

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 8, 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 (left 7:31pm), Steven Crowley, Kathleen Feldman, Brendan Sweeney, Estelle Rand (arrived at 6:37pm)

Councilors absent: Todd Rotondo

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

Solicitor – Stephanie Williams

St. Hilaire noted there were some big legal issues last year where the city had consultants and asked where in the budget that came from.

Williams stated it was the outside counsel line [11512-53026].

St. Hilaire asked if Williams is anticipating any issues like that this year.

Williams stated she is not aware of a specific project at this time that would require specialized work.

Negotiations will be coming up this year. It can't always be predicted.

Rand joined the meeting at 6:37pm.

St. Hilaire asked how that is budgeted for.

Williams stated that looking at the history for the line it has been pretty consistently funded over the years. Sometimes the actuals require intradepartment transfers or funds that have been encumbered and carried over. Williams stated she keeps an eye on it from month to month and will be watching it closely with negotiations coming up. We have to be very judicious about hiring outside counsel. We typically only hire outside counsel if it requires a highly specialized lawyer or if a piece of litigation has become so big and all-consuming that it takes away from the in-house work.

St. Hilaire asked Ayles if there were not enough funds where additional resources would be drawn from.

Ayles stated the reserve for unforeseen or, depending on the time of year, savings within the department or other department, or free cash as a last resort.

Bowen asked about the plan for negotiations.

Williams stated current contracts run to June 30, 2024, so typically by the end of the calendar, the law office will start to talk with unions about setting up initial meetings. In the second half of the year we expect we will be into negotiations with all nine city unions. We do use outside labor counsel for that purpose.

Bowen asked for an update on the charter review.

Williams stated it has been filed and referred to the Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government. We are waiting to hear about the scheduling of a hearing. They are aware that some questions are going to the ballot and of the time sensitivity there.

Executive – Mayor Michael Cahill

Cahill started with Erina Keefe, Sustainability Director, talking about the green initiatives line in the public services budget.

Keefe stated the majority of the sustainability department's funding is in that line. There are grant matches committed for fiscal year 2024. Those matches would be about \$50,000. Keefe stated the city is applying for about \$250,000 in grant funds this summer to support two resilience projects, one for Lynch Park and one for Obear Park. More funds are set aside for grant matches and education projects.

Keefe and Cahill highlighted some of the major projects including the Bass River resilience study, utility incentives for municipal buildings, the community aggregation program, the multi-site solar project, electrifying fleets, the library HVAC project, and waste policy.

Feldman asked about progress since the additional role of someone who enforces recycling policies and others that are on the books.

Keefe stated the position is currently vacant. It is a position in the engineering department with half the time focused on engineering compliance and the rest of the time on waste compliance. When there was someone in the position, it was very helpful.

Houseman asked for an update on the funding for the sustainability positions.

Cahill stated Ms. Keefe's position is funded by a donation through mid-October, then the city will be responsible for 100% of the position. The same anonymous donor gave \$300,000 to cover a percentage of the assistant/project manager position for three years and whatever wasn't used for that would be used for fleet electrification. Since the position is vacant, the intent is to ask the donor about moving the dates when we get a new person in.

Houseman asked about Beverly Main Streets' request for additional funding from the city this year.

Cahill stated Beverly Main Streets has been a long-term valuable partner. Financially, they took a significant hit during the pandemic and have some work to do to reestablish their base of financial support. They have asked for more annual funds in the meantime. The city cannot just award annual funds as an entity, but money is put in for RFPs under purchase of services in the budget. Main Streets will come forward with a proposal and new business plan. It will be a conversation. A strong business plan with help from the city could get them to a more sustainable position.

St. Hilaire asked about the zeroed out summer learning initiative line.

Cahill stated this year the city made some ARPA funds available through an RFP process, so that will represent the city's contribution. The program is not going anywhere.

St. Hilaire asked about the reserve for unforeseen.

Ayles stated this acts as a safety valve in the budget. This is the reserve for appropriation in the digital budget book. It's where we go if resources aren't available. Historically this tends to be the right amount. The funds get transferred out of this line and into another area, so that would come before the Council. We are not able to spend this money arbitrarily.

St. Hilaire asked about the actual amount showing as zero in FY20 and FY21.

Ayles stated that means it was all used. It is transferred out to other lines; that line would not be expensed directly.

