

**CITY COUNCIL BUDGET SESSION  
CITY OF WATERTOWN  
May 16, 2020  
8:30 a.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, Erin Gardner, Scott Weller, Police Chief Charles Donoghue, Police Captain Michael Labarge, Fire Chief Matthew Timerman, Yvonne Reff, Michael Delaney

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**

**Parks and Recreation**

Parks and Recreation Superintendent Erin Gardner began her presentation stating that her department is losing two full-time parks & recreation maintenance workers and one part-time clerk. She discussed the changes to the work shifts and increased workload that has occurred in the past few years due to the Watertown Wolves extending their season. She stressed that her staff has not been increased to handle this additional work and pointed out other significant staff reductions that took place a couple of years ago. She explained how her staff from Thompson Park will come to the Arena to provide assistance and vice versa depending on where the need is and priorities. She argued that losing two parks and recreation maintenance workers will have a tremendous impact on the services that her department can provide. Lastly, she described the work that the part-time clerk performs, noting that this person also ran the concession stand, and she said this work will now need to be divided between herself and the Assistant Superintendent of Parks and Recreation, Scott Weller.

Discussion occurred regarding the status of the recent consolidation of the building and grounds crews for the Parks and Recreation Department and the Department of Public Works, and whether it would assist with the workload of the cutting of the two parks and recreation maintenance workers.

Mayor Smith discussed snowplowing of Thompson Park and he suggested keeping an old DPW plow truck in reserve at Thompson Park. Noting that if there is a snow event, Thompson Park is the last to be plowed, he suggested that the crews at Thompson Park could plow the roads there and it would improve efficiency.

Mr. Mix indicated that the Park is on DPW's plow routes and are plowed just like the City streets are.

Ms Gardner stated that her staff all has CDL licenses and could be trained to use a large plow truck, and she pointed out that employees of the Zoo still need to get up there to care for the animals during the snow storms.

Concession stand was discussed further and in response to Mayor Smith's inquiry of whether it makes a profit after all the expenses of payroll are considered, Mr. Mills indicated that it does make a profit and he reviewed the net profit for the previous years dating back to Fiscal Year 16/17.

On page 136, Ms. Gardner confirmed for Mayor Smith that the increase in overtime and temporary costs was due to the employee cutbacks. She noted that during the months of April and September, three seasonal employees are hired and their duties are to lock the bathrooms at night, raise the flag and pick up garbage.

Discussion turned to the carry in/carry out trash policy, and whether it was successful, and there was discussion on the proposed lighting of the flag so staff did not have to do this work. It was noted that the flag was planned to be moved this spring, but that work had to be put on hold due to the current pandemic status.

Looking at page 148 and 149, Mayor Smith asked if this equipment had been pushed out due to the recent decision of the Rapids baseball team taking a year off due to the pandemic.

Ms. Gardner confirmed that it had been pushed into Fiscal Year 21/22 since the baseball team would not be operating this summer and other changes to the budget due to this recent decision were discussed. Ms. Gardner also pointed out that the Red and Black football team would be making a determination about their season today.

A brief discussion occurred regarding the salary of Council and that last year they took no raise, as well as the proposal to cut their salary in order to allocate the funds elsewhere. Council Member Ruggiero asked further questions on how the Council's salary is determined.

In response to Council Member Ruggiero's question of which position she would like back if there were to be adjustments to the budget, Ms Gardner replied she would rather see the parks and recreation maintenance worker come back over a part-time clerk.

Turning to the pools on page 151, Mayor Smith announced that the City needs to cut back to two pools and asked Ms. Gardner for her recommendation.

Ms. Gardner handed out to Council her written recommendation listing three options, as well as correspondence from Brian Frazier, Sundance Leisure, regarding pool maintenance (on file in the City Clerk's Office). She indicated that her recommendation would be to keep Flynn pool over the Alteri pool because recent work and improvements were done to the Flynn Pool. She also said that Alteri pool will need work in the upcoming years, which is estimated to be a \$90,000 expense.

Mayor Smith asked what the effect would be on the expenses listed on page 152 if Council was to close Alteri pool and make it a permanent closure. He questioned the expense listed for the splash pad porta-john rental since it would not be open this summer and he wondered if supplies and materials would go down.

Ms. Gardner indicated that she sent new numbers to Mr. Mills and Mr. Mix.

Mr. Mills replied that Ms. Gardner's email estimated the decrease to only be a couple thousand dollars.

