

CITY OF LACONIA - CITY COUNCIL BUDGET MEETING
6:00 P.M.
City Hall - Armand A. Bolduc City Council Chamber

5/23/2022 - Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Pro tem Mark Haynes called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM

2. SALUTE TO THE FLAG

Councilor Lipman led the salute to the flag

3. RECORDING SECRETARY

Katie Gargano, City Clerk

4. ROLL CALL

City Clerk Gargano called the roll, Councilor Cheney, Councilor Soucy, Councilor Lipman, Councilor Haynes, Councilor Hamel, Councilor Felch.

Absent: Councilor Hamel

Mayor pro tem Haynes confirmed 5 councilors are in attendance and a quorum is established.

Mayor Hosmer arrived at 6:09 PM.

5. STAFF IN ATTENDANCE

Scott Myers, City Manager; Glenn Smith, Finance Director/ Zoom Coordinator

6. PRESENTATIONS

6.A. Department Budget Presentation

Water Department - Ben Crawford, Superintendent presented the proposed budget to the City Council. Superintendent Crawford started with an overview of the department. They are an enterprise fund and do not operate with any tax dollars. There is no rate increase proposed for FY 23. He started on Page 115 of the City's proposed expenditure plan for FY23, reviewing the summary pages of Water and Sewer. Then he moved onto Page 125 where expenses are increasing 3%, and income is going to increase 2%.

Councilor Lipman asked when was the last time there was a rate increase?

Superintendent Crawford replied that the last rate increase was in November 2018. It was an increase of \$1.00 to the base and \$0.50 cents to the rate. They are trying to not increase rates every year, but on a 5-year basis.

Councilor Lipman made the comment that he thinks that a little increase every year is better than a big increase all at once. He then asked about estimated revenues from all the new buildings.

Superintendent Crawford replied that the overall usage in the units is hard to estimate because of all the water saving fixtures being installed, but the base rates they can estimate accurately. The Water Department will be keeping 6 months of operating expenses in a retained account that equates to \$1-\$1.2 million dollars. Page 127 shows salaries with a 3% cost of living expense increase. Page 128 shows distribution expenses. There is a 2% increase in total expenses in the budget.

Councilor Lipman asked about their way of billing and if they've looked into paperless billing.

Superintendent Crawford replied that they are looking at options for ways to get credit cards in-house and hiring an outside firm. They have not looked into paperless billing options but he will bring it up to the Water Commission soon.

Councilor Soucy said that he sits on the Water Commission and they are looking at getting software similar to the City Clerk's office to have residents be able to pay their bills online.

Superintendent Crawford went to Page 140 which presents the proposed Capital Projects which includes: Summer St Relay (Union to Highland St), Franklin St (Fairmont to School), and Bowman St (Clay to Academy). Councilor Lipman commented that he does not see the billing system included in their list of Capital Projects. Superintendent Crawford replied that he is correct, they are just starting the discussion.

Councilor Lipman commended Superintendent Crawford for doing a great job. The Water Department provides great water and has great rates for the water customers.

Councilor Soucy also commended Superintendent Crawford for doing a great job. He asked where do we stand compared to other cities on what we charge our rate payers for water?

Superintendent Crawford responded that he hasn't seen a full study since 2016. Laconia was in 12th place in the State in 2016, and he would think that in the last few years Laconia is still in the top 20% of the lowest rates in the State.

Councilor Soucy brought up the Milfoil expenses, and asked Superintendent Crawford to explain the process. Superintendent Crawford explained that the Water Department puts in their recommendations on where they should treat Milfoil and how much they should treat. The State tests the water each year to see how the chemicals they put in are working against the Milfoil. Typically, they do two sections of treatments and at different times, one in the spring and one in the fall, to space them out.

Manager Myers mentioned there is another way of testing which involves sending a diver down near the intake to conduct suction harvesting. The City always puts water quality safety at the forefront of all of their decisions.

Councilor Soucy mentioned that residents in the Turner Way area have come to the Water Department asking about expansion. The Water Department has estimated that project to cost about \$6 million dollars to bring water up to that area.

Councilor Haynes told Superintendent Crawford said that there has been nothing but good things being said to him from the Ward 4 residents about the Water Department.

Mayor Hosmer asked about the opportunity for the Water Department to provide bottled water as an additional source of revenue. Superintendent Crawford said they would have to go through the State to become a bulk water distributor. They have thought about becoming a source for people looking to fill their pools or to fill their trucks to bring a work site. They haven't thought about small bottles like the Mayor mentioned, but they have thought about it on a smaller scale.