Perry stated he agrees with the amount for the reserve. Towns do this same thing with a reserve fund. Every community has something. It is wholly appropriate. If the money isn't spent, it will go to free cash, but often things come up and it is good financial practice.

Regarding diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging work, Flowers asked if the line “other” [11211-55000] is for implementation of recommendations from the equity audit. Is that where cross-departmental funding would be housed?

Cahill stated the city has procured an additional \$100,000 worth of services, and HR&A will be working with the city on implementation. They will be coming here for a special meeting on the 26th to present the findings and what things to focus on over the coming year. There is a newly reconstituted core team of city staff, and this will be a three-person chaired effort consisting of Wangari Fahari, Pauline Teixeira and Joscelyn Ruelle-Kersker.

Ayles stated money has been set aside in a purchase order for the next phase of that work. That sits over and above what is being requested in the FY24 budget. The funds in the purchase order came from some that was available in this line item from FY23 and because of the turnover in that DEIB position.

Flowers asked what is envisioned for the budget lines for homeless services [11212-53010] and outreach [11212-53016].

Cahill stated the city has not had an application for the first in the past couple years. It had been that Lifebridge River House applied in response to the RFP, but they have not in the past couple years. The outreach funding will be paid to Beverly Bootstraps as there is a contract with them.

Flowers asked what accounts for the expense in the homeless services line if no one applied.

Ayles stated he would check on it.

Bowen left at 7:31pm.

Rand spoke about other communities’ changing work with people experiencing homelessness and stated she would wish for this administration and council to come up with a plan that is progressive and unique and has the same integrity with which we approach other problems. Rand stated she hopes to see some shift in the way of handling this problem to get to a better place.

Emergency Management – Mark Foster

Foster stated there has been a 50% increase in grants which does not show up here in the budget.

St. Hilaire asked about succession planning for the future of the department.

Foster stated he has a dual role as the city’s FEMA program manager and the emergency director. The plan is to separate the roles and have someone new come in for the program manager job. Foster stated he would supervise the new manager and cut back time but still have the emergency director position.

Animal Control – Matt Lipinski

Lipinski stated between dogs and cats, there are roughly 6,000 in the city. The department has been shorthanded since February and is in the process of interviewing for that position. Lipinski mentioned a new partnership in a pilot program with a company called Doody Calls to set up pet waste stations. It started at the dog park and worked well. Now stations have been added to Lothrop Street at Dane Street Beach and Independence Park. There was a container near the parking lot at Dane Street Beach that got high use and was overflowing. It was moved which seems to have alleviated that issue. It was attracting personal trash, not just dog waste.

Flowers asked if the program continues to go well, would it potentially roll out to other parks and shared recreation spaces.

Lipinski stated potentially, depending on the cost and if the company can take that on.

Flowers asked if the department will be able to keep pace with the workload once the second position is filled.

Lipinski stated adding more would allow the department to cover more ground and hours. The typical hours for calls coming in are about 6:30am - 8pm. The general focus of 8am-6pm with two officers is what we try to hit

regularly. It takes care of the majority of it. It is two people trying to cover seven days a week. We do keep up when we're fully staffed. The day-to-day duties are not just calls to service; there is also a patrol program enforcing city ordinances. There are approximately 39 locations the department patrols. In order to be effective, 30 minutes are spent in one spot. The department averages 74 calls a month, and each call can take up to an hour. The goal is to patrol three locations a day minimum.

There was some discussion about the challenges of keeping cemeteries dog-free, including necessary improvements to fencing.

Harbormaster – Peter Dickman

Dickman highlighted some of the changes in the budget. During the winter, we are staffed during the day. In the summer, we add a night shift until midnight. The department currently has two full-time people. The deputy harbormaster's salary also comes out of the assistant harbormasters' budget [12951-51202]. The increase in that line is to create a higher pay to retain staff. Training is required; all harbormasters should be certified. The goal would be to have some tenured staff to help train new staff and reduce turnover. The department is maintaining an aging fleet. Some emergency equipment is expired, and we need to keep up with replacing them.

St. Hilaire about the waterfront restaurant's impact on the department.

Dickman stated parking is an issue. We are looking to utilize the dock more. We are using an app where someone can reserve a dock spot for a couple hours.

Houseman asked about the structural status of the commercial lift for lobster traps. There were discussions 10-12 years ago about replacing it.

Dickman stated it has had failures. There is a backup mechanism. Dickman stated he does not think the hoist itself is a safety issue, but the access around it may be an issue. The Harbor Management Authority is working on it.

