

**CITY COUNCIL BUDGET SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
May 4, 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: Brian Phelps, James Mills, Michael Delaney, Dana Aikins, David Wurzburg, Tina Bartlett-Bearup, Logan Eddy

DISCUSSION

Engineering (page 54)

City Engineer Michael Delaney mentioned the staffing changes that had occurred and the two Engineer I positions that are vacant, but otherwise, there were no major purchases or changes needed to the Engineering budget. In response to Council Member Hickey's question, he explained the use of monument supplies, which is an expense of \$8,000.

Council Member Olney noted the City outsources a lot of engineering work and expressed his concern with this versus hiring more staff.

Mr. Delaney advised that some work is outsourced due to the current volume of projects caused by the ARPA funding and not having enough in-house staff. He warned that he is trying to find balance with the number of staff needed because once the ARPA projects are done, he does not want to be overstaffed and then need to lay someone off. He discussed the lack of applicants and interest in the positions, as well as applicants not being qualified for the work.

This led to further discussion among Council and staff about outsourcing work versus hiring more positions, possible reasons for the difficulty of receiving suitable candidates and the City's pay scale and benefits.

No changes were made.

Code Enforcement and Municipal Building (pages 62 and 101)

Code Enforcement Supervisor Dana Aikins reviewed both the Code Enforcement (page 101) and Municipal Building (page 62) budgets and noted there were no significant changes from last year. In response to Council Member Ruggiero's question about the increase in overtime for Code Enforcement, he explained that he has already gone over the current year's budget amount, so he tried to supply a better estimate by reviewing several years of data. He provided examples of situations when Code Enforcement is called in after hours.

Past staffing levels were discussed in reply to Mayor Smith's inquiry regarding the overall Code Enforcement budget having increased significantly from three years ago. It was noted that, in the past, two positions in the office were firefighters and paid from the Fire Department's budget but now these positions are Code Enforcement Officers. Other position title changes were reviewed as well.

Demolitions currently needed in the City were discussed and City Comptroller Mills stressed that regardless of the amount put in the budget, if Code Enforcement recommends a property to be demolished, the City will do it.

No changes were made.

Assessor (page 35)

City Assessor Brian Phelps indicated that there were no major changes or large equipment purchases to his department budget this year and he is fully staffed at three personnel. In response to Council Member Hickey's question about the increase in health insurance cost, he explained that, in the past, none of his staff, including himself, opted into the City's insurance, but now one new staff member has family insurance, and one new staff member chose the insurance buy-out option because they have coverage through another source.

No changes were made.

City Clerk (page 42)

City Clerk Ann Saunders indicated there was a slight increase in supplies but otherwise everything is the same as last year. She pointed out that there is one addition to the City Clerk fee schedule for a new service that New York State implemented in March and noted the fee is set by New York State. She advised that most of her department's fees are set by New York State.

Council Member Olney questioned the needs of the office in terms of resources and software for handling documents. He also mentioned the transition to the new website.

Mrs. Saunders provided details of the website's inability to search Council minutes and the need for document management software for the City as a whole. She noted that she is working on a solution to publicly search minutes through eCode, which is the City's online version of the City's Code. Regarding document management software, she pointed out that the City Clerk is the appointed Records Management Officer (RMO) and is responsible for the City's records, so an electronic system would be beneficial. She responded to questions regarding agenda software, but pointed out that this software was in the City's Manager budget and is a function of that office.

No changes were made.

Purchasing and Central Printing (pages 32 page 73)

Purchasing Director Tina Bartlett-Bearup reviewed both the Purchasing (page 32) and Central Printing (page 73) budgets stating there were no major changes. She noted the Central Printing budget decreased by approximately \$2,500 and reviewed the equipment purchases of a second-floor copier (page 74) and a postage machine replacement.

No changes were made.

IT (page 75)

Information Technology Manager David Wurzburg pointed out the major equipment purchases of servers (page 79) and telephone system (page 80) within his budget and discussed the need for each. He

responded to questions about the new website, the new Microsoft Outlook software and audio visual needs of Council Chambers.

