

Scott D. Houseman-Chair
Julie R. Flowers
Matthew J. St. Hilaire

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FINANCE AND PROPERTY / CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

Thursday, June 1, 2023, 6:30PM

City Council Chambers, 3rd Floor, Beverly City Hall, 191 Cabot St.

Houseman called the meeting to order at 6:33pm.

Committee Members present: Julie Flowers, Matthew St. Hilaire, Scott Houseman

Committee Members absent: None

Councilors present: Hannah Bowen, Steven Crowley, Estelle Rand, Brendan Sweeney

Councilors absent: Kathleen Feldman, Todd Rotondo

Order #144-Mayor's FY2024 Budget - Department Budget Sessions

Planning – Darlene Wynne

St. Hilaire asked if the staffing level feels sufficient to get the work of the department done and noted some changes in staff salary lines.

Wynne stated it has been a year where the staff has entirely turned over, in some places two fold. We have learned how to operate a lean ship. We effectively manage all the requirements that we have in terms of regulatory responsibility for reviewing applications and permits, issuing permits and decisions, and meeting those timelines. A couple of the staffing lines have increased because it has become a really competitive market.

Flowers noted the consultant line item has steadily decreased over time and asked if some of that was due to unique projects and asked if there were any concerns at all about a lower line item.

Wynne stated the highest level a couple of years ago was specifically for the master plan. Wynne stated that line is evaluated every year when discussing the budget with Mr. Ayles and Mayor Cahill based on projects that are coming up. It can also be offset with grants. Wynne stated she is comfortable with that number for next year and listed some of the things she is anticipating using it for, including \$10,000 for membership fees for the North Shore Alliance, the North Shore Transportation Management Association and other similar organizations, grant matches, support for small projects, consultant work on design standards and master plan, MBTA Communities compliance, and a sign ordinance update.

Sweeney asked if the \$205,000 for shuttle bus service [11752-53828] is money paid directly to CATA [Cape Ann Transportation Authority].

Wynne stated it goes to CATA through an RFP process.

Sweeney asked about the last mile transportation project from Depot to the Cummings Center and if there is value in supplementing some of the CATA services.

Wynne stated some research was done to see if an on-demand shuttle service, fixed route, or both would be possible. It is much more expensive and still requires more research. That might be another area to explore if there is some room in that consulting line. Right now it's prohibitively expensive.

Bowen asked if there are any thoughts on reviving the mobility hub Depot planning process.

Wynne stated that project is always in the back of her mind. The phase now would be bringing it to full design. There are ownership issues that need to be resolved. The city does not own the land that would be most affected by changes to that Park Street area. It really becomes more of an infrastructure project for another department.

Bowen asked where Ms. Wynne sees the department's role in the Cabot Street [Family Dollar] property and if that fits in the budget.

Wynne stated the department will play a large role in the future reuse of that property. Most of it will be meeting with interested parties, working on the RFP, and things that won't be budgetary issues.

Houseman asked about the interaction between Main Streets as an organization and the planning department.

Wynne stated she works very closely with Beverly Main Streets as well as Montserrat and Beverly Main Streets as partners for the Beverly Arts District.

City Clerk, Committees, Elections – Lisa Kent

Rand gave Ms. Kent the opportunity to talk about elections, how so much has changed, and how they are going forward. Rand noted it will require a little bit of an increase in the budget and asked to hear a little more of the details.

Kent stated a lot of the details have been put in ClearGov. We have been asked to do so much more in recent years.

Rand asked if Kent plans to continue to engage with young people for Election Day.

Kent stated yes, high schoolers are asked to help out at the polling locations.

Houseman asked how staffing at the polls for elections is going. It was challenging with the pandemic, how about now?

Kent stated it is always challenging. We lost a lot of our long-term workers but have gotten some new ones. We have to train more as duties change.

Bowen stated she hoped for a discussion on the budget line for the budget management analyst. That line is, by charter, half of the budget of the finance director position. Typically, we don't spend that full budget line on Mr. Perry's time. It is spent on other budget and management analysis things, such as consultants. Bowen stated she would like to get a feel for how much there might be available in that line for other projects.

Perry stated he averages about 600-650 hours per year. There will be money left over. These funds have been utilized for other means such as contracting with the Collins Center and work on the charter. Some of that line item will be needed for ordinance review. At times it has also been almost a mini reserve in case the City Clerk needs it for elections or things of that manner. Perry estimated that next year 50-60% of the line would be spent on his salary.

Bowen mentioned the possibility of on-demand consulting for background policy research or Council professional development.

St. Hilaire asked about the process for deciding how those monies are spent.

Perry stated he works with the Council president. Perry stated his predecessor spent just about all of it; another analyst may need more or less. The formula for the amount is there so a mayor can't eliminate the line and essentially cut the position.

Bowen suggested discussing projects for the next year either in finance and property or at some other point.