Mayor Smith wondered if the supplies should be divided by three, which then would decrease it by one-third.

Ms. Gardner explained that some items listed under the materials, such as trash receptacles, signage, rope floaters covers, office chairs, benches, picnic tables and umbrellas, and lawn mower with bag, were specifically for the new Thompson Park Pool since those items were not in the contract. She also explained that the other expenses for this year were to open the pools, clean them and do maintenance and then reclose them, which was recommended to be done even though the pools would not be opened to the public this year.

In response to Mayor Smith's question of whether Council supports taking staff's recommendation and closing the Fairgrounds pool, Council Member Compo replied that would be her preference.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson said that would be his preference if he had to pick, but he said he did not think they would be opening any pools this budget year.

Mayor Smith explained that the proposed budget did not include any pools opening for the summer, and he discussed the maintenance work and cost needed to keep three pools for future years. He pointed out if the Fairgrounds pool was to close, then the planned maintenance would not need to be done, therefore saving the City this expense.

An in-depth conversation occurred regarding whether a city this size needs three pools, the cost of maintaining three pools, the decommissioning of the Fairgrounds pool if it was chosen as the one to be closed, and the services offered to the residents by the City and how they have decreased through the years. Each Council Member discussed their reasons for opposing or supporting the closure of the Fairgrounds pool.

Council Member Ruggiero stated she strongly opposed permanently closing any pools, noting that she has heard from many residents that say the City keeps taking services away from them. She also said this is the first time that she is hearing anything about closing the pool and she said this goes against the recent strategic plan and comprehensive plan that was adopted for the City.

Mayor Smith discussed the expense and the operating costs of a pool and argued the City would still have two pools for the people that live here, and he suggested the bus system could set up a shuttle to pick people up to bring them to the two pools that remained open. He pointed out that this is not anything that had not been discussed before, noting that this was his position that he ran on during his campaign. He also suggested that maybe a splash pad could be installed at the Fairgrounds down the road to take the place of the pool.

Council Member Roshia said his stance has never changed. He also said he ran on this, noting that a city this size only needs two pools. He stressed that he would like to see the Northside pool remain open,

noting that from an economic standpoint this neighborhood is where most of the City's disadvantaged youth live.

Council Member Compo agreed with the recommendation of a splash pad to take the place of a pool. She discussed the climate of this area, noting that the pools are only open a few weeks out of the year, and she mentioned other cities, even in the south that have fewer pools than the City of Watertown.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson said he had hoped they would have another season before the City needed to make a discussion about decommissioning a pool, but he thinks Council's hand is being forced due to the economic impact of the pandemic. He said if he was forced to pick, he would go with option one.

Mayor Smith summarized that he would recommend taking steps for the recommendation of option one to keep the Northside pool open, close the Fairgrounds pool and recommend that staff immediately start decommissioning the Fairgrounds pool. He added that when the pools are opened back up, a bus service for a drop-off and pick-up could be arranged, and he said the long-term plan should be to put a splash pad at the Fairgrounds.

Council Member Compo, Council Member Henry-Wilkinson and Council Member Roshia agreed to be in favor with option one. Council Member Ruggiero said she was in favor of neither of the options.

During the conversation Ms. Gardner mentioned that large groups from outside of the City bus people to the City pool and a discussion of whether the City should charge these large groups to use City pools occurred.

Mayor Smith reiterated that there is clear support to decommission the Fairgrounds pool and asked staff to start working on bus routes that would accommodate a shuttle to and from the other to City pools.

Discussion turned to the playgrounds, as well as virtual activities that Parks and Recreation have suggested to offer during the pandemic when social distancing is required. In addition, there was discussion on what would happen if Governor Cuomo allowed the area to start opening up and use the fields, the status of the Wolves hockey team season, funding for CAPC and whether the additional CDBG funds received under the CARES Act could be used to fund some of the services.

### **Police Department (Page 79)**

Police Chief Charles Donoghue advised Council that the police budget was cut by four positions, which would be one officer per shift, and he explained the effect that would have on response times. He also discussed the K-9 unit, noting they were hoping to get back to three dogs but will need to be maintained at two. He responded to questions regarding overtime by stating that it is mostly due to arrests made and investigations, and he pointed out that when there is a homicide all the detectives are called in and there are extra patrols assigned to control the scene. He advised overtime is due to incidents that are out of the City's control and cannot be planned for.

Bail Reform was discussed and there was further conversation on the effects of the recent changes and how it affected overtime. It was noted that sometimes officers are needed to watch individuals while they are waiting for arraignment.

