

The Claremont City Council held a meeting on Thursday, May 7, 2015, in the Council Chambers of City Hall.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Neilsen at 6:30 p.m.

Members of the Council present were:

At-Large Councilor Keith Raymond
Ward I Councilor Carolyn Towle
Ward III Councilor Nicholas Koloski
Assistant Mayor Victor Bergeron
Mayor James Neilsen, IV
At-Large Councilor James Reed
Ward II Councilor Charlene Lovett
At-Large Councilor Kyle Messier
At-Large Councilor John Simonds

Also present were:

Guy Santagate, City Manager
Jane Taylor, City Solicitor

BUDGET

Mr. Santagate read his letter to the Mayor and City Council into the record. In it, he proposed to level-fund the City tax rate (sixth time in the last ten years) which meant disallowing many department requests even though the requests had merit, but he had to balance needs with the tax rate.

The proposed budget insures that the City will continue to provide essential City services to its constituents and assumes no further down shifting of costs by the state.

Mr. Santagate recognizes that continuously cutting department requests does affect the quality of services delivered. He has proposed adding the position of Public Information Officer to the staff. The salary and benefits for this position are included in the budget and have been factored into the proposed tax rate.

Mr. Santagate showed a PowerPoint presentation: 2016 City Manager's Proposed Budget. Salient Points: Level-funded tax rate, 6th time in 10 years; continue to provide essential services; did not fill positions in Finance, Welfare and Parks; reduced Highway request from \$950,000 to \$250,000 for pavement; Allocation of 2016 Municipal Portion of the Tax Rate: Public Safety (Police, Fire & Public Works) 74%, Culture & Recreation 13%, Planning & Development 5%, Welfare & Social Services 3%, All Other 5%. Average home assessed at \$135,000 would pay \$2,044 for City tax.

Fire – Public Hearing

Department Request \$2,625,641; CM Proposed \$2,580,447

Fire Chief Rick Bergeron said the level-funded budget won't be easy, but they have a plan to encumber some funds for next year. He said retirement costs are up because the state increased the City's contribution.

Ms. Walter said the \$5,000 for Capital – Buildings that was removed was supposed to go to a Capital Reserve. It was in the CIP (Capital Improvements Plan) for \$25,000. Mayor Neilsen said that was supposed to be an allotment toward the \$25,000 in the CIP.

Chief Bergeron said the Fire Department would be fully staffed soon. He is not aware of anyone retiring this year, but three people are eligible for retirement.

Mayor Neilsen opened the public hearing.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, asked about how much of the budget is for the fire union contract and he asked how that compares to other communities in NH.

Mayor Neilsen closed the public hearing.

A motion was made by Mr. Bergeron and seconded by Mr. Simonds to tentatively approve the Fire budget of \$2,580,447.

Voice vote: motion carried 9-0.

Airport – Public Hearing

Department Request \$111,225; CM Proposed \$111,225

Fire Chief Rick Bergeron, who also is the Airport Manager, said the Airport budget is mostly funded with offsetting revenue from gasoline. Increases to utility costs were because of increases in rates from the utilities.

Councilor Bergeron asked about the new hanger. Chief Bergeron said it is in the planner's and architect's hands now and construction will take place in 2017.

Chief Bergeron said this year the frame for the Great Lakes building was removed and the owner paid for its removal.

Mayor Neilsen opened the public hearing.

Marcie Daniels, Ward 3, thinks the airport should be paid for by private users. Mayor Neilsen explained the offsetting revenues from fuel and hanger rentals.

Mayor Neilsen closed the public hearing.

A motion was made by Ms. Messier and seconded by Mr. Raymond to tentatively approve the Airport budget of \$111,225.

Voice vote: motion carried 9-0.

Elections – Public Hearing

Department Request \$12,900; CM Proposed \$12,900

Mary Walter, Finance Director, said the Elections budget is down because we anticipate only two elections next year: City elections and the Presidential primary.

There was a discussion about the voting machines; they are working fine and they have a life expectancy of 12 years.

Mayor Neilsen opened the public hearing.

A. J. Maranville, Ward 2, asked about making provisions for other voting places in case the schools don't allow us to use the buildings for voting.

Marcie Daniels, Ward 3, said she disagreed with voting in schools because her daughter misses breakfast and gym on those days.

There was some discussion about voting in the schools.

Patrick Adrien, Ward 1, said unless the school asks the City to move voting, it should not be part of this conversation.

Mayor Neilsen closed the public hearing.

