

City of New Castle Delaware
Budget Workshop
1 Municipal Boulevard
Thursday, May 7, 2024
7:00 p.m.

Call to Order: 7:00 PM

Roll Call

Present: Council President Suzanne Souder
Councilperson Brian Mattaway
Councilperson Joseph F. Day, III
Councilperson Nermin Zubaca
Councilperson Andrew Zeltt

Also present: Antonina Tantillo, City Administrator
Courtaney P. Taylor, City Clerk/Finance Coordinator
James Whisman, City Treasurer

Council President Souder called the May 7, 2024 City Council Budget Workshop to order at 7:00 p.m. Roll call followed and a quorum to conduct business was declared.

Ms. Tantillo reviewed revisions made to the Budget pursuant to recommendations made by Council at the April 29, 2024 Budget Workshop.

Grant Contributions

Community Collaboration of Delaware (CCD) – At the request of Council President Souder, Councilperson Mattaway addressed the grant request from the Community Collaboration of Delaware for \$10,000; noting that the CCD is a non-profit organization that has been active in the community since 2019 and was previously unaware of opportunities to solicit funds from the city. Mr. Mattaway noted activities, partnerships and outreach programs that they currently have. Council President Souder noted her understanding that the CCD received grant funding for some of the services of the Community Service Worker who is working with the Police Department.

A discussion of grant requests ensued during which Ms. Tantillo addressed a question from Council President Souder as to why multiple applications were received for the same thing. Council President Souder noted that historically Council has awarded funding for specific projects and has avoided awarding funding for operating expenses.

Good Will Fire Company – Chief David Majewski was present from the Good Will Fire Company and responded to questions from Council regarding its application for funding.

Arasapha Garden Club – Councilperson Zubaca noted that he is working with Arasapha and may ask for an increase for them.

New Castle Library – Councilperson Zubaca proposed adding \$4,000 to the New Castle Library for increased access in the community. Council President Souder noted other agencies that contribute to the New Castle Library.

New Castle Community History and Archaeology Project Website – Councilperson Zubaca proposed that funds be set aside under the Historical Society or the Outreach Coordinator Program for this project, noting that the content is significant to the city. Ms. Tantilillo will speak with the Outreach Coordinator to see if this might be within their purview.

Wayfinding Signs – Councilperson Zubaca suggested that funds be set aside to update signage.

Outreach Coordinator – Councilperson Zubaca asked that a placeholder be added for the Quantitative/Qualitative study being proposed by Mr. Reaves.

Councilperson Zubaca initiated a short discussion of having directional signs for restrooms.

Ms. Tantilillo updated Council on several items:

- Ms. Tantilillo reached out to the Planning Commission and they will look into additional funding they may need.
- Mayor Leary requested that the Outreach Coordinator position remain in the budget.
- Mayor Leary and the Outreach Coordinator have discussed arranging for lodging for members of the ship at a local Bed & Breakfast or Air B&B so the crew has access to showers, which the City does not currently provide. Council President Souder noted her understanding that the intent is to rent one room for showering purposes. A discussion of the payment process ensued.

In response to a question from Councilperson Day, Ms. Taylor will research the Health, Life and Dental Insurance line item from the last report, but she opined that the discrepancy was a classification issue.

Dog Park – In response to a question from Councilperson Zeltt, Ms. Tantilillo noted that \$60,000 was not added to the line item because the amount was not firm. RFPs will be sent out for design and implementation.

Chestnut Street Parking Lot – In response to a question from Councilperson Zeltt, Ms. Tantilillo explained the \$65,000 is to pave the gravel area of the parking lot.

Appropriations – In response to a question from Councilperson Mattaway, Ms. Taylor explained the MSC appropriation is fixed per an agreement between the City and MSC. Councilperson Mattaway asked if the agreement can be renegotiated. Council President Souder opined that it may not be something that can be changed.