Councilor Cheney wanted to reiterate what Councilor Soucy said about the \$6 million dollar project for a buildout in the northwest portion of the City. There is potential for additional revenue for the City.

The Mayor and Council thanked Superintendent Crawford for his presentation.

6.B. Department Budget Presentation

Laconia Public Library - Randy Brough, Library Director

Director Brough and Library Chair John Moriarty presented the Library budget.

Chairman Moriarty began by thanking Manager Myers for all the work he has done for the City over the years, and commented that the best replacement for the City is to create a clone of Manager Myers.

Chairman Moriarty stated that there are 243 public libraries in the State of New Hampshire. Laconia Public Library was one of two in the State that remained open during Covid, and while they closed the inside of the Library to the public, the staff still conducted curbside pickup and other activities to keep the public safe and give them something to do while they were stuck at home. The Library Program numbers did go to near zero during the pandemic minus the online component they added, and they hadn't fully bounced back until November of 2021. He is very happy to announce that all of the Library's numbers are up, in both circulation and program numbers, and are higher than they were 2 years ago prior to the pandemic.

Chairman Moriarty stated that he doesn't think that there are any surprises in the budget. Manager Myers did tweak a few items from the Department's request and his recommendations are shown in the proposed expenditure plan for FY 2023. He thinks that the Library can live with all of the changes that the Manager made. The Library Board of Trustees gave Director Brough specific instructions to defer anything that could be deferred in the budget. The Library is looking forward to continuing to be in full operation as they are now.

The Library Board of Trustees asked Chairman Moriarty to ask the Council to amend their proposed budget to add \$30,000 for a part time security guard to be in the Library from November to March each year. The Library Board of Trustees has some concerns over the experiences the patrons are having when they visit the Library, particularly during the colder months of the year. They are trying to manage the people who are legitimately there to use the library for its intended purpose versus the people who are there mainly to use their plumbing and for its heat. The Library staff is doing a very good job walking the tightrope on what the mission of the Library is, and it is not a shelter. He knows there are going to be some conversations about this over the next few months with the Laconia Police Department regarding how to handle this situation.

Councilor Lipman stated that he understands the concerns he is raising but he would like to get a legal opinion before considering something like this request that could potentially put the City in the litigation position. He would like to see some parameters put in place before they would consider something like this.

Chairman Moriarty wanted to make the Council aware that in the past year there have been 76 responses from Police Department, and 11 medical responses from the Fire Department. He is not aware of what type of medical responses. But he thinks it is safe to say that an overdose is not keeping within the limits of the Library's mission. Regarding loitering now in the day of smart phones, if someone is connected to the Library's Wi-Fi then they are no longer loitering. They are then using the Library for its legitimate purpose. And there are concerns about how the Library is supposed to navigate those waters. These are some challenges that all public libraries face in regard to guests at the library versus loitering.

Councilor Lipman has some concerns about how this is being approached. He understands that the Library is not a shelter and to have a patron that is not acting with respect and decorum is a different

set of issues, but if someone is not using the facilities and is not on their smartphone, that does not make them a loiterer.

Chairman Moriarty agrees and he said that many of them may be aware of some of the Supreme Court cases. He gave the example of someone in New Jersey being asked to leave the Library because they had an unpleasant body odor. He knows that is clearly unconstitutional and illegal. He stated that the Laconia Public Library knows better than that and Councilor Lipman's point is very well taken.

Councilor Cheney stated that he thinks this matter can be resolved by having the Police Department assist.

Councilor Soucy would fully support in having the Laconia Police Department have a person at the Library to assist with these issues. He thinks this would be happily received by the citizens who go to the Library.

Councilor Lipman would like the Council to take a step back before they spend \$30,000 on pushing people out. He thinks that the \$30,000 could be used to deal with the fundamental problem because all they would be doing is pushing the problem to another location within the City.

Chairman Moriarty concluded with thanking Director Brough for his 21 years of service to the Library. The Library Board of Trustees is very thankful for how great of a job he has done over the years. The search for a new director has been going very well and he expects there to be several exciting announcements coming soon.

Mayor Hosmer thanked Director Brough and Chairman Moriarty for their presentation.

7. Any other business that may come before the Council

8. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Haynes adjourned the meeting at 6:58 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Katie Gargano, City Clerk