

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
April 26, 2022
7:00 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: Kyle Meehan, Patrick Keenan, Vicky Murphy, Michael Delaney

DISCUSSION

CitiBus

Transit Director Kyle Meehan presented to Council his proposal for projects for CitiBus during the 2022 grant season. He noted the first proposed item on the list, improvements at the office and bus garage on Newell Street, would definitely cost less than the proposed \$45,000 and would more likely be in the \$20,000 range.

Council Member Ruggiero inquired as to what the codes were in the grant column on Mr. Meehan's proposal.

Mr. Meehan explained that the 5307 was their regular yearly grant funding and the 5311 was the county-wide Mobility Management grant. He noted the 5311 only appeared in one spot and they would draw from the 5307 on that item as well.

Mr. Meehan explained one of the big-ticket items on his budget was the software that would allow analytical data to be reviewed in real time.

In response to Mayor Smith's question on whether City staff and Paratransit would also be able to make use of this software, Mr. Meehan said they would.

Mr. Meehan briefly explained the purpose and costs of other items such as training, fare software upgrades, security and equipment. Regarding the proposed administrative vehicle, he noted that he would prefer to purchase an electric vehicle to move the City further away from fossil fuels, but a long waiting list for those types of cars means he will be looking at a hybrid vehicle.

Next, Mr. Meehan presented his proposal for items not already in the 2022/23 budget, noting that the department's plan is ambitious. Included in his wish list is additional bus shelters with solar panels, an enclosed transit station, a study for a proposed transit hub and an electric bus. He noted an electric bus is currently being used in Tompkins County with good results.

Mayor Smith inquired about the range of those electric buses and how long the buses maintained a charge.

Mr. Meehan stated that, based on results the City of Cortland was getting, the range was 138-150 miles and the charge lasted up to 12 hours. He added that the terrain in Cortland has a lot of hills and they have had no issues.

Mr. Meehan summarized that all the projects in his proposal totaled \$1.4 million, with nearly \$1.2 million being covered by expiring or lapsing funds.

Responding to Mayor Smith's question on how the ARPA funds were being used, Mr. Meehan said they were going to operating services.

Council Member Olney asked Mr. Meehan to summarize what kind of information the proposed software would provide.

Mr. Meehan explained it would show, among other things, ridership, mileage, RPMs and preventative maintenance alerts.

Council Member Olney asked if the software would allow the City to adjust the routes.

Mr. Meehan said that it would and noted an algorithm could determine the routes and timing for Paratransit.

Council Member Olney asked Mr. Meehan if he had ordered his administrative vehicle yet and wondered if a local vendor could be used.

Mr. Meehan noted they would use the State minibid process and that there were restrictions on what he would be able to purchase.

Mr. Mix confirmed that the State used to call the bidding OGS bids but now they were called minibids and this vehicle was in the proposed budget.

Council Member Olney asked what could be done to reduce the travel time from outer State Street to Arsenal Street.

Mr. Meehan noted that once all the proposed updates were in place, then the system could be tweaked to improve routes and schedules.

In response to Council Member Pierce's inquiry on how many riders an electric bus could carry, Mr. Meehan said the Tompkins County bus carried 31.

Council Member Pierce questioned whether the Genfare software took debit cards or other mobile apps.

Mr. Meehan explained it could take various forms of mobile pay, but it would depend on which option was chosen and that each came with different costs. He mentioned another option could also be pre-paid cards but that would involve finding a retail partner that could sell those cards.

Council Member Hickey asked if the proposed transportation hub could be located at the Butler pavilion.

Mr. Meehan noted many considerations will go in to choosing a location and mentioned he had considered that site as well as the VanDuzee Street and former Mercy Hospital locations. He added that he would like to see the transportation hub be a multi-mode hub that could provide other services such as Greyhound. He noted he has been looking at the Ulster County transportation center as an example.

Water Lines

Water Superintendent Vicky Murphy explained that the list presented to Council (on file in the City Clerk's office) represented the projects chosen by Council in August 2021 for the upcoming year. She noted her office keeps an ongoing list of the water lines with issues and explained that they are ranked from highest priority (1) to lowest (3).

Council Member Olney asked what a transite pipe was.

Ms. Murphy stated that was a type of pipe made of cement and asbestos installed in the late 1940s and 1950s and were built to last for 50-70 years. She noted there are six miles of transite pipe in the City and all of it needs to be replaced. She further explained that other types of pipes deteriorate and are still able to be used but when transite pipe deteriorates it is catastrophic as whole sections collapse.

Council Member Olney asked if anything could be done about the lack of water pressure on West Main Street between Mill and Pearl Streets and suggested replacing the four-inch pipes there.

Ms. Murphy confirmed that pressure has always been lower on the Northside of the City but noted that not all four-inch pipelines are bad.

Mr. Mix stated the purpose of tonight's report was to inform the new members of Council what had been decided by the previous Council as priority projects. He commented that usually only one or two projects can be done per year but, with the large amount of ARPA funds available to the City, the department was able to do many more.