No changes were made.

City Comptroller (page 28)

City Comptroller James Mills responded to questions regarding the vacant Deputy Comptroller position and the need for it, stressing that the recommendation to add the position last year did not come from him. He remarked that he is hesitant to increase his department staffing, when he would be the one to ask other departments to evaluate decreasing their staffing when the City approaches the end of the hydro contract in seven years with the loss of significant revenue. In response to Mayor Smith's question, he indicated that he does not need the position.

Council Member Olney stated that he asked for the position to be put into the budget last year because the Deputy Comptroller position is listed in the City Charter and for succession planning in case the current City Comptroller became unavailable. He advised that most departments have a second-in-charge position, noting that the Assistant to the City Manager and Deputy Fire Chief positions were added last year as well.

Discussion led to increased spending on added projects and the addition of 22 positions last year without the addition of offsetting revenue.

Mayor Smith noted that if the City Comptroller states that he does not need the position, then the City should not budget for it.

In response to Council Member Ruggiero's question, Mr. Mills advised that the total cost of the position, with benefits, would be \$96,000.

Council Member Pierce and Council Member Ruggiero also expressed support for deleting the position.

Council Member Olney indicated that he opposed this and questioned the motives for why open positions within departments are not being filled.

This conversation turned to the end of the hydro contract and whether it would have a significant impact on future budgets and revenue. The possibility of Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) and Municipal Power was debated, and it was noted that a CCA program might not provide the additional revenue as originally thought and that Municipal Power would need to be an enterprise fund so it would not add funding to the General Fund.

Mayor Smith, Council Member Hickey, Council Member Pierce and Council Member Ruggiero agreed to remove the Deputy Comptroller position from the proposed budget, saving approximately \$96,000.

City Manager (page 25)

City Manager Mix quickly reviewed this budget, stating there are no major changes.

No changes were made.

City Council and Mayor (pages 19 and 22)

Mayor Jeffrey Smith advised that the only major change is his proposal to increase the Mayor and Council's salary by \$3,000 to begin on January 1 once he is out of office.

Council Member Olney expressed opposition to it, stating that it is an election year, and he is not in favor of giving himself a raise under the current environment of the City.

Council Member Pierce said that she does not see the need for an increase, noting that many of them did not get into this position for the money.

Council Member Ruggiero also said that she is not in favor of this proposal.

Discussion occurred about last year's proposal to increase the salary for the Mayor and Council and it not being well received by the public.

Council agreed to remove the salary increases for both the Mayor and Council Members, which would have gone into effect on January 1. Since this was only budgeted for half of the fiscal year, it equates to removing \$1,500 from the Mayor's budget and \$6,000 from the Council's budget.

In response to Council Member Pierce questioning the need for the data plan for Council's new tablets since City Hall and Council Members have Wi-Fi, Mr. Mix explained that sometimes the Wi-Fi in City Hall is difficult to connect to.

Tax Stabilization Fund (page 190)

There was a brief discussion of the Tax Stabilization Fund and Mr. Mills explained to Council Member Olney that this year's budget includes an allocation of \$500,000. He reviewed the prior allocations that had been made to the fund.

Council Member Olney said that if this allocation was removed, there would be no need for the proposed tax increase.

Further discussion occurred, which led to the funding used to pay for the golf course.

Property Tax Cap, Debt Limit and Multi-Year Plan

In response to Council Member Hickey's request, Mr. Mills reviewed in detail the information pertaining to the Constitutional Tax Limit on page 3, Property Tax Cap Calculation on page 4, Computation of Debt Limit on page 275. He also fully explained the assumptions, listed on page 349-350, used to develop the Multi-Year Forecast beginning on page 351.

This turned to a debate about sales tax revenue and offsetting revenues to support increasing expense.

Budget session ended at 2:47 p.m.

Ann M. Saunders
City Clerk