Flowers recognized the Council had not fully utilized Mr. Perry's time up to the budgeted amount. The first priority is that the line is for as much of the budget analyst's time as any members of the Council may need. Flowers stated she would hate for the Council to designate it for other things before having a chance to spend it for its prescribed purpose if something comes up that presents more demand.

Veterans' Agent – David Perinchief

St. Hilaire asked if the increase in the temporary help line [15431-51810] to a full time employee will meet what Mr. Perinchief is looking for.

Perinchief stated this is a good pay for the work and responsibility required and will take a lot of weight off his own shoulders.

Sweeney asked if Perinchief could speak to some of the specific tasks the office can take on with more staff.

Perinchief stated the primary role is going to be coordinating the VA benefits, getting federal funds to take care of the veterans and their families, and being able to be a liaison for veterans who need assistance.

Perry stated he does recommend a new full-time employee. Beverly is somewhat below the state average on VA monthly payment benefits. It is virtually impossible for a city this size with only one employee to be processing all those as well as doing the rest of the work. Mr. Perinchief just didn't have the resources. Perry stated he recommended the position be known as administrative assistant/benefits coordinator and should be solely responsible for processing Chapter 115 paperwork. There is more money at the federal level. If we bring more money in, then the veterans are in better shape and it enhances the economy. By getting more money to veterans, we will be helping them and bringing more money into Beverly. Perry recommended elevating the veterans' services department head position to a manager role; it is currently a union role, but if it were made a management position, then the new position could be the union role.

Flowers clarified that while this line item has been named temporary help, it is not a temporary position.

Perry confirmed it is not a temporary position.

Ayles stated if this budget is approved, that money will be pulled out and a line will be added for the position.

Rand asked how many veterans are represented by the line item for veterans benefits [15434-57700].

Perinchief stated 44 veterans.

Library – Allison Babin

Babin shared about upcoming events at the library as well as successful programs from the last year.

Rand asked about the line item to purchase new items for the library [16103-54219] and if that meets the state regulation or how any difference would be made up.

Babin stated the library needs to spend \$290,000 and will make up the gap through state aid and trust funds.

Bowen asked for an update on the HVAC replacement and how that might be impacting things.

Babin stated there have not been any physical improvements in the building yet as the project is in the design phase. The remaining unit the library has is still working and hanging in there.

Inspectional Services – Jim Butler

Flowers asked about the line for temporary help [12451-51810].

Butler stated that the line has been used for plumbing and electrical temporary inspectors when there has been staff turnover or extended time out of the office.

Council on Aging, Enterprise Fund – Christopher Gomez-Farewell

Gomez-Farewell stated that today a lot of his department's work is social work. There are a lot of fun events as well. Gomez-Farewell stated he wants to provide the most the department can offer to Beverly's senior community.

Houseman noted that 25% of Beverly's population are 60 and over.

Sweeney asked Gomez-Farewell what he sees as the biggest strengths, weaknesses and opportunities with the Council on Aging.

Gomez-Farewell stated one of the biggest strengths is the building and staff. Gomez-Farewell stated as far as weaknesses, he has been working on making the transportation service more efficient and adding more trips like to casinos, beaches, and restaurants. In the last three months, attendance has gone up 20%. There are at least 11,000 seniors in Beverly, so there is great opportunity to reach more. Gomez-Farewell stated the Council on Aging is trying to go out into the community and meet the seniors where they're at as well as attract the younger seniors. We recently started going to different senior housing and telling them about what the senior center offers. We are working with city departments to bring information to the senior center. We are working on getting more diverse seniors. Gomez-Farewell stated the Council on Aging also now advertises that they speak Spanish since he speaks Spanish.

Sweeney stated the senior center really is the front door at the local level to connecting folks with services at the state level. Sweeney asked if the Council on Aging is still seeing increased activity from the pandemic.

Gomez-Farewell estimated 75% of the work of the social worker and outreach coordinator is housing and food assistance.

Rand asked what some of the favorite activities that the seniors engage in at the senior center are.

Gomez-Farewell stated some of the biggest hits are the big band events, yoga classes, tai chi, and the special events like the recent Mother's Day event.

Flowers asked Mr. Gomez-Farewell's thoughts on ways to continue expanding access in other languages.

Gomez-Farewell stated he hopes to work with Wangari and also to get two iPads for language assistance. The Council on Aging is also planning on highlighting a different culture every month.

Sweeney asked about the driving factors in the increase in the salary of the director.

Ayles stated that can be seen in other areas of the budget as well. It's really market driven. We want to attract talent, and we do a salary survey of comparable communities.

Bowen asked Mr. Gomez-Farewell to say a little more about what transportation enables in the city and how we benefit from providing that service.

Gomez-Farewell stated it really can be a lifeline for a lot of our seniors. They can get rides to the senior center for meals and services. They also can go to doctor appointments and grocery stores.

