

City of New Castle Delaware
Special City Council Special Meeting & Budget Workshop
1 Municipal Boulevard
Thursday, May 25, 2023
6:30 p.m.

Call to Order: 6:30 PM

Roll Call

Present: Council President Michael M. Platt
Councilperson Suzanne M. Souder
Councilperson Joseph F. Day, III
Councilperson Nermin Zubaca
Councilperson Andrew Zeltt

Also present: William J. Barthel, City Administrator
Max Walton, City Solicitor
Janet E. Carlin, City Treasurer
Kathleen M. Walls, City Clerk
Courtaney P. Taylor, Finance Coordinator

Council President Platt called the May 25, 2023 City Council Special Meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Roll call followed and a quorum to conduct business was declared.

Council President Platt introduced Ms. Taylor, the City's new Finance Coordinator.

Recommendation of Tourism Coordinator

Mr. Barthel stated that after interviewing a number of candidates, Ms. Sarah Crawford was recommended to Council as the candidate for the City Tourism Coordinator position, and Councilperson Souder and Council President Platt interviewed her. Councilperson Souder and Council President Platt both noted that they were impressed with Ms. Crawford's qualifications as well by that fact that she has local contacts in the area with the Wilmington Visitor Bureau and various hotels on the Riverfront. Ms. Crawford introduced herself and briefly detailed her background and experience.

A motion was made to award the Tourism Coordinator contract to Sarah Crawford. The motion was seconded.

In response to questions from Councilperson Zubaca relative to grant-writing and coordinating resources for multiple organizations, Ms. Crawford briefly explained the Small Business Administration grants she has written for the Women's Business Center, and her experience in building alliances between organizations.

The motion was unanimously carried.

First Reading – Ordinance No. 538 – An Ordinance to Modify Chapter 203 §230-21.1 regarding multifamily uses in the Downtown Gateway District.

Council President called for a motion to read Ordinance 538. No motion was made.

First Reading – Ordinance No. 539 – An Ordinance to establish a new Chapter 77 in the New Castle City Code relating to Election Candidacy Declaration Requirements.

Council President Platt called for a motion to read Ordinance 539. No motion was made.

During discussion Council President Platt noted that the Ordinance was recommended by the City Solicitor. Mr. Walton explained the purpose of the Ordinance, noting that Ordinance 539 was written to codify Council's wishes to clarify the process. Councilperson Souder stated that she did not object to the idea of codifying the election registration requirements; but noted that the Ordinance appeared to have been drafted very quickly and key elements of the Ordinance are not clearly defined. She added that if the Ordinance is to be revised it must be done properly and thoughtfully; and she would be willing to entertain it in the future. Mr. Walton stated that New Castle is governed by the Elections Code dealing with Municipal Codes; however it does not say anything about the process by which you submit to be a candidate. Councilperson Souder stated that it appeared the Ordinance was rushed due to the need for a Special Election, and reiterated that it should be done thoughtfully. Councilperson Zubaca concurred with Councilperson Souder's objections, adding that he would like to see more forms submitted online. Councilpersons Souder and Day concurred that filing for candidacy should be opened to electronic submissions in addition to in-person submissions. During discussion Mr. Walton noted that the Board of Elections is an appellate authority, and should not be involved in vetting candidates. Councilperson Zeltt also stated that the City needs to come up with a way for candidates to file electronically.

Motion, Discussion and Vote on Resolution No. 2023-18 to approve August 5th as the date for the special election for Mayor.

Council President Platt read Resolution 2023-18. The Resolution was unanimously passed.

City Council Workshop Session to discuss 2024 Fiscal Year General Fund budget and Grant Fund Budget.

Mr. Barthel explained a number of project highlights of the proposed Budget:

- The City requested \$1,465,000 as a grant from the State for Queens Court, Kings Way from 10th Street to its terminus, School Street from 9th to 10th Streets, and Buttonwood Avenue from Meehan Avenue to Railroad Avenue. The City should be notified if the grant is awarded by July 1st.
- Dog Park - \$20,000
- Mobile Stage - \$75,000
- Chestnut Street Lot Mill and Overlay - \$65,000
- Tourism Director - \$50,000
- Police Cars - \$70,000

Mr. Barthel explained that \$350,000 was allocated from ARPA funds for police cars over the next five years, and the \$70,000 expense in the proposed Budget will come from that allocation. Two cars should be delivered in the next few weeks, and two more cars will be delivered during the next fiscal year.

Mr. Barthel added that the new garbage truck was delivered to the City, noting that \$270,000 was also allocated from ARPA funds.

