

City of Norwich, Department of Finance

One City Plaza
Norwich, New York 13815
(607) 334-1230

Minutes

Finance/Personnel Committee Meeting of June 6, 2006

Present:

Ald. Joseph Maiurano
Ald. Walt Schermerhorn
Ald. Robert Jeffrey (6:08)

Also Present:

Director of Finance, William J. Roberts
Human Resources Director, Deborah DeForest
Police Chief Joseph Angelino
Fire Chief John Tighe
DPW Superintendent Carl Ivarson
Ald. Suzanne Williams
Ald. Terry Bresina
Assistant Police Chief Dale Smith
Code Enforcement Officer Jason Lawrence
Deputy Clerk Darlene Colaso
Media Representative Michael McGuire

Call To Order:

The meeting was held in the Council chambers at One Court Plaza and called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Committee Chairperson, Ald. Maiurano.

Approval of Minutes

Ald. Schermerhorn **moved** to approve the minutes from the regular meeting of May 1, 2006. Seconded by Ald. Maiurano, and duly adopted ayes all.

Community & Economic Development Projects & Funds:

Human Resources Director Deb DeForest reported that there would be an update on the Community & Economic Development projects at the upcoming work session.

Public Safety Items

Assistant Code Enforcement Officer - Part-Time Position - Costs

DeForest reported that a part-time Assistant Code Enforcement Officer is needed. The official title would be Code Enforcement Technician and the combined cost for the salary and mandated benefits would be \$15,500 for 19 hours per week (no elective benefits). She stated that a full-time assistant is really what's needed, but the budget won't allow for that. She reminded the Committee that this had been discussed before and noted that Jason (Lawrence – Code Enforcement Officer) is already putting in 2-hours per day more than he should be, just to keep up with all the requests.

Fire Chief John Tighe distributed a pie-style chart and which broke-down the Code Enforcement Officer's (hereinafter "CEOs") time into the respective responsibilities. Tighe reported that 25% of the CEOs time is spent on complaints, 28% is spent on actual violations, 27% on building maintenance and evaluations, 13% is spent on answering phone inquiries, and 7% remains for quality of life issues. Tighe specifically reviewed April/May to analyze the best-case scenario. This does not consider the high-volume during the June-August months. Jason is already working 9-10 hour days anyway and he needs help: 1) to patrol and get a handle on grass and junk cars (noting that when we put pressure on to remedy, they start to comply) and 2) to cover the office, as the CEO is out of the office approximately 55% of the day. Tighe concurred with DeForest, in that once the rehab portion of his duties comes into

the equation, normal, day-to-day activities will fall to the wayside. Ald. Schermerhorn asked about years past and DeForest noted that if the recently expanded emphasis on multi-family enforcement is the direction we want to go in, we need that part-time person to help.

A brief discussion ensued as to the seasonal changes in duties and DeForest discussed record keeping and tracking of the nearly 1600 units that will need to be accounted for, noting that they are looking at over 600 inspections as well. It's a huge impact for this department. Ald. Schermerhorn asked if this position would generate some revenue and DeForest stated that there is a possibility of bringing in some income (~\$16,000) particularly on the registry and inspection costs, however you constantly have to review and assess. Ald. Schermerhorn mentioned that every time the Committee meets, they seemingly spend money and his concern is in increasing the tax base with some revenues. DeForest noted that to improve the quality of life, they need someone. The bottom line is that you can't work the CEO anymore than he's already being worked and Planning & CD Administrative Assistant Amy Donnison is currently filling-in when needed and it still isn't enough – but once the rehab starts, there will be no code enforcement of complaints, it will be all rehab.

A brief discussion ensued when Ald. Jeffrey inquired as to the pay rate details and noted this is a quality of life issue. He knows that Jason is overworked adding that he is receiving a dozen phone calls per week pertaining to code issues. Ald. Jeffrey stated that we will not get people to invest in a neighborhood unless the codes are enforced. Communities need to show that they care and we need to start viewing Code Enforcement as a revenue generating position. Ald. Jeffrey also noted that the County Code Enforcement takes in over \$100,000 in revenue and has only expended \$62,000 to date. DeForest commented that the City is without large businesses like Lowe's building within City limits.