The discussion moved on to the enterprise fund. Gomez-Farewell stated most of the activities go through the enterprise fund. The biggest event in the enterprise fund is probably Senior Day in the Park.

Ayles stated this is for the senior center to collect very modest fees for these events they plan.

Houseman asked about the fund balance.

Perry stated certified retained earnings were \$61,590 with \$40,950 to be used to augment the enterprise fund.

Rand asked about the increase in the "transfer to general fund" line under debt service in the enterprise fund.

Ayles stated that's a product of a process done every year. These are the costs associated with central services provided by other city departments such as IT, the finance department, mayor's office, council's salaries; a portion of those costs get attributed to these enterprise funds as indirect costs that are otherwise absorbed within the general fund.

Health – Laura DelleChiaie

Houseman noted Ms. DelleChiaie was not available to attend this evening due to a previous commitment and that she will be at the meeting on Monday, June 12.

Bruce Doig, Director of Parks and Recreation and Community Services, stated the health department is back to fully staffed for the first time in a long time. Otherwise there is not a lot of change in the budget.

Ayles stated Ms. DelleChiaie advocated for funding in a few areas, particularly for training, seminars and costs of that nature.

Flowers asked about the sanitarian line [15101-51192] and if the goal is to have two.

Ayles stated there has historically been two full-time sanitarians. There was turnover and temporary help to fill the gap for a little while. This year, the department has two full-time sanitarians on staff in the general fund. In addition, there is a sanitarian from the ARPA fund for the near future to help get that workload under control. Ayles noted that the line above for inspectors [15101-51189] has been zeroed out.

Doig stated someone just started a few weeks ago as the second sanitarian.

Parks & Recreation, Enterprise Funds – Bruce Doig

Flowers asked Doig to share plans for parks and playgrounds work this coming fiscal year, noting that there have been conversations about Holcroft Park.

Doig stated he plans to apply for a state grant for Holcroft Park. That would be up to a \$400,000 grant, in addition to that hopefully some CPC funds. The basketball court needs significant structural work as well as the pavilion and adding more picnic tables and benches for people to enjoy. Doig stated he wouldn't know about the grant until the end of the year. A lot of playgrounds are showing signs of age. Doig stated he would like to eventually replace all the water fountains in the parks with bottle filling stations and new water fountains. Doig stated he may start at Gillis Park. CPC funds are for replacement only, not maintenance. Doig stated the department got CPC funding a couple of years ago to do the tennis courts at Cove [Kimball Haskell Park] and at Cahill Park in Centerville. Doig stated he is hoping to get an engineer on board to put together the bid documents for that and to get a contractor on board by the fall and start in the fall.

Crowley asked about plan B if the grant doesn't go through and the possibility of at least getting some lighting this year at Holcroft Park.

Doig stated he is also expecting a state earmark for Simon Street and Holcroft. Some other sources could be additional CPC funds and the David Lynch Trustees. Doig stated lighting is something to talk about.

Bowen asked about the status of the pickle ball courts.

Doig stated the courts are done except for the sound reduction padding. Once that is delivered and installed, the courts will be ready.

Bowen asked if there was a sense of how much funding there is in the capital fund or somewhere else that is either already marked out for projects or could be available.

Perry stated there might be more of a conversation on capital projects when Commissioner Collins comes in.

Rand asked which line item has scholarships for the parks and recreation programs.

Doig stated scholarships are funded from a donation in a separate trust fund not listed here. There is not a line item, but we always find the money for scholarships.

Ayles stated when revenues are projected, those are estimates based on what we think we are going to take in, net of any scholarships or anything that might be granted.

Rand stated she would like to see that number as a tool to understand the community need for scholarships.

Doig stated he could try to pull out that data. Doig stated the CIT program is not something people have to pay for anymore and the department is not charging a fee for that program this year.

Rand also expressed support for a plan B for improvements to Holcroft Park if the grant doesn't work out rather than taking leftovers from other projects.

Ayles added that it is important to understand the nuance of each enterprise fund. This one is spent in the first part of the year with staffing and summer programs and replenished with fee collection in the spring for the next season. It took a big hit at the start of the pandemic when the money was spent in calendar year 2019 for programs, but all programs for spring/summer 2020 were canceled, so it couldn't be replenished in the same way. It has slowly been building back up.

Houseman stated he could not see the enterprise fund balances in the digital book and asked if they were there.

Ayles stated the fund balances aren't in there. That's something for next year to see if we can incorporate in the fund description.

Perry stated he can resend his memo from November that listed the certified retained earnings from the enterprise funds.

A motion to adjourn Committee of the Whole was made and seconded. A vote was taken, and the motion passed (7-0). A motion to adjourn Finance and Property was made and seconded. A vote was taken, and the motion passed (3-0). The meeting adjourned at 8:51pm.