Councilperson Souder

Revenue

- Page 23, Trustee and MSC Appropriations – Ms. Walls explained that the final quarter payments from the Trustees and MSC have not yet been received.
- Page 23, Interest Other – Ms. Walls explained that it is a conservative number because the interest rate and how much of the ARPA funds will be left are unknown. Councilperson Souder opined that line could be raised to \$50,000-\$55,000 without too much risk.
- Insurance Reimbursement – The prior year receipt was a one-time payment.
- Miscellaneous Income General Fund – Ms. Walls explained the variance between the prior year's Budget and the proposed Budget, noting that it was a one-time payment from a class action settlement.

Expense & Balance Sheet

- Balance Carried Forward / Unreserved Restricted Balance Carried Forward / Unreserved Funds Carried Forward – Ms. Walls explained that the ARPA funds will not be shown as revenue until the Auditor books it, and it will go into Fiscal Year 2022. Ms. Walls explained the \$280,000 in the Restricted Fund is specific ARPA money that will go into the new Budget to cover some expenses; and the Unreserved Fund balances the Budget.

Grant Fund

- Good Will Fire Company – add \$15,000 to fully fund their request.
- Historical Society – add \$10,000 to fully fund their request.

Councilperson Zubaca

- Page 22, Special Trash – increase by \$2,000 to match prior year.
- Page 21, Building / HAC Applications – increase to \$100,000. Mr. Barthel noted that the application fees are predicated on the size and number of projects. He added that City Council has historically held mid-year budget reviews to review and adjust the Budget.
- BOH Security Line – Ms. Walls noted that if a board or commission did not have a separate Security Line it was included under Mayor and Council Security Line. Next year those Security Lines will be separated out.
- Page 18, Professional Development & Training – Mr. Barthel noted that special training has been discussed with the City Solicitor.
- Page 17, City Solicitor – Mr. Barthel explained that the City had significant legal expenses last year that were mostly unanticipated. In addition, there was duplication when the City changed law firms and additional legal fees during the last election. Councilperson Zubaca opined that this item can be reviewed mid-year.

- Page 17, Worker’s Compensation – Mr. Barthel noted that the City received a credit because it belongs to DFIT and they offered back a credit to all participating municipalities, which reduced this line item.
- Page 16, Battery Park Port-a-Potties – Councilperson Zubaca asked if those funds could be moved to upgrading the bathrooms in Battery Park. Mr. Barthel explained that upgrading the bathrooms in Battery Park would be a Trustee expense.
- Page 14, Termite Pest Control – Ms. Walls explained the City will be billed in May with payment due in June.
- Page 11, Election Expenses – Mr. Barthel explained that the budgeted amount is for the Special Election.
- Page 9, Handicap Curb Ramps – Mr. Barthel stated this is a City program to have 100% of the City’s curbs handicap accessible. Mr. Zubaca asked if these funds could be used for brickwork on sidewalks that could endanger the public. Mr. Barthel opined that it is a discussion that should involve the City Solicitor. Bringing the sidewalks to ADA compliance was discussed. Councilperson Day concurred with Mr. Zubaca’s thoughts, and added that perhaps Council should consider accessibility improvements in general.
- Page 9, Dog Park – Mr. Zubaca suggested that this line be reviewed mid-year. Mr. Barthel explained the budgeted amount is a placeholder and the job has not yet been bid. During discussion alternate locations were suggested; however, it was determined that the Hermitage is probably the best location.
- Page 8, Playground Maintenance – Mr. Barthel noted that line item is in regard to mulch and explained the program established with Public Works for mulching the City parks.
- Page 8, Park Equipment – This line item is for the mobile stage.
- Playgrounds – In response to a question from Councilperson Zubaca, Mr. Barthel stated that larger “No Smoking” signs can be made by the City for all the City Playgrounds.
- City Laptops – In response to a question from Councilperson Zubaca, Mr. Barthel stated that the Budget includes funds to purchase new laptops for City staff. Councilperson Zubaca also asked if a laptop can be purchased for each of the meeting places for City meetings.
- Projector and Screen for Senior Center – In response to a question from Councilperson Zubaca, Councilperson Souder stated that she researched this matter and received one quote of \$57,000. Councilperson Day opined that this equipment could be purchased under the umbrella of the County Vendor Program.

Councilperson Day

- Page 1, Overtime – Ms. Walls explained this line item is for contractual overtime for police officers.
- Page 2, Cameras – Mr. Barthel explained this line item, noting that he is working with the State for additional cameras that would be installed on roadways.
- Page 2, Body Cameras – Ms. Walls explained this line item was to replace equipment.
- Page 3, Administrative Expense – Mr. Barthel explained this was a one-time expense.
- Page 5, Salaries – Ms. Walls explained this line item.
- Page 8, Pruning & Planting – Mr. Barthel noted this was a request from the Tree Advisory Commission. There was discussion about the tree planting program and the watering program.