Another brief discussion ensued as to changing the fees and penalties to conform to the standard. It was agreed that the City is way behind on fees and that the schedule is in great need of being revamped. Chief Tighe used the CEOs Monday schedule to reconstruct a typical day in the Code Enforcement department. Ald. Maiurano said we need to take a look at the 2007 budget and ensure that those numbers are on par with the actual needs. He also asked if this was going to be a permanent position? Ald. Jeffrey asked if there was a way to get the person up and running as soon as possible? DeForest responded by saying that it is a permanent position and that yes, there is the possibility of an immediate start. Roberts said that because of the date, starting someone fairly soon would mean one-half of the stated salary, since we are already into the month of June (\$7,750). Roberts added that the funds are there from under budget amounts in other lines. DeForest inquired as to whether the Committee views the salary as acceptable, and they concurred that it is.

Ald. Maiurano **moved** to recommend Council approval of a part-time position to the Code Enforcement Office at the rate of \$15,500 annually for 19 hours per week. Seconded by Ald. Schermerhorn and duly adopted, ayes all.

Fire Equipment Replacement Plan (for Full Council Review)

Roberts reported that the Public Safety/Public Works Committee has reviewed this plan briefly and reiterated that financing the acquisition of equipment via a lease approach is likely the best option. He added that the built-in rates for these kinds of projects are the lowest they'll probably be and that bonding, while still an option, would be reasonable if not for the front-end costs (particularly the bond counsel and legal fees, and the financial advisor's roles cost when they have to put together, what's basically a prospectus for the bonded debt, which gets really expensive). Roberts noted that they would use a financing lease where you lease the equipment, and then at the end of the five-year term you own that equipment. Roberts stated the purpose of that type of lease is simply another way to finance the purchase versus an operating lease where you turn in the equipment at the end.

Roberts reported that basically the schedule that Tighe handed out reflects us using the money that we've been putting into the Capital Reserves account each year, which has been around \$25,000 to \$30,000 and increasing it by \$25,000 each year to build up an amount that could go toward our debt service fund to pay the leasing costs. The balance of the leasing costs would be accomplished by pulling money out of the Capital Reserve account (currently has \$500,000) and then each year we'd be

drawing out enough out to make the full lease payments for all the equipment on the schedule, which would total \$193,000 each year.

Roberts reported that Tighe has two phases for the equipment replacement plan - each over a five-year time period. Tighe reported that Phase One would replace four units with three units, and Phase Two would replace three units with two units. Roberts stated that what they are looking for is an authorization to go out to bid to get some hard numbers. It won't be easy, but the flip side is continuing on with unacceptable maintenance costs. A brief discussion ensued regarding the financing options and the bid process. Tighe pointed out that if we find that this is not working as we originally planned, we simply do not go on to Phase Two - we go at a different direction. Ald. Maiurano noted that we should have equipment replacement plans in place for DPW and Police as well. Roberts mentioned that Ivarson had recently given Roberts a list of items needed by DPW and ironically, he received a call today from the State Comptroller's Office, indicating they would like to see our multi-year plan. This falls in line with what we will soon be required to provide to the State anyway. Tighe reiterated that the emission requirements are changing January 2007, so time is of the essence in order to take advantage of this year's emission standards (consequently, costing us \$25,000 less per vehicle).

Ald. Jeffrey **moved** to go forward and obtain bids for the fire department equipment needed per the replacement plan. Seconded by Ald. Schermerhorn and duly adopted, ayes all.

Public Works & Engineering Items

Bids For Air Conditioning System for City Court

Ivarson reported that the City Court building's air conditioning unit is shot (irreparable). He purchased 4 Lowe's portable air conditioning units, just to keep them up and running and he's now requesting to go out to bid for an air conditioning system. Ivarson believes it will cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$30,000. Ivarson asked Roberts whether this is something that the court pays a portion of (25%?) the cost, and Roberts stated that he believes it is up to a certain dollar limit. DeForest stated that she may be able to renegotiate the contract for shared expenses. Ivarson stated that he definitely has to replace it; there's no other option. Roberts will contact the court and determine who bears the cost responsibility.

RBC's Equipment Repair (\$14,000) & Replacement (est. \$89,000 + Installation) - Reserves

There are two RBC (rotating biological contactor) units where the shafts are damaged. Each repair costs approximately \$14,000. He can only replace one at a time (30 days apart) in order to keep his permits in compliance (one violation is \$25,000/day). Roberts asked if he should just request \$28,000 for the replacement of both of the RBC's and Ivarson replied that he does not know the condition of the other one until he actually takes it off, so at this time he would need just one of them replaced. Ivarson also wanted to mention that that repair is only good for approximately 18 months (that's the longest they will guarantee it for), and a new shaft cost \$89,000, which does not include installation. He noted that 2/3rds of the WWTP (Waste Water Treatment Plant) life is already gone. He noted that we would eventually be going to a different process, and would not be keeping the RBC's long-term, so there would be no need to replace them at \$89,000 each.