Ms. Murphy added that her department was very pleased to be able to do so much more with the additional funds.

Mayor Smith informed Council that, although the ARPA funds would allow a lot more projects to be completed, even if they used every single dollar from ARPA, it would not cover all the replacements needed to be made in the water lines.

Ms. Murphy expressed her appreciation for the number of projects Council had approved, adding that all the lines were priority one in her mind.

Sanitary Sewer Lines

Patrick Keenan, Department of Public Works Superintendent, presented two videos showing examples of conditions in the sewer system. The videos showed roots pushing through the pipes as well as cracks and areas of collapse. He explained that his department works to keep up with the maintenance of these pipes as well as residential laterals as need demands. He noted the budget included two additional staff members be hired to assist and added that last year they performed 142 inspections and 48 repairs. He also explained that before they pave any streets, staff determines if there are any issues in the pipes

beneath the street and makes a judgment on how soon those pipes will need to be replaced. He noted the items in the budget included sealing manhole covers to prevent infiltration, Western and Cooper Street outfall projects and replacement of sewer pipes at Washington Street and Keyes Avenue.

Mayor Smith asked if the sewer pipes on Keyes Avenue were made of wood.

Mr. Keenan said they were original to the City, but he believed they were made of stone.

Mayor Smith mentioned there were wooden sewer pipes found once during a project near Thompson Park.

Mr. Keenan explained for Council that when his department considers projects it is always a balancing act of the street condition and the pipes beneath the streets.

Council Member Olney inquired whether the department was focused solely on maintenance projects or whether it was looking to the future. He mentioned a business that considered locating to outer State Street but decided not to pursue the project when they learned there was no water and sewer in that area.

Mr. Keenan confirmed that was true and explained the area of State Street/Hunt Street/Gifford Street Road was in a hole, adding that when the 801 housing was built on Olmsted Drive, a pumping station was built and that is what would have to be done to expand further on State Street. He stressed that his department is really a maintenance organization, and they do all they can to keep up with current issues.

Council Member Olney asked what could be done to help.

Mr. Keenan noted there are six vacant positions, and they would like to add two more, but the department is finding it difficult to hire.

Council Member Olney questioned whether the City offers competitive salaries, mentioning that he had encountered similar problems with the City's inability to hire lifeguards for what they were paying.

Mr. Keenan informed Council that the City offers good benefits but noted some prospective employees only consider the dollar amount. He commented that he is blessed with a great crew and he, personally enjoys the job.

Mayor Smith asked if there had been any follow-up with the Town of Watertown on their contributions to infiltration of the City's sewer lines.

Mr. Keenan noted this was in the works, adding there had been some manhole metering where no "smoking gun" had been discovered. He indicated the infiltration problem is a culmination of a lot of individual point sources. He stated the easy fix was to seal up the manhole covers. Mr. Keenan said the next step is to do some smoke testing. He noted Mr. Mix had been working with Supervisor Bartlett from the Town of Watertown to work together to solve these issues.

Council Member Hickey asked if there was a new Federal Government requirement for filtration in stormwater sewers.

Mayor Smith and Mr. Keenan both said there was possibly new guidelines. Mr. Keenan went on to say that when the urbanized area became an MS4 Municipal Separate Stormwater System, it brought more requirements to meet federal guidelines for inspections and on the impact stormwater systems had on receiving waters like the Black River.

Council Member Hickey asked what that meant the City would have to do.

Mr. Keenan stated that any new construction project had to follow these guidelines and offered an example of when work was done on Public Square a cyclonic separator was installed to separate the solids before they get to the discharge area.

In response to Council Member Hickey suggesting installing grates on the drains, Mr. Keenan explained that had been tried but they tended to back up with debris causing water over the roads. He noted the short answer is that anything installed by the City will need maintenance.

Streets

Mr. Keenan informed Council that street repairs in the City are funded primarily by the CHIPs (Consolidated Highway Improvement) program and the department usually spends between \$600,000 and \$700,000 per year. He noted that this year, the costs for the traditional number of projects is looking to be right around \$1,000,000. He informed Council that this year the State has additionally provided a paving program that will add around \$2.1 million and that will pay for Mill, High and Academy Street projects.

He briefly explained the method his department uses to prepare the list of projected street projects for the next 15 years. He explained this year they start with a balance of about \$1.1 million carried over from previous years of CHIPs funding. With the addition of the Pave New York Program and the Extreme Weather Relief Program the department has around \$1,000,000 to spend on paving. He also mentioned the City may get some Touring Route funds from the State. He displayed a chart showing the sources of revenue and the anticipated expenditures.

In the list of expenditures, Mr. Keenan also noted that their 30–35-year-old paver needed to be replaced. He commented that the department was a bit overwhelmed with the volume of money being received by the department and has concerns about being able to accomplish everything. He added that it is not as simple as just going out and paving a street.

Council Member Hickey requested that Council be provided with the slides displayed in Mr. Keenan's presentation.

Mr. Keenan then noted Council had a map (on file in the City Clerk's office) in their packets that details the various conditions of the 100 miles of streets in the City.