In response to Council Member Roshia's question, Chief Donoghue explained that one of the people to be cut would move into a position of an officer that is retiring in the middle of July. He confirmed that the officers currently were in the process of finishing their training and getting certified and indicated that as retirements happen, they would be the first used to fill those positions. He also advised that these individuals could potentially seek employment at other municipalities.

Responding to Council Member Ruggiero's question of whether the union offered to take a percentage of pay cut in order to save the positions, Mr. Mix said there was a verbal discussion proposing the idea but he has not received their decision. He added that the union wanted to wait for this budget discussion because the percentage of the cut might change depending on Council's decisions.

Chief Donoghue responded to a question of whether he would rather have the vehicles requested saved or the positions saved in the budget process by stating the vehicles are necessary. He added that the number of vehicles were already cut from his original request when he did up his budget proposal. Further discussion occurred regarding vehicle requests, the need for them, the ordering process and the time that it takes for delivery.

Regarding the part-time parking enforcement position which was cut from the budget, Council Member Ruggiero asked the status of this expense versus the revenue that it brought in.

Chief Donoghue reviewed the average tickets per shift, and with his calculations, he thinks it was revenue-neutral. He noted the downtown businesses were pleased with the increased parking enforcement.

Mayor Smith asked staff to look into this further because it is revenue-neutral and it helps the downtown business owners, but he noted the goal was not to make money for the City.

A detailed discussion regarding a kiosk system for parking enforcement. It was noted that the benefit of using a kiosk system would allow any officer to enforce parking and it is an easier system to use and monitor.

Mayor Smith suggested that the Police Department look into a dictation system which would help the officers file their reports and would improve efficiency, therefore allowing them more time on the street versus with paperwork.

### **Fire Department (Page 85)**

Fire Chief Matthew Timmerman stated the operating expense was lean and that anything which could be pushed out to future years. He noted the reason why the budget appeared to be increased was due to the local share of the SAFER Grant being higher for this upcoming year, a tabulation error on contracted services in last year's budget which carried over and an increase in labor cost.

In response to Council Member Ruggiero's inquiry, City Comptroller James Mills explained that as the union contracts resolved, the retro pay was brought forward. He confirmed this did equal about a million dollars for the two year reward up to 2016. On page 86, Mr. Mills explained the "actual" columns included estimates and summarized that personal services totaled approximately \$5.9 million. He responded to questions regarding the EMT training reimbursement and noted that last year was the

first time the City had received it and it totaled \$12,000. He further explained that the reimbursement is every three years for the certification.

Chief Timmerman confirmed for Council Member Ruggiero that EMT certification is in the job spec for a firefighter.

The use of Narcan was reviewed and discussion occurred over the increase in overdoses and the effect of the pandemic on this issue.

Turning to page 260, the purchase of a ladder truck replacement was discussed, Mayor Smith asked questions about a lease versus a purchase and he said the former City Manager had looked into doing a fleet spec versus an individual spec.

The condition of the reserve ladder truck was reviewed versus the condition of the current frontline ladder truck, and discussion took place over which would be a better vehicle to put in reserve once the new ladder truck arrived. It was noted that the new ladder truck would take two years to be built and arrive so the condition of the other two ladder trucks could be evaluated at that time and a decision made at that point. Discussion turned to the fire truck that is currently out for refurbishment and the additional work that was needed, as well as the differences in manufacturers that were available and issues that the City has had in the past with each one.

Chief Timmerman responded to questions regarding how often the ladder truck responds to calls and the types of calls, and the vehicle replacement plan was discussed.

In response to Council Member Ruggiero's comment that overtime was down in the budget, Chief Timmerman indicated that the SAFER Grant helped with that.

Mayor Smith added that overtime is driven by minimal manning and not actual fire calls.

### **Library (Page 223)**

Library Director Yvonne Reff began her presentation by citing the statistics on the usage of the Library. She responded to Mayor Smith that Sunday is the slowest day and Monday is the busiest day. She confirmed that, through the budget process, she would lose one full-time position and one part-time position, so it was necessary to reduce the number of hours. She summarized the staff was cut by 15% so hours would have to be cut by 15%. She advised that the Library would have to cut Sunday hours and one weekday evening.

Council Member Ruggiero commented that the Library receives grant money based on the number of hours that they are opened and noted that it was approximately \$71,000 for this year. She asked where this grant money came from.