A motion was made by Ms. Messier and seconded by Ms. Towle to tentatively approve the Elections budget of \$12,900.

Voice vote: motion carried 9-0.

Municipal Complex (Maintenance) – Public Hearing

Department Request \$389,878; CM Proposed \$389,875

Ms. Walter said this budget is up because of two capital items that are coming from Capital Reserve accounts. They are to replace the exhaust fan in the Police Department roof and to install ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act)-compliant access doors by Central Collections. She said the City has saved \$24,000 this year with the electric broker contract. Offsetting income is from outside details for the Opera House and the District Court lease.

Mayor Neilsen opened the public hearing.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, said he would prefer to see the revenues matched with the expenses to show the net impact.

Mayor Neilsen closed the public hearing.

A motion was made by Mr. Raymond and seconded by Mr. Simonds to tentatively approve the Municipal Complex budget of \$389,875.

Voice vote: motion carried 9-0.

Debt Retirement (Debt Service) – Public Hearing

Department Request \$1,118,320; CM Proposed \$1,118,320

Ms. Walter said this is down \$9,000. The next bond will be paid off in 2017 which will free up about \$80,000 a year. The one after that will be in 2021 at \$282,000 and in 2023 the landfill will be done which is \$225,000.

Mayor Neilsen said it is tough to keep up with the City's needs without taking out bonded debt.

Mayor Neilsen opened the public hearing. No one spoke. He closed it.

A motion was made by Mr. Raymond and seconded by Ms. Lovett to tentatively approve the Debt Retirement budget of \$1,118,320.

Voice vote: motion carried 9-0.

City Administration (Finance) – Public Hearing

Department Request \$943,193; CM Proposed \$932,088

Ms. Walter said this budget is down slightly. Software agreement is down \$6,000 because the Planning and Development Department wants to drop some software and pick up a less expensive, more user friendly software. The \$6,000 is being dropped from the maintenance of those modules, Equipment M&R – Contractual Services. She said the software is going on 15 years old and will be coming to the end of its useful life. We paid \$160,000 for it and we will start putting money into a Capital Reserve for a new software platform. Temporary and Seasonal employment is up because a vacancy was not filled and we may need some temporary employment.

Mayor Neilsen opened the public hearing.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, said the first 18 line items of this budget seem to be personnel costs; he would like to have subtotals after the personnel expenses.

Mayor Neilsen closed the public hearing.

A motion was made by Mr. Simonds and seconded by Mr. Raymond to tentatively approve the City Administration budget of \$932,088.

Voice vote: motion carried 9-0.

Policy – Public Hearing

Department Request \$701,894; CM Proposed \$760,871

Ms. Walter said this is up \$120,000 because of Property M&R – Cleanup of Property. It is being offset from fund balance. It will be for building demolition. Most of that money won't be recovered. This budget has the Public Information Officer (PIO), with the \$90,000 coming from Capital Reserve. This has \$362,000 in offsetting revenues, \$120,000 for CCTV – Pass Through, \$2,000 from Business License Permit Fees, \$150,000 from Fund Balance (\$120,000 from Property Clean Up and \$30,000 for ADA Access). \$90,000 for the PIO will come from the communications and technology capital reserve.

There was a discussion about the \$90,000 salary for the PIO. The position is estimated to be between a grade 9 and 10. There is no job description yet. The salary includes an estimate for benefits.

Mr. Santagate said we are looking for input from the Council.

Ms. Taylor said this amount is for budget purposes. Before someone is hired, we need to bring a revision to the Classification and Pay Schedule to Council. Mr. Santagate said this needs to go to the Personnel Advisory Board. Ms. Taylor said there is a process to establish a new position. If the Council doesn't approve the position, the money doesn't get spent.

Ms. Lovett feels the \$90,000 could be used in other ways. She didn't think taking the money from the capital reserve fund was a good idea. She thinks the position is a good idea.

Mr. Bergeron thanked the Citizen's Group for the suggestion, but will vote no if the PIO position is in the budget. He said Parks has only one full-time employee and he feels adding a PIO is not the best use of the money. He said that it sounded like it would become an assistant city manager position.

Mr. Raymond agreed with Mr. Bergeron. The roads are only getting \$250,000, so this is not the year to do this.

Ms. Towle thinks a PIO is a wonderful idea. She agreed with Mr. Bergeron. This is not the year to do this because funding for the roads is only \$250,000.

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Mr. Koloski was concerned that no job description was given to the Council. He would like to know what other communities have. He said this may not be the year for this position, but it may be the year for discussion.