Council Member Olney commented that he noticed on the map that Mill and Leray streets' conditions were rated as Fair.

Mr. Keenan noted that part of Mill Street will be paved this year, but his department attempts to balance the use of the funds, adding that they could easily spend all the CHIPs funding on Mill Street alone.

Mr. Keenan then showed slides of some paving equipment the City had made use of in the past, noting that their use was specific to long stretches of road and not really suitable to smaller side streets with structures such as manholes and curbing.

Council Member Olney asked if there was any way that Mill and Leray streets could be paved this year.

Mr. Keenan indicated part of Mill would be paved and that Leray was a project that entailed pipe replacement before it could be resurfaced. He went on to explain that there were many complaints over the winter regarding the conditions of Massey Street and that is being taken care of this year.

Council Member Olney inquired about a wand-type piece of equipment he had seen used and wondered if the City could use such a tool.

Mr. Keenan indicated the City could use that but there are concerns about the materials and storage with that particular equipment.

Council Member Olney asked if the City could work with Fort Drum and the County to share equipment.

In response to Mayor Smith mentioning that at one time there was a grant request with the Town of Watertown, Mr. Keenan agreed that was true, but the grant application had been unsuccessful.

Mr. Keenan explained to Council that one of the complications the department is facing in filling their six vacant positions is the new regulations for a CDL (Commercial Drivers License) and they were in discussions with the WorkPlace to potentially offer scholarships for potential applicants.

Sidewalks

City Manager Mix informed Council that sidewalks are an important part of urban life, and, over the years, the City has handled sidewalk replacement in different ways. He noted that the current policy causes major disparities in the ways various property owners pay for the blocks. He added that certain neighborhoods get their sidewalks replaced at no cost at all when their streets are selected for the CDBG program. He suggested that, if Council is interested, he would like to investigate other more equitable methods of handling sidewalks.

City Manager Mix said that he is proposing either using the General Fund to pay for sidewalks or conducting a program the City of Ithaca currently has in place. He explained that Ithaca has five permanent districts, and each district charges an annual fee that goes towards sidewalks. He commented that, in essence, Ithaca is treating sidewalks like just another City-offered utility. He noted that if Council is interested in either proposal, he will advise staff to evaluate them.

Council Member Hickey passed out a packet (on file in the City Clerk's office) detailing Syracuse's sidewalk program and noted first year the fees were \$0 and would increase over the next several years.

Mayor Smith asked how tax-exempt properties would be charged.

Mr. Mix indicated that even tax-exempt properties can be charged for special assessments. He added that another consideration is that ADA compliance could be assured if the City replaced sidewalks.

Council Member Hickey offered his support of looking into a City-wide plan.

Council Member Olney reminded Council that he had proposed grants for lower-income properties.

Mayor Smith gave an historical overview of the ways sidewalks had been handled in past years. He explained that in the 1980s, the City had sidewalk crews that handled sidewalk replacement but noted that staff was eliminated in the 1990s. He noted that in 2001, Council determined that sidewalks were a benefit to the homeowner as well as the community and therefore the property owner should pay for at least part of the sidewalk cost. He noted that the last time this was addressed, a price was determined that each homeowner would be charged for a sidewalk replacement which they could finance, or they could hire the work done themselves.

Council Member Hickey mentioned that the homeowner's possible charges maxed out at \$3,000.

Mayor Smith asked, if the City went with a plan similar to Ithaca's, whether there would be an exemption for a homeowner who replaced his own sidewalk.

Mr. Mix confirmed that this could be taken into account as well as a potential exemption or reduction in the fee if the sidewalk had been replaced in the last 20 years.

Council Member Olney suggested reaching out to the public to gather their thoughts.

Mayor Smith reminded Council that the last time they made a change to the sidewalk plan, so many people showed up to the Council meeting that they had to hold the meeting at the State Office Building.

In response to Council Member Olney's question on who would perform the work, Mr. Mix indicated that they would most likely contract it out. He mentioned that the contractors who do the CDBG work can perform the work a lot faster than City staff can.

Future Budget Sessions

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Mayor asked the members of Council to check their calendars so that upcoming budget sessions could be planned. The following meetings were scheduled:

- Tuesday, May 3, 6-8 p.m.
- Wednesday, May 4, 6-8 p.m.
- Tuesday, May 17, 6-8 p.m.
- Friday, May 20, 6-8 p.m.
- Monday, May 23, 6-8 p.m.
- Tuesday, May 24, 6-8 p.m.
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It was also noted that the City Council Meeting to be held on May 16 would be adjourned until June 6 at 6:30 p.m.

Civil Service Commission Meeting Invite

Charles “Chuck” Ruggiero requested, and was granted, a moment to address Council. He informed Council that Civil Service Commission, of which he is the Chair, meets on the third Tuesday of each month from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. and invited members of Council to come to a meeting to make sure they are getting the information they need from this Commission.

Work session ended at 9:04 p.m.

Lisa M. Carr
Deputy City Clerk