

CITY OF UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS  
MINUTES OF FINANCE AND LAY COMMITTEE  
DECEMBER 8, 2022

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The Finance Committee met on December 8, 2022 at the Wiley Building, 2181 Miramar Boulevard in University Heights, Ohio. The following were present:

Vice Mayor Michele Weiss, Chair  
Councilwoman Barbara Blankfeld  
Councilman Chris Cooney  
Councilman Justin Gould  
Councilman Brian King  
Finance Director Dennis Kennedy  
Councilman John Rach  
Finance Advisory Committee member Winifred Weizer

Also Present: Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan

Vice Mayor Weiss called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

**Budget Review**

Mrs. Weiss stated that this meeting is to hopefully finalize the budget and refer to Council for a vote. She thanked Finance Director Kennedy for clearly answering and clarifying a litany of questions. Mrs. Weiss stated that there are items she would like to discuss publicly.

Vice Mayor Weiss summarized where the budget stands currently: the City has revenues of \$22,183,326 and expenses of \$22, 241,281; the budget has an insignificant deficit of \$54,955.

Mrs. Weiss stated that there are a few open items for discussion before finalizing the budget as follow.

**Salary Items**

It was noted that the new Assistant to the Mayor is making \$75,000. Vice Mayor Weiss believes the Clerk of Council's salary should be raised by \$10,000, pointing out that she has been with the City for many, many years longer than the assistant. Mrs. Weiss referenced administrative ordinance, 2019-75, which needs to be updated because it appears that a year has been skipped due to COVID; it should be updated every two years. Mrs. Weiss has asked the Law Director to

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include that legislation for the January 2023 agenda. Mrs. Weiss stated that there is ample room to raise the Clerk of Council's salary and wanted to hear from everyone regarding same. Councilman Gould supports the raise for the Clerk and stated that the current salary, especially when compared to other City employees, is far too low for the value that she adds with the work she does; he believes it is about time and appreciates the recommendation. Councilwoman Blankfeld also agreed.

Vice Mayor Weiss then discussed the salary of the Communications Director, noting that the salary went up to \$75,000. The threshold in the salary ordinance is only \$70,000; this amount places the City in violation of the ordinance. While Mrs. Weiss stated that there could be a more robust discussion regarding this when the new ordinance is passed, the salary needs to be reduced by \$5,000 now to be in line with the ordinance. Councilman Rach stated that it was first discovered at the last Finance Committee meeting that this is a director-level position, as opposed to a coordinator level. Mr. Rach questioned whether or not a director position in this department had been authorized. He noted that there was no job description in the packet, and he would like to know whether or not duties had changed. It was noted that reference was made in the ordinance for a Communications Director but a Communications Coordinator had been authorized years ago. Councilman Rach stated that it would be helpful to hear what duties have changed and what is different.

Councilwoman Blankfeld agreed that we should not be out of synch with the ordinance and the salary should be lowered to comply; and, that a robust discussion is needed regarding the issue. She noted that she would like to take a much more granular look.

Vice Mayor Weiss suggested that the salary be lowered by \$5,000 with the expectation that when the ordinance is updated and comes to Council either at the next meeting or in January, that there be a job description to discuss whether it warrants an increase. Mrs. Weiss clarified with Mr. Kennedy that there will be new salary ranges and job descriptions, which will be done by the new human resources company. Mrs. Weiss recapped that the salary for the Communications Director would now be lowered to \$70,000, as opposed to the current salary of \$75,000, to be within the legal threshold, until there is clarification and the ordinance is updated.

In response to a question by Councilman Cooney, Vice Mayor Weiss reported that she has checked with other Directors regarding salary ranges, and that they are all within range.

### **Ambulance**

Vice Mayor Weiss discussed an ambulance that the Fire Chief requested, which is included in the Fire Department's capital plan. It was explained that the process to acquire an ambulance takes at least a year. Mrs. Weiss noted that this would add \$275,000 to the budget; it would still have to be done next year. This is needed for the safety forces. Mrs. Weiss suggested that \$275,000 be

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encumbered in this year's budget for the ambulance because it is not going to be delivered for another year. It was pointed out that this will not affect cash for this year, that it is an encumbrance without affecting any cash flow. All agreed. Councilman Rach noted that this appears to be an accounting issue.

