

The Claremont City Council held a meeting on Tuesday, May 20, 2014, in the Council Chambers of City Hall.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Neilsen at 6:00 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

Absent:

At-Large Councilor John Simonds

Also present were:

Guy Santagate, City Manager
Mary Walter, Finance Director

OLD BUSINESS

Streets & Roads (Highways) – Snow Removal from Around the Schools and Downtown Sidewalks

Bruce Temple, Public Works Director, said Council had asked him to come back with pricing for snow pick-up in the downtown area and to address snow removal from sidewalks in a more timely fashion. There are 126 miles of paved road times 2 passes for 252 miles to be plowed; there are over 17 plow routes. It takes 3-4 hours to cover each route. If it starts snowing at night, Public Works (PW) responds 30-45 minutes after the Police call them out. If there is no call, by 4 a.m. the routes are being treated. Usually around 5:30 a.m. the Superintendent of Schools calls PW for a report of the condition of the roads. PW maintains 6 City parking lots. They are done after the streets are plowed. Usually around 7 a.m. they get to the pedestrian bridge; then they hand shovel the stairs on Water Street; and then they start the sidewalk routes. Last year there were 18 snow events. They don't have the staff to work extended days. The downtown snow pick-up is further down on the list (last thing they do) and removal of the snow in the middle of Pleasant Street is done at about 3-4 a.m. When down there working, it is important that the streets are cleared of vehicles. After the storm it could be 2-3 days before they get there. In addition to snow plowing, his people are working on other tasks as well (i.e. water

plant). The cost per storm to pick up snow in the downtown core (Leo's Market, up Main Street, over to LaValley's to Shirley's, by the High School, Pleasant Street, Tremont Street) by an independent contractor with 5-6 trucks from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. is about \$75 per hour per unit for \$3,600; plus a snowblower and a couple of loaders will cost about \$2,000; and if Police are needed, it is \$59.40 per hour per officer for a total of about \$6,040 per storm. To beef up sidewalk plowing would take 3 sidewalk plows for about \$1,800 per storm and hand shoveling costs an additional \$400-\$500 per operation for about \$2,300 per storm. Mr. Santagate asked if this includes schools and sanding and salting the sidewalks. Mr. Temple said sand and salt would add another \$7,500 for a budget of about \$157,000. This would take care of the sidewalks around the schools. He suggested \$155,000-\$160,000 would be a good budget number. Mr. Temple said they average 5,000 manhours each winter and one-third is overtime. Short of having more people, he doesn't know how to get more out of his people.

\$160,000 would be about 21 cents on the taxrate.

Mr. Temple said clearing the sidewalks, regardless if it is done by PW employees or by a contractor would have to wait until the roads are finished, otherwise the snow would be plowed right back onto the already cleared sidewalks. Because of the union, staff would have to be offered the overtime hours before bringing in a contractor.

Mr. Temple said the sidewalks around the schools are usually done on day two or day three after the storm. To accelerate the time it takes to get to the sidewalks, Mr. Temple would need three extra people. Mr. Santagate said that would cost about \$150,000 per year. Mr. Temple said PW is down 5-6 people and that having even one extra person would help.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, wondered if the City could check in with other cities and large towns to see if they have had these same issues and to see how they solved them or if there are other possibilities.

Mayor Neilsen announced the Boston Post Cane would be awarded May 25th at Silver Maples to Eleanor Evans.

BUDGET

Parks

Department Request \$677,762; CM Proposed \$350,466

Mark Brislin, Parks and Recreation Director, showed a PowerPoint presentation: 620+ Acres of Parks, Highlights within the parks; Benefits of Parks Programs; Doing More with Less, 1 full-time and 1 part-time maintain the parks, fields, facilities and equipment.

Council was concerned about the reduced budget for the JSL building. Mr. Santagate said the JSL building has been a financial issue for a long time. He had previously suggested to the Council to close the building and to sell it. The JSL provides roller skating programs that we

can't do elsewhere. The upkeep of the building is costing a lot of money and his recommendation will be to sell it. The City will be glad to work with the JSL people on most of the activities (i.e. basketball can be done at the CSB Community Center). We should look at moving some of the City-owned properties onto the tax rolls. We can't sustain it going forward. We met with a representative from the JSL to explain the issues we are faced with. We appreciate the work they have done there.

Ms. Walter said the budget for the JSL was \$9,000 seven years ago and then it went up to \$14,000. The money for next year is to keep a minimum number of lights on.