Bike Racks – Councilperson Mattaway proposed adding \$1,000 for additional bike racks. Council President Souder noted that the Historic Area Commission would be involved in adding bike racks in the Historic District, and available land is an issue. A discussion of appropriate

locations to install bike racks ensued, including in front of the New Castle Library, the pier, and near the Courthouse. Ms. Tantillo will reach out to the Bike Council for information. Councilperson Day noted that this, and other items, could be reviewed mid-year.

Mr. Whisman opined that between the Arsenal and the Federal Building would be an ideal spot for bike racks. It was noted that the City does not own that area. Ms. Tantillo will mention the suggested locations to Mr. Reaves.

City Branding – Councilperson Mattaway proposed that Council consider adding a line item for new branding for city signs. He also suggested that as new police cars are obtained the new branding be incorporated on them as well. Councilperson Zubaca noted other signage that is unreadable and needs to be updated.

Councilperson Mattaway also suggested that the City is not taking good advantage of its name as a marketing tool, i.e., holiday ornaments, t-shirts, hats, etc. Mayor Leary and Councilperson Zeltt are looking into branding.

In response to a question from Ms. Taylor, Council President Souder suggested she speak with Mayor Leary regarding advertising that the City did with William Penn High School T-Shirts and whether it will be an annual expense.

Little League Team – Councilperson Mattaway proposed that Council earmark \$350 to potentially sponsor a Little League Team.

Mses. Tantillo and Taylor continued to review and explain changes to expenses and to respond to questions from Council.

Separation Day – Councilperson Mattaway initiated a discussion of Separation Day, how it is managed and how it can best benefit the city.

Property Taxes – Councilperson Zubaca suggested reducing the line item by \$25,000, and opined that \$3,075,000 seems more appropriate.

Battery Park Port-a-Potties – In response to a question from Councilperson Zeltt, Ms. Tantillo stated that port-a-potties have been installed in Battery Park and will remain there for at least one month. She and Chief McCabe met with Trust Officers to evaluate the situation. Council President Souder added that based on the meeting she and Ms. Tantillo had with the Trust she got the impression that they would be willing to open the restrooms on a trial basis. Ms. Tantillo will follow up with the Trustees.

Code Enforcement Officer – Ms. Tantillo stated that an offer has been made and was accepted. They will not be able to start until the beginning of the new fiscal year.

The discussion moved on to revenues.

Metered Parking – Councilperson Zubaca asked if there has been any discussion of metered parking in the Chestnut Street parking lot or parking passes to generate income. Council President Souder stated that metered or kiosk parking downtown had been considered; however, the kiosks have to be purchased, maintained and enforced; and it would probably not generate sufficient income to cover those costs. The same issue would exist in the parking lot. Councilperson Day opined that if the Chestnut Street parking lot was pay only people would look for other places to park; and that metered parking is not the highest priority.

AV Equipment – In response to a question from Council President Souder, Ms. Taylor explained the reason there are two line items for AV Equipment.

During further discussion Councilperson Zeltt suggested funds for paving the Chestnut Street parking lot be reallocated to the Dog Park.

A motion was made by Councilperson Zeltt to redirect the \$65,000 from the Chestnut Street from ARPA to the Dog Park. The motion was seconded by Councilperson Day and unanimously carried.

Playground Sub-committee – Councilperson Zubaca proposed earmarking \$350,000 from ARPA funds for Phase 2 of the playground in Battery Park, to include ADA compliant surfacing and new equipment (\$250,000), and community-wide playgrounds (\$100,000). Ms. Tantillo stated that she visited all the neighborhood playgrounds and there are improvements she would like to see in them. She will forward that information to the Sub-committee. Councilperson Zubaca said that an alternate use for the \$100,000 would be to put it toward a resiliency fund, and interest accrued would be earmarked for the Sub-committee. Mses. Taylor and Tantillo addressed using interest from the ARPA funds, and Ms. Tantillo stated that additional measures must be taken first and then determination can be made if interest needs to be allocated to a certain project.

