

CITY OF NORWICH
JOINT MEETING of the
PUBLIC SAFETY / PUBLIC WORKS and
FINANCE/PERSONNEL COMMITTEES
November 5, 2014

Present:

Ald. Bryan McCracken
Ald. Brian Doliver
Ald. Walter Schermerhorn
Ald. Paul Laughlin
Ald. Thomas LoPiccolo

Absent:

Ald. John Deierlein

Also:

Director of Finance/City Clerk William Roberts
Police Chief Joseph Angelino
DPW Superintendent Carl Ivarson
Fire Chief Tracy Chawgo
Mayor Joseph Maiurano
Deputy City Clerk Brian Drake
Assessor Brian Fitts
EMO A. Jones
Assistant Police Chief Rodney Marsh
Media Representative Shawn Magrath

Ald. Paul Laughlin called the joint meeting of the Public Works/Public Safety and Finance/Personnel Committees to order at 6:01 p.m. at the Council Chambers.

Approval of Minutes

Ald. LoPiccolo **moved** to approve the minutes of the Joint Committee meeting of October 7, 2014. Seconded by Ald. Schermerhorn, approved ayes all.

City Reassessment

City Assessor Brian Fitts addressed the Committees regarding a city-wide re-evaluation of property assessments. He noted that the last re-evaluation was done in 1988, and since then inequity has grown between sales and assessed values of properties, leading to unbalanced equalization rates. An equalization rate is a ratio of the locally determined assessed value of taxable real property to the Office of Real Property Tax Services's estimate of market value. Equalization rates are New York State's independent measure of each municipality's level of assessment. For example, an equalization rate of 50 indicates that a town's total assessed value of all real property is 50% of the town's full (market) value determined for a specified date.

The state's responsibility for "equalizing" local property assessments to a common full (market) value is important because the full values are used for a variety of purposes. These include the allocation of various state-aid programs, the fair apportionment of county and school property taxes, and the determination of tax and debt limits for local governments. One of the most important uses of the equalization rate is to divide fairly (to apportion) the tax burden among municipalities that are in the same school district. The City's equalization rate for 2014 is 66%.

A re-evaluation is needed to bring equity back to City property owners. Owners of new properties, which have been recently assessed, shoulder an unfair portion of the tax burden compared to properties which have not been assessed in almost 30 years. Assessment should equal market value. Currently, in some instances properties are selling for several times their assessed value. A common misperception is that a re-evaluation will mean that everyone's property taxes will go up; this is untrue. The current tax rate would likely be lowered after the re-evaluation, which would offset many increases in assessed value. In most municipalities, approximately one-third of properties will see an increase, another third will see no change, and the remainder may see a decrease in their property taxes.

B. Fitts proposed a re-evaluation over the next three years as being economically feasible. The City may be reimbursed by the State up to \$5 per parcel for the expenses of a re-evaluation. B. Fitts has conducted re-evaluations in 15 municipalities. He noted that as no re-evaluation has been performed in almost 30 years, education and transparency will be key to the success of the re-evaluation. The first step will be data gathering, then updating records, visiting properties, creating mathematical models, and conducting the re-evaluation. Disclosure statements will be sent to property owners with estimated impacts on their property taxes. Property owners may then set up an informal meeting with the assessor to discuss the proposed assessment. The assessor then may or may not alter the proposed assessment, and property owners would have a chance to bring a formal grievance. During re-evaluations in Cazenovia, approximately 100 informal meetings led to only 30 grievances.

The Committees discussed methods of assessing rental properties, which include checking market value and rental income, and further concerns were addressed, such as the impact on the elderly who are enrolled in the Enhanced Star exemption and senior citizen exemption. B. Fitts explained that such concerns will be addressed through education, and in most cases assessments should stay below the State designated dollar cap for the Enhanced Star program.

Department Head Reports

Human Resources Director of Finance William Roberts explained that Director of Human Resources Deborah DeForest was absent to receive her son, returning from military duty in Afghanistan, and that a resolution appointing the new police chief will be presented to the Common Council at its November meeting.

DPW

Scum Pumps DPW Superintendent Carl Ivarson reported that he received two proposals for new scum pumps and recommended the lower proposed of approximately \$10,000 each. This will be paid for with a transfer from the WWTP equipment fund reserves. Ald. Schermerhorn **moved** to recommend Council approve a transfer of funds to cover new scum pumps. Seconded by Ald. LoPiccolo, approved ayes all.

Supernate Line C. Ivarson reported that Burrell's Excavating submitted a proposal in the amount of \$28,240 to conduct hydro-excavating work at the WWTP to repair lines there. Hydro-excavating is necessary rather than typical excavation because of the number of electrical, natural gas, and methane gas lines in the area. C. Ivarson approached other companies, which expressed no interest in making proposals. This will be paid for with a transfer from sewer mains capital reserves. Ald. Schermerhorn **moved** to recommend Council approve a transfer of funds to pay for hydro-excavation at the wastewater treatment plant. Seconded by Ald. Doliver, approved ayes all.

Screw Pumps C. Ivarson reported that he has been in communication with the manufacturer regarding worn bearings on two of the screw pumps. The pumps had just passed their warranty, but the manufacturer has agreed to replace the bearings at no cost.

Filter Plant C. Ivarson reported that the final report on the filter plant has been received, manganese levels will not be a problem, and the project is now able to proceed to design.

Digester Report C. Ivarson reported that the digester problems have been resolved and the equipment is back online.

Water Inlet C. Ivarson reported that the stone of the water inlet of the upper reservoir is falling apart. Repairs will be necessary. He will have a price for the work at the December meeting.

CHIPS C. Ivarson reported that new CHIPS regulations require handicapped-accessible curbing on repaved streets. The plans for repaving in 2015 would involve 15 such ramps, with a cost of approximately \$25,000. He stated this will reduce the amount of potential repaving covered under CHIPS funding.

Flow Meter C. Ivarson reported that two proposals for flow meters came in at \$2,500 each or \$9,800 each for the identical product. He recommend the lower-priced proposal and stated the Department would perform the installations.

Firehouse Third Floor Project C. Ivarson asked for confirmation of the receipt of grant funds in order to proceed with design for the completion of the third floor of the Firehouse. Mayor Maiurano confirmed that grant funds should be forthcoming.

Finance

Supplemental Appropriation of Grant Funds W. Roberts reported that grant funds have been received from the Greater Norwich Foundation in the amount of \$10,095 to fully cover protective gear for EMS providers. Ald. Schermerhorn **moved** to recommend Council approve a supplemental appropriation of grant funds from the Greater Norwich Foundation. Seconded by Ald. McCracken, approved ayes all.

Budget Transfer – Legal Expenses W. Roberts reported that the Council approved additional expenses for legal services for Human Resources in August, with the expectation of further expenses. The estimated expenses for the remainder of the year will be approximately \$3,700. Ald. Schermerhorn **moved** to recommend the Council approve a budget transfer to cover legal expenses for Human Resources in the amount of \$3,700. Seconded by Ald. Doliver, approved ayes all.

2015 Budget W. Roberts stated that he will be communicating with the Aldermen to schedule special meetings to begin the 2015 budget process.

Executive Session Ald. McCracken **moved** to enter executive session at 6:49 p.m. to discuss the employment history of particular individuals; and to discuss pending litigation. Seconded by Ald. LoPiccolo, approved ayes all.

Ald. McCracken **moved** to exit executive session at 7:44 p.m. Seconded by Ald. LoPiccolo, approved ayes all.

Adjournment

Ald. McCracken **moved** to adjourn the meeting at 7:44 p.m. Seconded by Ald. Schermerhorn, approved ayes all.