Ms. Lovett said a job description is needed.

Mayor Neilsen supports this, but there are a lot of ancillary things to consider. Where will the employee work; what equipment is needed; what information will be funneled to the person, etc.

Mayor Neilsen said it looked like the Council was saying no at this time, maybe yes later.

Mr. Koloski said no would be his answer. He wants more information such as a job description.

Ms. Messier agreed this is a tight year and we have lots of infrastructure issues. She would like to see a discussion with the schools.

Mr. Bergeron said he is not against the concept.

Ms. Lovett will vote that we continue to research and put together a job description. She talked about communicating with the schools to see if the position could be shared.

Mr. Koloski said he would vote to continue the discussion.

Ms. Messier said it sounded like the consensus was that this would not be a clerical position.

Mayor Neilsen said this will be clearer after discussion with the school.

Mr. Simonds said this needs to be more than a clerical position; it needs to be someone to promote Claremont to bring people here.

Mayor Neilsen opened the public hearing.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, said he is a member of the Citizen's Group. He is in favor of the concept. He noted there was not a huge crowd in Council Chambers advocating for the position. He thinks the City and schools should share the position.

Patrick Adrien, Ward 1 resident and member of the Citizen's Group, said that members are grateful the City Manager and Council have listened to them. He said people like the idea of a PIO, but they are concerned about the \$90,000. He would like to have more information about the position.

Marcie Daniels, Ward 3, asked who will pay for the position. Mr. Koloski said the taxpayers would pay for it.

A. J. Maranville, Ward 2, said he thinks a part-timer could do Facebook and the City's webpage.

Bob Strug, Ward 1, agreed this is not good idea. There are so many ways to get information out and there are people who do that already.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, asked where someone would find the functions that are covered under Policy Department. He asked where to find offsets.

Peg Hall, Ward 1, asked if there is a narrative to these budgets. Ms. Walter said no. Directors are available to answer questions from the Council.

Mr. Santagate said there is a lot of information in the budget and it is on the website.

Mayor Neilsen closed the public hearing.

A motion was made by Ms. Messier and seconded by Ms. Towle to tentatively approve the Policy budget of \$670,871

Voice vote: motion carried 8-1 with Mr. Reed voting no.

General Services – Public Hearing

Department Request \$754,450; CM Proposed \$670,950

Ms. Walter said this includes a generator for an uninterrupted power source. She said the biggest change is that we are not funding GASB Liabilities. It will show up on the balance sheet next year. To level-fund the budget, we had to cut \$60,000 this year. We have been funding the minimum portion each year. State of NH is funded at 58%. We are a lot better off than most communities.

Mayor Neilsen opened the public hearing.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, asked what budget had all the legal expenses. Ms. Walter said it is in the Policy budget. He asked what portion of the Policy budget is attributed to the Solicitor's office and he wondered what other communities spend on legal services.

Mayor Neilsen closed the public hearing.

A motion was made by Mr. Raymond and seconded by Ms. Lovett to tentatively approve the General Services budget of \$670,950.

Voice vote: motion carried 9-0.

Revenue – Public Hearing

Department Request \$5,568,510; CM Proposed \$5,666,810

Ms. Walter explained the individual Revenue line items. Because of reduced revenue from Land Use Change Tax and not funding the PIO position, the Revenue line needs to be reduced by \$102,000.

Ms. Walter said Meals & Rooms distribution has been frozen at 2011 level. State cuts may impact Welfare.

Mayor Neilsen opened the public hearing.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, had questions about PILOTs (Payment in Lieu of Taxes).

Mayor Neilsen closed the public hearing.

Ms. Walter said the court-approved PILOT for Wheelabrator has expired.

Ms. Taylor said in reference to the Sawtooth building (Maker Space), it is anticipated the City will negotiate a PILOT with them.

A motion was made by Mr. Raymond and seconded by Mr. Simonds to tentatively approve the Revenue budget of \$5,564,810.

Mr. Santagate said that amount is not coming from the tax rate.

Voice vote: motion carried 9-0.

Ms. Lovett commented that the 2015 Council Approved column needed to show figures that were actually approved so that the percentage increase or decrease was accurate. In order for the department increase or decrease to be accurate, you have to pull out the encumbrances.

CONSULTATION WITH LEGAL COUNSEL

None

ADJOURNMENT

At 9:40 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Bergeron and seconded by Mr. Simonds to adjourn.

Voice vote: motion carried 9-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dorée M. Russell
Clerk to the Council