Mr. Brislin said the overspending for the JSL has made opening the parks difficult. Ms. Walter said there are other issues such as liabilities, background checks, etc. It is not a City-controlled building.

Council would like to take a tour of City-owned properties to include the JSL and Arrowhead.

Mr. Koloski would rather give \$10,000 to the JSL building versus paint the church.

There was discussion of adding a full-time employee. Ms. Walter said \$32,600 would have to be added to a part-time position to make it full-time.

Ms. Towle talked about offering a yearly membership as compensation for trained volunteers instead of adding another employee.

Mr. Santagate said the City reached out to the JSL and Arrowhead before the budget was presented and the City is willing to work with them to help mitigate the pain. We don't want to destroy the programs if we can salvage them.

Ms. Lovett recommended getting together a taskforce of all the stakeholders to look at options.

Mayor Neilsen would like to talk about this at the second meeting in June.

A motion was made by Mr. Koloski and seconded by Ms. Towle to tentatively approve the Parks budget of \$350,466.

Robert Knight, previous JSL Chairman for 10 years, said 50-60 years ago the JSL was an armory. The building was given to the City and the Junior Sports League (JSL) took over maintaining the building. The City pays the electric and heat. The building is closed in the summer because it is too hot. All the money made goes back into the building for repairs and skates. They have basketball every night and they skate twice a week. There is an archery and shooting range in basement.

Steve Raymond, Ward 1, said he volunteered there in the 80s and every penny was accounted for. He said he was told they make \$500 on a good Friday night. They should be able to

maintain the building without taxpayer help. He would like to know how much the JSL is really bringing in.

Ms. Walter said she has been with the City for 13 years and has never seen a spreadsheet of the expenses and revenues from the JSL.

Voice vote: motion carried 8-0.

CSB – Recreation

Department Request \$1,414,999; CM Proposed \$1,146,126

Mr. Brislin showed a PowerPoint presentation of the Claremont Savings Bank Community Center Budget: CSBCC Staffing, 4 Full-time and 40 Part-time; CSBCC Program Highlights; and The Benefits of the CSBCC are Endless.

Mr. Brislin said there was a mistake in Waste Removal, the budget is zero, but he would like to add \$2,800.

There was a discussion about the increase in Part Time. Mr. Brislin said the CSBCC is currently open 90 hours/week and there is a proposal to stay open 4 more hours/week and staff would be needed to cover that. He said the goal is that the increased hours would increase the revenues to offset the expenses.

Mayor Neilsen said that would be \$80,000 for 4 more hours a week and that may affect the cost recovery.

There was a discussion about paying additional fees for classes. Mr. Brislin said certain classes have additional fees. Mr. Koloski thinks that all classes should be covered by additional fees.

Mr. Bergeron asked if there will be an increase in fees this year. Mr. Brislin said he is currently not recommending increasing the fees.

Mr. Bergeron wants to see the cost recovery no lower than 61 cents. Ms. Walter said if we cannot maintain that, we can come back to Council to raise rates.

Ms. Walter asked to put some money in the Waste Removal line to maintain that line item.

A motion was made by Ms. Lovett and seconded by Ms. Towle to move \$100 from Postage to Waste Removal.

Voice vote: motion carried 7-1 with Mr. Koloski voting no.

There was a discussion about a survey that is being used to gather information to help make decisions about the hours of operation, programming and rates for the Claremont Savings Bank Community Center.

A motion was made by Mr. Raymond and seconded by Ms. Messier to tentatively approve the CSB – Recreation budget of \$1,146,126.

Roll call Vote: Motion failed 4-4 with Ms. Towle, Mr. Koloski, Mr. Reed and Ms. Lovett voting no.

Mr. Koloski said the sticking point for him is the \$80,000.

Ms. Walter said we added \$100,000 in anticipated revenues and she thinks that is a conservative estimate. This is based on increasing Part Time by \$80,000.

A motion was made Mr. Reed and seconded by Ms. Towle to reconsider the vote.

Roll call vote: motion carried 8-0.

A motion was made by Mr. Raymond and seconded by Ms. Messier to tentatively approve the CSB – Recreation budget of \$1,146,126.

Mr. Koloski said he will vote no because he wants to see it go down a little. The revenues are anticipated, with no guarantees. Without having the survey back, we don't know what the public wants.

Mr. Brislin said the survey closes June 6th and he can report the results to the Council at the June meeting.