(It was noted that Mr. Brenner joined the meeting at this point via Zoom)

Councilman Gould commented that this is a smart move and noted that there is a year minimum and possibly more depending on specifications for the ambulance. He stated that a committee needs to be formed in order to review the needs of the department. It is only after the committee makes its recommendations that the specifications can be made to the vendor who will then advise what the current wait time will be. He believes putting it the budget now is smart in order to avert a crisis situation.

Mr. Cooney asked about equipment which was already in the budget.

Mrs. Weiss thanked Councilman Gould and the Safety Committee for clarifying very clearly what these safety needs are. She noted that the Capital Plan also helps.

In response to a question by Mr. Kennedy, Vice Mayor Weiss stated that the utility vehicle was approved by this body at the last meeting. Mr. Kennedy stated that this item is subject to the same supply chain issues as the ambulance. It was noted that the cost is \$55,000.

Following are items Mr. Kennedy was unable to address and were directed to Mayor Brennan.

**The amount of \$8,000 for a newsletter** - Mrs. Weiss asked if this amount is over and above the *Mosaic*. Mayor Brennan stated that a newsletter is printed for seniors; it is not monthly now, but it is the "At Your Service" newsletter that was previously delivered by the Service Department workers. That is done by email but also printed and mailed to seniors.

Ms. Weizer asked whether or not that amount was increasing because she did not remember seeing that in a previous report. Discussion ensued regarding the newsletters. Mayor Brennan stated that this is to restore mailings to seniors. He noted that the *Mosaic* comes out three times a year, not four. He stated that more E-news communications are relied upon, but as we move away from the pandemic operation of the City, efforts will be made to restore and have more of the regular newsletter. Mayor Brennan stated that it was not intended for the *Mosaic* to replace the newsletter but to supplement it. He noted that the summer recreation guide was included within the *Mosaic* as well as other publications. Mayor Brennan responded to Ms. Weizer that the printed version

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goes to seniors and the electronic version goes to everyone on the E-news email list. He reported that the additional money is for the printing and mailing of the newsletter.

Mr. Kennedy stated that as of last month, there are about \$4,500 in expenses with 45 days left. He mentioned that costs for distributions to new residents will be incorporated in this detail. The Mayor was not sure if those costs will be included in that line, but Welcome-to-the-City packets have been delivered to homeowners in the last four months and were finished in the last few days. The expense, Mayor Brennan stated, is to restore the budget so that a monthly or near-monthly newsletter could be done.

- **Swag Inventory** - Vice Mayor Weiss stated that this amount should be more like \$5,000, rather than \$20,000. Mayor Brennan stated that the stock is nearly depleted and that we are basically out of mugs and items that were purchased when the brand was initiated. He reported that over \$15,000 was spent back in 2019 to kick off the new City brand. Mrs. Weiss asked if an inventory was taken to show that almost everything is out. Mayor Brennan stated yes, and that when new signs come in, there will be more demand for the updated logo.
- **Juneteenth** - Vice Mayor Weiss noted that she believed the cost could be increased, but not to \$20,000 from \$10,000 and commented that there are other Juneteenth events throughout the City; she suggested partnering with someone to make a bigger event, keeping it here in the City. She asked what the Mayor was envisioning. Mayor Brennan stated that he thinks it would be better if the Finance Committee were to ask questions of those directly involved.

Vice Mayor Weiss mentioned that she did ask both Mr. Englebrecht and Mrs. Drucker separately because she was aware that they did not have a large budget; Mr. Englebrecht did not mention an increase. Mayor Brennan stated that he is aware that there is more being planned, but he believes that is something that would be better addressed by Mr. Englebrecht. Councilman Gould is on the Juneteenth committee and stated that the committee is trying to figure out if there is something a little grander that can be done. Mr. Gould stated that Mr. Englebrecht did a fantastic job and utilized every community resource on a very tight budget. The event had a great community impact. Mr. Gould stated that to bring in more performers and/or other interesting ideas of the committee will require more funds, and he believes that this is an appropriate expenditure.