Houseman expressed concern about equipment not being up to par even though this is an emergency response department and asked if there is any critical need in the short-term for replacement of a boat or boats.

Dickman stated he has outlined a list of needs with Catherine Barrett (Director of Grants) and the Harbor Management Authority. The top need is a pickup truck. We are constantly towing boats with our own vehicles. Occasionally we get a truck from DPW for a big boat. Our main patrol boat is a good boat. We will get the pumpout boat ordered and look at what is next.

Fire – Chief Peter O'Connor

O'Connor spoke about the increase to the shift coverage line. This is the first year in a long time the fourth piece, the ladder, has actually been in service all year round.

St. Hilaire asked about the training line.

O'Connor stated it is very difficult to do on-duty training. We have to do some other training outside.

Flowers asked about how staffing levels are now.

O'Connor stated he is much more comfortable having the fourth piece in service now. There is a grant application placed for four additional firefighters. Those grants are very competitive. If we were awarded those grants, it would give us a 17th firefighter on shift if we were fully staffed.

Houseman asked how many calls are received for fire events versus non-fire events and how much firefighting equipment goes out to medical calls.

O'Connor stated about 65% of calls are medical calls. All our members are EMTs. Regardless of the type of call, the department responds in fire equipment. We will go and do patient care, but there are still people on that truck available to respond to another call as soon as they are done with that call. There used to be a two-person

crew in a Chevy Tahoe, which was intended to take a little of the lean off the big 80,000lb truck but in reality, it reduced fire service capacity. Ambulances run with two, and fire runs with a crew of a minimum of three. The first apparatus to go would be the closest engine.

Houseman asked about the status of repairs on the Central Fire Station.

O'Connor stated it is moving, but not at the point where we see the work yet.

Houseman asked if there is enough in the budget for overtime.

O'Connor stated the budget for FY24 has significantly increased. O'Connor stated he does not foresee any issues coming. If we can keep people healthy, then this number should be sufficient for the year.

Police – Chief John LeLacheur

Houseman asked about the status of shifting to the new dispatch system.

LeLacheur stated the posting for civilian dispatchers will go up soon. Some equipment has to be moved. The hope would be to have them in the building this fall.

Sweeney asked about funding in the budget for an additional officer.

LeLacheur stated the Hall-Whitaker Bridge closure affected response time and led to traffic issues. Having another officer for traffic control not just in Ryal Side will help and will add to the public safety of the city.

Sweeney stated the police have two School Resource Officers [SROs] across seven schools and asked if there are sufficient resources to keep schools safe.

LeLacheur stated it would be great to have four SROs. We sometimes forget the number of private schools in the city we assist with. The SROs are also juvenile detectives and handle those cases that come up throughout the city. They are working with youth throughout the entire year. Even though St. John's Prep was a swatting call, we all responded because of our proximity. There was a lot of professionalism. It was good to see how effectively we all worked together.

LeLacheur stated the vehicles that were ordered in FY23 should be arriving in July. To help with budget issues, the department is only ordering one new vehicle in FY24. Typically the police department orders three new vehicles a year. The longer vehicles go without replacement, the more expensive maintenance becomes.

Flowers asked about the grant-funded social worker and if that one position is sufficient.

LeLacheur said the state grant is for two clinicians for six towns. One covers Beverly and Ipswich; the other clinician covers other communities in this area. Those are Lahey employees not city employees, and the grant is for reimbursement up to \$200,000. Costs this year will probably be over the amount of the grant. We are looking at ways to fund that through either the six cities and towns or other means. We have had conversations about if we should look at adding this as a city position, but then it gets into retirement and benefits. The work that is done is unbelievable. If we had a second full-time clinician, they'd be busy. The clinician works with our domestic violence coordinator, Cindy Baez. Last year we increased community impact by an officer, so that officer now works with Ms. Baez on follow-ups.

Crowley asked about the decrease to the budget in the past few years for equipment for officers.

LeLacheur stated the department has been able to get the best of the best in recent years. We are in the position where we don't need that level of funding for this year. We have been able to get ahead and are in good shape right now.

There was some discussion on the opioid epidemic, homelessness, and the accreditation process, and solar panels on the new police station.

A motion to adjourn Committee of the Whole was made and seconded. A vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously. A motion to adjourn Committee on Finance and Property was made and seconded. A vote was taken, and the motion passed (3-0). The meeting adjourned at 9:21pm.