits at approximately \$110,000, but the Captain cannot do the management duties. The SAFER staffing grant was discussed, and it was decided to wait until its expiration date in October 2021 before making any changes to staff.

Mayor Smith summarized Council's decision to make an Administrative Captain in October 2021 by increasing the number of Captains to 18 and decreasing the number of Firefighters to 46. He added that other departments should be asked to help the Fire Chief in areas that they can.

Library Fund – page 246

Library Director Yvonne Reff reviewed the pre-COVID-19 statistics of the services provided by the library. She explained that the Librarian III position was deleted years ago but she would like to bring that position back so one of the Librarian II positions will be promoted to the Librarian III. She stated that a Librarian I position, which was deleted last year, has also been put back in the proposed budget. She also noted expenses for the new floodlights and the facade work on the front of the Library building.

Mr. Mix added the proposed budget also includes the addition of one Facility Maintenance Worker, which was deleted last year, and this position's time will be split between the Library and City Hall.

Mayor Smith said he would like to see the Library rented out for events for a fee and noted this could generate revenue for the City.

Council Member Compo agreed, stating there could be a demand for this.

In response to Council Member Ruggiero's inquiry, Ms. Reff talked about what was done during COVID-19 in order to continue to offer services to the public and discussed the phases of reopening stages.

Mayor Smith suggested there should also be a fee for the services and work done in the Genealogy Room. He commented the Library needs to start thinking about charging for some of services that require staff time.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson mentioned that the expense for security services is listed in the budget at \$56,000, but this does not cover all the hours the Library is open. He proposed increasing this amount to cover all of the hours.

Mr. Mills advised that at the current contract rate, an additional \$35,200 would need to be included to cover the full hours.

Council agreed.

Department of Public Works – page 59

Superintendent of Public Works Patrick Keenan explained that the Public Works Administration account varies from last year's because of the reallocation of the percentage of time for the Assistant Superintendent of Public Works and for the Senior Account Clerk Typist positions. He said otherwise there are no significant changes. He pointed out that starting July 1 he will begin to track time that staff spends working on sewer and water projects, and it will be charged to those funds.

Under the Building and Grounds Maintenance account on page 102, Mr. Keenan noted there is a 40% increase due to equipment purchases. He pointed out the Maintenance of Roads account starting on page 111 is for street work that is funded by CHIPS.

Mayor Smith stated the list of streets to be done by CHIPS is listed on page 316.

Regarding the Snow Removal account on page 115, Mr. Keenan said there are no significant changes except for the replacement of a truck, which is listed on page 119. He did mention that DPW took over the plowing of the main streets in Thompson Park and is training park staff to help with plowing duties in some of the larger DPW trucks.

Reviewing the Traffic Control Account, which started on page 26, Mr. Keenan mentioned the three major projects that are to be worked on this year. He said the PSAP project is geared towards pedestrian safety, the CMAQ project is to address signal light coordination issues and North Massey Street, Arsenal Street and Court Street Bridge Intersection would receive traffic signal upgrades.

The traffic signal construction project on Arcade Street and Arsenal Street intersection was reviewed on page 310 and it was noted that it will be funded through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) CARES Act grant because the bus transfer station is located there. Further discussion occurred about the safety of this intersection and whether it would be better to change the direction of the traffic flow on Arcade Street or to relocate the bus transfer station to another location such as JB Wise parking lot.

Turning to the Bus account starting on page 133, Mr. Keenan gave a recap of the CARES Act funding that was received from the FTA, as well as the regular funding received through the FTA. In response to Council Member Ruggiero's question regarding Paratransit, he mentioned there were a few kinks to work out in the beginning of the contract but now everything is going very well. He also noted that bus ridership is down 20% due to COVID-19. Regarding the bus fleet, Mr. Keenan reviewed what would be replaced this year in the proposed budget, which was listed on page 298 and 299.

Mr. Mix pointed out that the Storm Sewers account, starting on page 183, contains a stormwater utility study for the amount of \$75,000. He explained that this will look at charging property owners for the amount of stormwater coming off their property and it will become a separate fund from the General Fund. He said this will become a fee for service, noting that regulations are coming which will eventually require stormwater to go through the treatment facility.

Conversation turned to the Refuse account on page 189 and the changes required in preparation for moving to a single stream recycling system. It was noted that the City has been in discussion with Fort Drum regarding sharing a transfer facility and with DANC in the development of a transfer facility. Further discussion took place regarding the benefits of single stream recycling to the City and their customers and whether it will result in a cost savings for the City. The equipment purchases and building construction needed prior to the implementation of a single stream recycling system were reviewed on page 293 and page 302 – page 305.

Mr. Mix said he is not sure if it is going to save the City any money and noted that to pay for the additional cost, the garbage fees will need to increase.

Council Member Spaziani expressed concern that the equipment purchases alone cost approximately \$580,000 and he thinks the plan is premature until more information is received from DANC. He wondered if it would be better to have private haulers provide this service and let the citizens decide which private hauler they want to use.

Mayor Smith argued that single stream recycling is more efficient and profitable and that is why private haulers do it that way. He also pointed out that Jefferson County is one of the few counties in the State that do not do single stream recycling.

Further debate occurred regarding whether the City should invest in the expense to convert to single stream recycling.

Mayor Smith relayed that he supports single stream recycling.

Council Member Spaziani said he would not support this, stating it is too soon and too fast.

Council Member Compo said more information is needed but thinks it is an overall good idea, noting that it will improve efficiency and participation.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson stated that he supports it and feels the City will gain more customers once it offers single stream recycling.

Council Member Ruggiero commented that she thinks the City is not ready for it and should possibly wait one year. She said she would like to see a cost versus savings analysis.

Mr. Mills clarified the project and equipment would be funded through a bond and reminded Council that it takes a 3-2 vote to approve the budget, but it would require a 4/5ths majority to approve the bond.

Demolition of Flynn Pool

Council Member Ruggiero requested a report of the total cost of the needed repairs for the Flynn pool and stated that the north side residents feel they have lost a lot of things and have not been treated the same as other areas of the City.

Mayor Smith argued that three pools are not needed for a City this size and with a population that continues to decline.

Council Member Spaziani said he sees the pool being demolished eventually but does not think it needs to be done this year, which could save \$50,000 from this budget.

Council Member Compo commented that there needs to be a more accurate picture of the costs of demolition. She said it does not make sense to put money into repairs of another pool and that the City should invest in another asset at that site, such as a splash pad or a hybrid ice arena/splash pad.

Mr. Mix clarified that the cost of \$50,000 for the demolition is \$20,000 for the pool and \$30,000 for the building. He said that based on City Engineer Delaney's description of the repairs, it made more sense for a full replacement of the pool versus trying to repair it. He advised that he would speak to Mr. Delaney and get a full report back to Council.

Budget session ended at 1:47 p.m.

Ann M. Saunders
City Clerk