Mr. Cooney asked if any consideration had been given to sponsorships and if there is an estimate of how that could offset the increase. Councilman Gould explained that there may be some community grant funding from organizations like the Cleveland Foundation and others who want to sponsor these types of community outreach efforts.

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**Sustainability and the Bike Program** - Mayor Brennan stated that a \$7,500 grant has been applied for. The grant is a reimbursable one, so the City would have to appropriate \$15,000. The funds are for bike grants and fix-it stations throughout the City of University Heights, diagrams, etc. Regarding the sustainability program, Mayor Brennan stated that funds will be needed for communication brochures to promote things ranging from solar co-op programs to composting, and to better recycling. Programs needing money are anticipated during the year for this endeavor so it is requested to have money set aside. Mrs. Weiss asked the Mayor if the Rust Belt Riders have been contacted regarding mailings and advertising so that the City doesn't duplicate those efforts. Mayor Brennan stated that the effort is not advertising per se for Rust Belt Riders; there has been no discussion. He mentioned composting seminars in conjunction with the Conservation Solar Water District.

Councilman Gould referred to the summer concert series and recalled that there were discussions regarding the personal sound equipment of the performers and the costs that weren't identified in the budget. He wanted to ensure that there was an established budget with the understanding of where the funds would come from, contract prices for each group ahead of time, the ability to approve and/or deny expenditures even when under the spending authority. Mrs. Weiss reported that Councilman Cooney has worked on this in the Recreation Committee and he has discussed same with Mr. Kennedy. Regarding the sound equipment, efforts are being made to have the entertainment acts bring their own sound systems. She stated that she asked Mr. Kennedy to provide more detail in the line items for the concert series.

Mr. Cooney discussed an admission/permit fee for vendors who set up stands at the events.

Regarding the City Engineer, Councilman Rach recalled that it was mentioned recently that the contract would transition from an individual to a company. Mr. Rach is not proposing any changes at this time and the matter has been referred to committee. He commented that the action would impact the budget whether it is a company as a vendor or an individual as an employee. This would transfer to a professional services line if the change is decided and noted consideration of management wages, worker's comp, Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) Medicare. etc.

It was pointed out that the budget may need to be amended after those meetings are held. Mayor Brennan suggested that a motion be made to extend Mr. Ciuni's contract for sixty (60) days to allow time to consider the changes that GPD Group has requested for a new engineering contract. Mayor Brennan stated that it is his understanding that both GPD and Mr. Ciuni agree to the extension.

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Vice Mayor Weiss thanked the Mayor for presenting a nearly balanced budget. She summarized the changes made today that she would ask for a referral to Council:

- **An ambulance for \$275,000 is being added;**
- **Add salary to the Clerk of Council of \$10,000;**
- **\$5,000 is being deducted for the Director of Communications salary with the caveat that the ordinance will be coming to Council with updated salary ranges; and Council asks that the job descriptions, along with the Directors line items are given.**

**This brings the budget to a slight deficit of \$334, 955.**

Councilman Gould asked about City-branded promotional items. Mrs. Weiss stated that the amount is \$15,000 to restock the inventory. Mrs. Weiss advised Mr. Kennedy that she would email all the recommendations made this evening.

**Motion by Mrs. Weiss, second by Mrs. Blankfeld, to refer these recommendations to Council for approval on emergency so this can be finished at the end of the year. All were in favor of the motion.**

Mayor Brennan stated with the 5K reduction in Mr. Cook's salary we will see if he can do his job.

Mrs. Weiss thanked everyone for taking the hours to work on this and that it has been a good year financially.

There being no further business to consider, the meeting adjourned at 6:38 p.m.

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Jeune Drayton, Assist. Clerk of Council

Michele Weiss, Vice Mayor/Chair/Finance