Ms. Reff explained this is State funding because they are a Central Library and she pointed out that they need to maintain a minimum of 55 hours open per week. She also advised that they are looking at an approximately 50% cut this year, which will be carried into next year. She indicated that approximately \$30,000 goes towards items and \$20,000 goes to payroll for a part-time person to process all the Central Library books. She confirmed for Council Member Ruggiero that the proposed budget cuts funding for

children's books and ebooks. Other local libraries, such as Ogdensburg, and the effects of financial concerns on them were reviewed.

Mayor Smith mentioned the proposal for the Library to receive funds under the City School Board's taxing jurisdiction and stated there were some concerns by some individuals over representation because Library board members must live in the City under the current Library Charter.

Ms. Reff explained the options were for the Library to be a School District Library or for there to be changes to the Charter which allowed board members to live outside the City but within the School District. Further information on the process of each of those options were given and evaluated.

Mr. Mills provided additional information on the money received from the State and on money received from the North Country Library system, which pays for a clerk position.

Discussion turned to procedures that would need to be established for the reopening due to the pandemic and the need to keep up a social media presence and events under these circumstances.

Mayor Smith suggested considering using the building for more events and charging rent as a way to generate revenue. This additional revenue was discussed as well as various events that could be held and it was noted that the Library would need assistance by someone who has experience planning events.

**Engineering (Page 54), Municipal Building (Page 63) and Code Enforcement (Page 93)**

City Engineer Michael Delaney reviewed the staffing cuts for his department, stating that he would lose an engineering technician and one full-time secretary. He indicated that the secretary in the Code Enforcement Office would assist with some of the administrative work for engineering. He pointed out that a printer plotter was pushed out from this budget to a later year. Regarding the municipal building account, he indicated that there is a maintenance supervisor and two maintenance workers for City Hall and the Library, but the proposed budget cut this to one maintenance supervisor and one maintenance worker for both buildings.

Mayor Smith expressed concerns over this, stating that simple upkeep of this building is not currently being done.

Mr. Delaney agreed stating maintenance and cleaning will be tough to get done with only two people, especially now with new sanitizing needs due to the pandemic. He indicated that with the construction season reopening, his department and Code Enforcement's work will be increasing. He also advised that in Code Enforcement, there are two part-time positions that are no longer working and there is a Code Enforcement officer that they will not be filled. In addition, he reminded Council that one of his engineers spends half of his time overseeing operations of the hydro plant so his salary is split between the two accounts.

Mayor Smith commented that the common theme through the years in the City is for staff to be reduced and every department is being asked to do more with less. He stated the City needs to look at how it can be more efficient and suggested the City needs to consider contracting things out, like general cleaning, but it will need to be negotiated with the union.

Mr. Delaney stated that as the buildings get older more maintenance is required and there are issues with City Hall and the Library that need to be resolved. Regarding capital projects, he said they were very diligent working with the City Manager, the City Comptroller, DPW and Water Department to try and reduce project expenditures to only projects that they felt had to be done and were critical in terms of maintaining either safety or the general viability of the structure so that the City did not incur higher costs later.

Discussion turned to Accela, the new software used in the code enforcement office, and its implementation status and whether it is meeting the needs of the office. It was noted that this was a big expense and there was a \$2,400 license fee per year for each tablet.

Mr. Delaney answered questions from Council regarding the rental registration, the use of NYSERDA funds for items such as the windows in City Hall and the need for a drone service which is included in the budget.

### **State AIM Funding**

Mr. Mills warned Council that there was a possibility the State AIM funding might be cut due to the financial concerns at the State level as a result of the pandemic. Mr. Mills advised that this would be a double hit to the City because whatever cut is made would impact the current Fiscal Year 19/20, as well as need to be amended for what was proposed in the upcoming budget for Fiscal Year 20/21.

### **Animal Control (Page 90)**

Mentioning that this account is approximately \$155,000, Mayor Smith asked if there was another provider for dog control and wondered if staff could be trained to assist with crow hazing.

Mr. Mills indicated that the current dog control contract with the County was in place until December 31, 2021.

Council Member Ruggiero mentioned the SPCA was willing to work with the City and that there was another provider, which was the backup plan.

Mr. Mix said that he would look into this.

Further discussion occurred over the crow problem and the issues that it causes for the buildings in the downtown area, as well as the children's playground at the State Office Building.

Budget Session ended at 12:06 p.m.

**Ann M. Saunders**  
City Clerk