

**CITY COUNCIL BUDGET SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
May 12, 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: Scott Weller, James Mills, James Scordo, Jordan Northrop, Logan Eddy

DISCUSSION

Parks and Recreation

Parks and Recreation Superintendent Scott Weller started his presentation by reviewing the Administration account beginning on page 141 and he stated there are no major changes. Regarding the Parks and Recreation Maintenance account beginning on page 144, he pointed out the purchase of a pickup truck on page 149, a trail groomer on page 150 and a dump trailer on page 151. He also mentioned that this is where funding for the Solar Eclipse event appears.

In response to Council Member Hickey's question about the Thompson Park Conservancy Public Benefit expense of \$100,000, Mr. Mix explained that last year the Thompson Park Conservancy received \$100,000 from the City, but in previous years, they had received \$50,000 and then \$20,000. He summarized that this expense has increased over the years. Mr. Mix also responded to Council Member Olney's inquiry about using stone from the quarry in the Park, by advising that it would take a lot of work to remove the stone and that the cuts would be more angular than rounded like the other stonework in the Park.

The hours of the Park were discussed as well as a lengthy conversation about the Carry-In/Carry-Out Policy regarding trash removal. Mr. Weller assured Council that the Carry-In/Carry-Out Policy is working well and that there has been less trash in the Park since this policy was implemented.

Mr. Weller turned to the Athletic Facilities Maintenance account beginning on page 152 and pointed out the cost of the football field sound system (detailed on page 157), sod cutter (detailed on page 158), utility trailer (detailed on page 159) and debris blower (detailed on page 160). He also mentioned the hot water heater replacement for the grandstands. In response to Mayor Smith's question about the increase in temporary wages, he explained that this is mainly due to the increase in minimum wages.

In the Recreation Programs and Events account beginning on page 162, Mr. Weller stated that the cost for background checks increased so that nationwide searches can be done for coaches and volunteers, and he said he increased the advertising line item. Under materials and supplies, he pointed out the purchase of cross-country skis and snowshoes because these will now be rented in the Park, and indicated the fees for these are still to be determined.

Council Member Olney suggested providing an outdoor ice-skating option in the Park and mentioned having it inside the large pavilion or the golf course parking lot.

Mr. Weller advised there was difficulty getting the water to the pavilion and there are safety concerns of people running into the stone columns.

Further discussion ensued about the creation of an outside ice rink in the Park, the issue with maintaining the ice due to weather, and the cost of using a chiller or cooling pad.

In the Pools account beginning on page 166, Mr. Weller commented that there are no changes from last year's budget except for the costs of opening a third pool next June. He also pointed out the increases in chemicals for the pool, advising that they did have difficulty obtaining chemicals during the last pool season. He confirmed for Mayor Smith that the cost of running a pool is approximately \$200,000. Lastly, he reviewed the opening schedule for this upcoming season.

Council Member Ruggiero asked if \$750,000 of ARPA funds were being used for the Flynn Pool project.

City Comptroller James Mills explained that this amount was for the design of the pool.

Council Member Olney asked if the department tracks who uses the pools and whether they are City or non-City residents. He suggested that the City approach the County about assisting with the funding of the City pools since people outside the City use them.

Mayor Smith informed Council that he had asked the County Legislature Chairman last year and there was no interest in helping to fund the City pools.

This led to a debate over County residents' use of the City amenities and whether the County should contribute to the expense of operating and maintaining these amenities. The conversation then turned to whether the City should charge users that do not live inside the City limits, especially large groups that are bused into the City to use the pool.

Mayor Smith polled Council on their support for charging users from outside the City to use the pools.

Council Member Hickey, Council Member Pierce, Council Member Ruggiero and the Mayor expressed support for this proposal. Council Member Olney adamantly opposed it.

Mr. Weller was asked to develop a fee schedule for this proposal.

Extending the time that the pools were open was suggested and Mr. Weller indicated that the City does not have enough lifeguards to staff two pools past Labor Day weekend. He explained that many of the lifeguards are either high school students returning to high school sports practices or college students returning to their campuses. In regard to fees for use of the pool, Mr. Weller expressed concern with staff needing to handle cash at each site.

Moving to the Golf Course account on page 170, Mr. Weller advised that there were not many changes from what was recently presented for the opening of the golf course.

Golf Course Manager Jordan Northrop responded to questions about the number of tournaments and memberships currently in place, as well as the potential revenue earned from each of these. He explained what he is doing to market and promote the golf course and the improvements that have been made to the greens.

The opening of the concessions and the status of Spokes' alcohol license were reviewed.

A lengthy debate ensued about the potential revenue to be earned and the expenses for the operation of the golf course, as well as previous statements made in support of and against the purchase of the golf course. The deficit that appears in the proposed budget was discussed and the nondisclosure agreements signed by Council Member Hickey, Council Member Olney and Council Member Ruggiero regarding the previous owner's financial reports were mentioned.

Mr. Northrop was asked about the condition of the equipment, and he replied that the carts are not in good shape. He indicated that some golf courses lease golf carts instead of purchasing them so that the cost is lower, and the inventory can be turned over every few years. He responded to a question about the cost of mowing equipment by saying it could be approximately \$100,000.

Mayor Smith pointed out the golf course storage building listed in the Capital Budget on page 302 will cost \$350,000.

Council Member Olney questioned whether it is better to pay cash or bond for this project.

This led to a detailed discussion on the decision-making process used to determine whether to bond or pay cash for a purchase/project. The history involved with previous major projects was reviewed.

Turning to the Arena account beginning on page 174, Mr. Weller commented that there were no major changes with this account. He responded to questions about options to cover the ice when skating events were not occurring, his proposal to start holding pickle ball events, and opportunities to increase use of the arena. Concessions at the arena were talked about as well.

Lastly, Mr. Weller pointed out the following capital projects: Arena sound system upgrade on page 292, Fairgrounds Grandstand split face concrete masonry unit repair/restoration on page 301, Thompson Park Golf Course pre-engineered metal storage building project on page 302, disc golf course on page 303, and the 12-foot wing mower on page 309. He also reviewed the proposed changes to the Parks and Recreation fee schedule starting on page 379.

Other than the proposal to create a fee structure for non-City users of the pool, no changes were made to the Parks and Recreation Department.

Budget session ended at 3:09 p.m.

Ann M. Saunders
City Clerk