During discussion it was noted that funds from the Bond Bill are also being requested for resurfacing the playground in Battery Park. In response to a question from Councilperson Day, Councilperson Zubaca stated that currently numbers are not being tracked, but they are starting to think about how to collect the quantitative data to determine how many people have used the park since the new equipment was installed. Councilperson Zubaca emphasized that this is the first money that the City will have contributed to the playground.

Councilperson Day made a number of points:

- When the Sub-committee first approached the City, it was made clear that they would not be asking for funding from the City; and one year later they are asking for \$350,000.
- Is it unknown if the city has adequate parking, services, trash, etc.
- Council had made the decision to set ARPA funds aside for sea level rise.

Councilperson Day opined that implementing it out over three or four years would be more palatable than asking for \$350,000 at one time. He added that at least 30 items have already been added into the budget.

Councilperson Zubaca stated that he supported moving funds to the Dog Park without a firm number, and the numbers presented by the Sub-committee are real; adding that all he is asking is that the city also supports the children in the city. Councilperson Zubaca opined that nothing in the budget is benefitting kids. Council President Souder took issue with Councilperson Zubaca's contention that none of the budget benefits the children and that this will benefit 20% of the city's population (ages 19 and under). She opined that perhaps 10% of the population (12 and under) uses the playground. Council President Souder also questioned if New Castled needed a \$1.4M playground to be considered a "first-class city"; and asked if they could have a nice playground, an improved playground, a better playground without spending almost \$1.5M.

Councilperson Zeltt asked if the \$65,000 earmarked for police cars could be reallocated to the playground; however, Ms. Taylor stated that those funds are to cover police vehicles over a 5-year span.

Councilperson Zubaca stated that it would only cost the city \$250,000 of the \$1.4M and the rest would come from grants and explained his use of 20% of the younger population using the playground; he further opined that the children are worth investing in.

Councilperson Day opined that when a city resident sees that 80% of the children who use the playground are not residents, and the city is spending \$250,000 to supplement the park when it does not have adequate parking, how will they feel when the city asks to raise taxes? Council President Souder added that many people in town were not in favor of the new playground. Councilperson Zeltt said that the biggest complaint he has heard is that there are no slides, and asked why they need the Taj Mahal.

Councilperson Mattaway stated that the original equipment was probably more than 20 years old, and if the city had invested less than \$12,000 a year in improvements Council would not be having this conversation. He opined that this speaks to a larger issue of maintenance of ongoing equipment and the need for a Parks and Recreation Department in the city.

Councilperson Day stated his frustration that adding \$350,000 to the budget was not brought up until this meeting.

Councilperson Zeltt asked why Phase 1 of the playground did not have the proper base. Councilperson Zubaca explained that at the time they were advised that mulch was the best water proof base; however, after further research they were advised that a rubberized surface was the better option. Council President Souder opined that the Sub-committee is not looking at the big picture first when considering what is best for the playground, and stated she would like to see more broad scale planning before getting into the details of what kind of equipment to put up. She also noted her understanding that there were also issues with the installation. Council President Souder stated that having increased visitors to the playground may benefit the local businesses, but it does not benefit the city.

Councilperson Zeltt asked about the footprint of the playground, noting that it is larger than originally planned. Council President said that the shape was adjusted slightly, but the overall square footage is roughly the same.

In response to a question from Councilperson Day, Ms. Tantillo stated that the Bond Bill ask for the playground is approximately \$275,000 for surfacing and the Bond Bill has not yet been submitted to the State. Council President Souder noted that funds received from the Bond Bill must be used for a dedicated project.

Council President Souder recommended that the Resolution Councilperson Zubaca is proposing should be more broadly written.

Ms. Tantillo asked that additional ARPA requests be presented at the next meeting.

Council President Souder stated that Council's first priority is to pass the budget by the end of June and that the use of ARPA funds can be revisited at a later time.

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

A motion to adjourn was made, seconded and unanimously carried and the meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer

Next Regular Meeting Date: May 14, 2024
Posted: 04/30/2024