- Page 10, Contributions – Councilperson Day opined that requests for Good Will Fire Company and the Historical Society should be wholly fulfilled.
- Page 13, Admin Hardware & Computer Services – Mr. Barthel explained this line item.
- Page 15, Temporary Labor/Consultant – Ms. Walls explained that line item is for the Finance Consultant.
- Councilperson Day opined that Good Will Fire Company’s funding request for the Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) should be wholly fulfilled through ARPA funds.

Councilperson Zeltt

- Salaries – In response to a question from Councilperson Zeltt, Mr. Barthel explained the FOP and AFSCME agreements the City has relative to compensation, noting that there is no stipulated standard increase for non-contract employees.
- Budget Worksheet – In response to a question from Councilperson Zeltt a “comment” field will be added to the Budget Worksheet.

Council President Platt

- Council President Platt had no additional comments.

Councilperson Souder suggested that Council consider appointing an Assistant Treasurer to assist Ms. Carlin, who could then assume full responsibility as Treasurer in the future.

Public Comment

Sally Denton

Ms. Denton asked for a status update on Ordinance 539. Council President Platt stated that the will of the Council is that Ordinance 539 will not move forward at this time. Councilperson Souder added that Council feels there is insufficient time to thoughtfully revise the Ordinance before the August Mayoral election. Ms. Denton opined that people should know what happened with the election because they need to know the truth, and this has created a very bad situation in town.

Beverly Ross – 615 Delaware Street

Ms. Ross asked if the Ordinance can be reintroduced after the election; opining that it should be done before the end of the year. Councilperson Souder concurred that it should be done this year, opining that the First Reading could be done at the September Council meeting.

Ms. Ross noted that if filing could be done electronically, the Absentee Ballot could also be done electronically. Ms. Ross opined that New Castle is small and residents could have the time to come to the City Office. It was noted that many people cannot take time off work to come to the City Office. It was also noted that the City Office remains open late on the second to last day for filing. Councilperson Zubaca opined that Council can commit to an August First Reading of the Ordinance. He further opined that the City should be able to make filing more convenient for the public.

Valarie Leary – 201 Harmony Street

Ms. Leary expressed her support of Council funding the Good Will Fire Company's request for the SCBA equipment.

Phil Gross – 1301 13th Street

In response to a question from Mr. Gross, Mr. Barthel stated that all cameras that were received by the City have been installed.

Mr. Gross suggested that all filings for candidacy be time/date stamped, and suggested that if electronic filing is implemented it should include electronic signatures.

Mr. Gross suggested that the AV system for the Senior Center be implemented.

Mr. Gross noted that there is an area by the Yacht Club that could be used as a Dog Park. He also suggested that the City ask for Sponsors to off-set the cost.

Mr. Gross asked if the Budget includes funds for the Partnership and Separation Day. Councilperson Zeltt stated there is a line for the Partnership in the amount of \$2,500. Councilperson Souder noted that there is a grant for Separation Day, and there is no cost to the City.

Budget Balances

Ms. Walls confirmed that Council wishes all revenue and expenses discussed be added to the proposed Budget:

Expenses

- Good Will Fire Company / SCBA – add \$63,000 from ARPA Funds
- Good Will Fire Company Grant – increase to \$30,000
- Historical Society Grant – increase to \$15,000
- Historic Area Commission Grant – increase by \$30,000 to \$100,000
- Projector Screen at the Senior Center

Revenue

- Property Tax Transfers – increase by \$50,000 to \$250,000
- Delinquent Tax Collection – increase by \$2,000 to \$12,000
- Business Licenses – increase by \$5,000 to \$130,000
- Special Trash Pick-up – increase by \$2,000 to \$9,000

Councilperson Day asked that Council consider what to do about cut-through traffic. Mr. Barthel noted that he and Council President Platt met with Senator Poore and DelDOT regarding roadwork, and DelDOT was not able to provide a definitive answer. Mr. Barthel recommended that Council members reach out to their Representatives (Representative Frank Cooke and Senator Darius Brown) regarding this matter.

Mr. Barthel addressed a question from Councilperson Zeltt regarding widening Rt. 273, noting that DelDOT had no definitive answers regarding what the City can do to help alleviate the situation.

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Council President Platt recommended that any further discussion regarding roadwork be postponed to a future meeting.

In response to a question from Councilperson Day, Mr. Barthel stated that the cost of the study to improve security at the City Office is in the Budget.

Councilperson Souder will forward the estimate for AV equipment at the Senior Center to Councilperson Day, who will reach out to his contacts at the County. Councilperson Souder will also forward that information to Mr. Barthel.

There being no further business to discuss, Council President Platt called for a motion to adjourn.

A motion to adjourn was made, seconded and unanimously carried and the meeting adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer

Next Regular Meeting Date: June 13, 2023
Posted: 05/02/2023