Ald. Maiurano **moved** to approve the \$14,000 capital reserves transfer for repairs to the RBC. Seconded by Ald. Jeffrey and duly adopted, ayes all.

Refilling of MEO 1 Position

Ivarson reported that he is down this position and needs to refill it.

Ald. Maiurano **moved** to refill the position. Seconded by Ald. Schermerhorn and duly adopted, ayes all.

Water System Maintainer – Advertising Costs

Ivarson reported that we have not been able to find anyone to fill this position and that he needs to advertise locally. DeForest reported that advertising would cost approximately \$500 and Ivarson noted that it would come out of the water fund.

Ald. Maiurano **moved** to advertise locally for the position of Water System Maintainer. Seconded by Ald. Schermerhorn and duly adopted, ayes all.

Old Business

Tax Sales Certificates

Roberts reported that he is still working on these.

City Credit Card Account

Roberts reported that through NBT Bank, they have applied for a credit card, which is through MBNA. This is so we can acquire items, such as pieces of equipment, for very favorable prices over the internet. This has been a real problem (not having a credit card) and we are now in the process of obtaining one. Roberts reported that the card would be set up with him as the controlling primary holder and would likely have a \$2000 limit, to be used strictly for competitive pricing.

Ald. Schermerhorn **moved** to establish the account through NBT Bank and to take before the full Council. Seconded by Ald. Jeffrey and duly adopted, ayes all.

New Business

Local Sales Tax Cap on Gasoline

Roberts reported that the County is opting out on the local sales tax cap on gasoline. Roberts noted that the impact on the taxpayers is negligible. He stated that traditionally, the City has done what the County does and that, in this case, would be to do nothing. Consequently, the cap will apply only to the State.

Establishment of Applicable Minimum Wage

DeForest reported that the NYS minimum wage is going up January first to \$6.75. She stated that we, as a municipality, are only mandated to pay by the federal minimum wage rate, which is \$6.00. DeForest stated that in her opinion, the wages are adequate based on the job requirements. DeForest also mentioned that if the state minimum wage were implemented (at \$6.75), she would have summer help making more than some of our full-time, permanent help. She also noted that Bob Mason was adamant that we conform to the state rate of \$6.75. She would like to keep the rate at \$6.00 and if retention is a problem, then we reconsider. The Committee concurred.

Alternative Date for July Fin/Per Committee Meeting (First Tuesday is July 4th)

It was decided by the Committee that the date for the July Finance/Personnel Committee meeting (since it falls on the 4th of July national holiday) will be Thursday, July 6th at 6 PM.

Update of City Attorney Rate for Extra Services Outside of Basic Scope

DeForest stated that this would be discussed in executive session.

Rental Registry and Garbage Ordinances

Chief John Tighe handed out an informational package on the Rental Registry and the Garbage Ordinances, which will be discussed at the upcoming Council Work Session.

Prior to moving into executive session, Ald. Jeffrey pointed out that the upcoming work session conflicts with a NYRI meeting and Roberts pointed out that we wanted to avoid confusion, so we let the

work session revised date, June 15, stand. Also, the B.I.D. annual meeting is on Wednesday, which would be a conflict.

Ald. Jeffrey also asked for an update from Todd Dreyer, Planning and Community Development Specialist, as to where we are as far as community development and grants are concerned. DeForest replied that Dreyer was planning on having it in Council member's mailboxes before the work session. Ald. Jeffrey also asked about the possibility of sidewalk replacement. Jeffrey additionally asked about a Community Day, like Binghamton, where people gather to clean-up the community. A brief discussion ensued as to the possibility of having inmates performing such services. An additional brief discussion ensued regarding the liability issues and supervision issues involved. Jeffrey spoke of it in terms of a public relations event, which could be advertised. It was mentioned that regarding properties located in the Empire Zone, if they make improvements to the home, the property owner could receive a 10-year exemption from reassessments.

Executive Session

Ald. Jeffrey **moved** to go into executive session at 7:00 pm to discuss the employment history of particular individuals. Seconded by Ald. Schermerhorn and duly adopted, ayes all.

Ald. Jeffrey **moved** to exit executive session at 7:25 pm. Seconded by Ald. Maiurano and duly adopted, ayes all.

Adjournment

Ald. Maiurano **moved** to adjourn at 7:25 pm. Seconded by Ald. Schermerhorn and duly adopted, ayes all.