

**CITY COUNCIL BUDGET SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
May 11, 2020
6:00 p.m.**

Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith Presiding

Present: Council Member Sarah V. Compo
Council Member Ryan J. Henry-Wilkinson
Council Member Jesse C.P. Roshia
Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero
Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith

Also Present: Kenneth A. Mix, City Manager

City staff present: James E. Mills, Vicky Murphy, Patrick Keenan

This meeting was conducted in accordance with Governor Cuomo's Executive Order No. 202.1 that restricts in-person access to meetings. The public was able to view or listen to the meeting live at: <https://livestream.com/swp/wcc>.

DISCUSSION

Hydroelectric Production

Beginning on page 111, Water Superintendent Vicky Murphy indicated that overall this is under budget from last year and there is only one capital project in this year's budget, which is the turbine relay. She explained that this is the second of three to be done, noting the last turbine will be done next year. She said otherwise the items in the budget are pretty much the same things that are included every year.

Mayor Smith noted that production was down last year and asked if it was due to the plant being down or was due to low flows.

Ms. Murphy explained that the flow was down last year because it was dry but also there was maintenance done at the plant. She indicated that more maintenance is scheduled for this year but if it is a wet year, then it will be postponed.

Mayor Smith reviewed details of the FERC license with Ms. Murphy asking if more hydro production could be produced.

Ms. Murphy replied that the licensing allows for more but the current conditions cannot produce more without digging or blowing out the dam and installing a low flow turbine to catch the low flow.

Mayor Smith asked Ms. Murphy to have staff study the cost benefit of installing a low flow turbine, especially for the remaining 10 years of the contract with National Grid with the City being paid the highest rate.

Water Fund

Turning to the Water Fund beginning on page 173, Ms. Murphy advised that the soda ash system is to be done this year and with that comes additional costs for chemicals.

Council Member Ruggiero noted that there is a decrease in water rents and asked if the rents were changing.

Ms. Murphy indicated that they were not.

City Comptroller James Mills explained that he trends usage in order to determine the estimated number for the budget.

Mayor Smith pointed out that water and sewer are the highest consumers of electricity and mentioned a study that was done in the past looking at the intake value at the water plant. He wondered if that would offset some of the cost of the water plant, and since the City was not over producing electricity, it would allow the City to sell more electricity at the higher rate to National Grid. He asked if staff could obtain that previous study and see if any improvements could be done in regard to this.

Sewer Fund

Regarding the sewer fund beginning on page 202, Ms. Murphy indicated that the rates would not increase and reviewed the maintenance projects that would be done. In regard to hauled waste, she said it has gone up a bit. She discussed recent negotiations with DANC regarding the leachate, noting that the rate did go up a bit for them, and pointed out that if the City was not taking leachate from DANC it would be allowed to take more leachate from other users at a much higher rate. She added that the negotiations with DANC may be revisited once the current situation of COVID-19 resolved. She responded to further questions on the handling of leachate and the land application of biosolids, and she confirmed that fracking is not allowed in NYS.

Council Member Ruggiero inquired about the purchase of a truck on page 218.

Ms. Murphy indicated the current vehicle needs several repairs and the fund has money for it without the need to raise rates.

Mr. Mills pointed out the water fund capital projects on page 285 and page 286 as well as the sewer fund project on pages 292–294.

Ms. Murphy provided further detail on the need for the re-point masonry on the pump house building.

In response to Mayor Smith's question of bonding for this instead of paying out of the water fund balance, Mr. Mills explained that the proposal is to bond for it but when the time gets closer, this could change if the funds are available. He confirmed that the other projects listed on pages 292-294 would be paid for by a transfer from the sewer fund.

Discussion turned to the need for work to be done on the Western Outfall Trunk Sewer Rehabilitation project on page 294 and whether the conditions were considered worse than the Cooper Street Outfall. Further details of the work to be done and the scope of those lines were given. There was also conversation regarding the properties within the City which have septic tanks and whether they should be connected into the City's sewer system.

Lastly, Ms. Murphy pointed out that the water main will be done on Tilden Street and the sidewalks will be done using CDBG money. She added there is not a lot of pressure in this area so this should improve that issue.

Department of Public Works

Department of Public Works Superintendent Patrick Keenan explained that Peter Monaco did not retire so the position of Fleet Manager was turned back into his original position of Assistant Superintendent. He noted that Mr. Monaco performs the duties of both positions as well as the supervisor of refuse. He explained that the salaries on page 59 show an increase but that is due to 100% of the Assistant Superintendent position being allocated to this account versus being split among other accounts last year. He stated that overall there is a 5% decrease to his budget and noted that there was an elimination of a part-time clerk and one full-time mechanic. He responded to questions regarding the effectiveness of the application of brine to the streets prior to a snow storm and the usage of salt and the amounts on the roads. In regard to snow events during the past winter season, he indicated that it was close to average.

Council Member Ruggiero inquired about the extended snow chute blower listed on page 110.

Mr. Keenan confirmed that it was the same request that was in last year's budget and it was pushed into this proposed budget.

Discussion occurred regarding a patch spreader, which has a hot box that will keep the hot mix up to temperature and allows for year-round use for patching pavement and roads. The benefits and effectiveness were discussed in detail.

Turning to the bus account of page 123, Mr. Keenan indicated that during the current pandemic situation ridership is down and noted that most of the operating cost going back to January will be covered by the additional approved funding under the CARES Act. In response to Council Member Ruggiero's inquiry, he provided an update on the issues with the new Paratransit vendor, noting that most have been resolved. Regarding bus fares, he confirmed that the rates will remain the same, but there will be discussion on increasing them, especially with the services being extended out to Walmart and Target. Lastly, he noted that contract services decreased significantly in this account and that it was due to the contract with the new Paratransit vendor.

Regarding the parking facilities account, Council Member Compo mentioned that National Grid has a program that helps pay for LED lighting.

Mr. Mills said he would look at the information if she sent it to him.

Regarding paving projects, Mr. Keenan stated that the plan was to address Thompson Boulevard from Myrtle Avenue to Gotham Street. He said the open ditches will be removed during this work and then the street will have a curb added.

Discussion turned to the separation of sanitary sewer and storm sewer lines, recent projects, planned projects and how many in the City still needed to be separated. In response to questions, Mr. Keenan

also provided an update on the private trash service used for Creekwood Apartments and the use of paper bags for yard waste.

Mayor Smith noted that the refuse service produces a little revenue for the City and suggested changing the pickup to nights, which is done by other municipalities. He argued that this would be more efficient and could possibly streamline the work to be done within three days versus five days. He also suggested building a pad by the sewer treatment plant where trash could be dumped, stored and then transported directly to the landfill, which would save on tipping costs.

Mr. Keenan indicated that he could study this option for cost savings.

On page 116, Mr. Keenan reviewed the traffic control and lighting account, in particular the improvements listed on page 121 and 122. He pointed out that they will be paid for by CHIPs funds.

The capital projects/expenditures were reviewed on page 270, page 273, page 275, page 276 and page 279. Mr. Keenan discussed the need for each as well as how they would be paid for.

Work session ended at 7:26 p.m.

Ann M. Saunders
City Clerk