Roll call vote: motion carried 6-2 with Mr. Koloski and Ms. Lovett voting no.

City Administration (Finance)

Department Request \$953,654; CM Proposed \$940,654

Ms. Walter gave an overview of the things that come out of the City Administration budget: Maintenance, City Elections, Debt Service and General Services (those that are shared by everyone). Those budgets are \$3.2 million and they bring in \$2.8 million in revenues. 60% of her staff is Merit Plan and 40% is Clerical Union. There is a new IT (Information Technology) position in the budget. Currently one person takes care of 9 to 13 servers, over 100 computers, security alarm, camera, fire alarm systems, Cisco phone, fiber network, security for internet, etc. There is too much for him to do alone. He will need help deploying the new computer systems that we are now purchasing.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, agreed with the need for infrastructure staff. People need to change processes to take advantage of technology. Suggested the City develop a non-proprietary strategic IT plan.

There was discussion about the trees in front of City Hall and that they are pushing on the foundation and Ms. Walter said that would have to be a future discussion.

A motion was made by Mr. Raymond and seconded by Ms. Messier to tentatively approve the City Administration (Finance) budget of \$940,654.

Voice vote: motion carried 8-0.

General Services

Department Request \$815,405; CM Proposed \$761,425

Ms. Walter said this budget is shared by other departments. By 2017 the City will see post-employment benefits come onto the balance sheet for the future cost for our present employees and our retirees, what the outlying costs are to cover them and she estimates it to be about \$3 million. Mr. Santagate talked about a study being done on the pension and he believes it will be underfunded. For Overlay, if someone is approved for an abatement, the City has to pay 100% even though our share is only 40%.

A motion was made by Mr. Bergeron and seconded by Mr. Raymond to tentatively approve the General Services budget of \$761,425.

Ms. Lovett asked to reduce Bank & Admin Fees from proposed \$22,000 to \$5,000. Ms. Walter will talk to the Treasurer before making that decision.

Voice vote: motion carried 8-0.

TIFD-River Road

Department Request \$618,125; CM Proposed \$618,125

Ms. Walter said the major expense is the loan to the Downtown TIFD. This TIFD closes next year. The excess value will bring \$12 million in assessed value to the tax rolls and that will be shared by the schools.

There was a discussion about starting another TIFD in another part of the City when this expires. Mr. Koloski asked about a Charlestown Road TIFD. Mayor Neilsen said that could be a future workshop.

A motion was made by Mr. Raymond and seconded by Ms. Towle to tentatively approve the TIFD-River Road budget of \$618,125.

Voice Vote: Motion carried 8-0.

TIFD-Downtown

Department Request \$923,875; CM Proposed \$923,875

Ms. Walter said revenues and expenses are down. She bills back the electric for the parking garage.

A motion was made by Mr. Reed and seconded by Ms. Messier to tentatively approve the TIFD-Downtown budget of \$923,875.

Voice vote: motion carried 8-0.

Policy

Department Request \$590,853; CM Proposed \$582,656

Ms. Walter said we have requested a half-time, 20-hour legal person. It was originally 28 hours, but she cut it to 20 hours. This position is needed so the Code Enforcement person will be able to do his job as well.

There was a discussion about 20 hours versus 28 hours. The salary and benefits difference is \$8,200. Without the extra legal help, there will be no follow-through on code enforcement.

Mr. Koloski would like to see us find a grant to paint the church instead of paying \$10,000 and then he would like to put the \$10,000 into this. Spending money on code enforcement and legal will decrease the money we spend on blighted neighborhoods.

A motion was made by Mr. Koloski and seconded by Ms. Messier to tentatively approve the Policy budget of \$590,856.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, said he is not opposed to the 20 hours a week clerical assistance for the City Solicitor, because every 91-A, right-to-know request, has to go through that office. He said there may be some inefficiencies there. He said Lebanon uses an outside firm for its legal services.

Voice vote: motion carried 8-0.

Revenue

Department Request \$5,297,592; CM Proposed \$5,297,592

Ms. Walter said she tries to be conservative with the revenue numbers.

A motion was made by Ms. Messier and seconded by Mr. Reed to tentatively approve the Revenue budget of \$5,297,592.

Voice vote: motion carried 8-0.

CONSULTATION WITH LEGAL COUNSEL

None

ADJOURNMENT

At 10:31 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Reed and seconded by Ms. Towle to adjourn.

Voice vote: motion carried 8-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dorée M. Russell
Clerk to the Council