

City of Norwich, Department of Finance

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

Minutes

Finance/Personnel Committee Meeting of October 3, 2006

Present:

Ald. Walter Schermerhorn
Ald. Paul Laughlin
Ald. Robert Jeffrey

Also Present:

Mayor Joseph Maiurano
Ald. Suzanne Williams
Director of Finance, William J. Roberts
Human Resources Director, Deborah DeForest
Police/Fire Chief Joseph Angelino
DPW Superintendent Carl Ivarson
Code Enforcement Officer Jason Lawrence
Media Representative Jessica Lewis

Call To Order:

The meeting was held in the Council Chambers at One Court Plaza and called to order at 6:05 p.m. by Committee Chair Ald. Schermerhorn.

Approval of Minutes:

Ald. Laughlin moved to approve the minutes from the regular meeting of September 5, 2006. Seconded by Ald. Jeffrey, ayes all.

Youth Bureau Items: (none)

Community & Economic Development Projects & Funds:

Codes Proposed Software Re: Unfunded NYS Mandate – Increased Enforcement Activities

H.R. Director DeForest distributed copies of a proposal from General Code Publishers for codes software which could be utilized not only for codes enforcement purposes, but also for zoning and planning operations. She noted that it is from the same people who are currently engaged in the re-codification of the City Charter and Codes ordinances into an electronic format. It would be versatile, compatible, and integrated with the charter and ordinances, providing an easily accessible and comprehensive capability for such activities as monitoring multi-family dwelling registrations and compliance tracking.

The most comprehensive configuration would involve a cost of approximately \$32,000, while a configuration for just codes related applications would be around \$27,000 if it were desired to have the rest added later. Mayor Maiurano said discussion with General Code indicated that the cost could be split over two fiscal years to make it more palatable. He added that staff would be looking for funding options. DeForest said that they were planning on pursuing a records management grant through State Archives in the next round of filing in February. She said they were not looking for any action from the committee tonight, but just providing information at this point. She also said that conversation with the City's computer systems consultant Michael Tomaselli indicated that the current file server is not likely to be adequate. This could be another cost element to take into account.

Ald. Schermerhorn expressed concern about whether the new software could be supported by existing staff. He wouldn't want to see an investment made and then not be able to have it properly utilized. Code Officer Lawrence said the current program is too small and inadequate to handle the

large increase in violations tracking that has already developed. He added that time demands will increase dramatically when the new unfunded mandate from the State takes place next year (which was discussed later in the meeting). He pointed out that after installation, the new program would enable ward maps and zoning issues to be determined electronically. DeForest added that temporary staff might be needed to help with the startup input needed to establish the program database.

Ald. Jeffrey asked about pursuing supplemental funding sources to help with the costs, such as the grant program of the Greater Norwich Foundation.

Endorsement of Chenango Greenway Conservancy Grant Application – Greenway Trail Project

D. DeForest reported that this group is looking for endorsement support only with respect to their grant application to the State Office of Parks and Recreation, and not any (funding) commitment from the City. Mayor Maiurano added that they have worked very hard on this quality project, and he would like to see them supported in their efforts. The committee concurred and referred it to the full Council for approval.

NYS Shared Municipal Services Incentive (“SMSI”) Grant (Re-)Application

D. DeForest briefed the committee on the SMSI program and referred to the last application submitted through the Chamber of Commerce during 2005-2006. She said the objective to secure funding for a feasibility study of sharing and consolidating operations between the City, the Towns of Norwich and North Norwich, and the County, was being revisited following the first unsuccessful attempt. After researching the background, T. Dreyer has recommended applying for \$60,000 this time, versus the \$120,000 originally sought by the Chamber. Also, other changes from the first application would include the City being the lead agency, and seeking a consultant through an RFP process instead of pre-designating a firm. The cost to the City would not be substantial, since it would be limited to sharing a 10% local match of \$6,000 among the participating municipalities. She did point out however, that it would significantly involve department heads’ time commitment for interacting with a consultant to gather information and input on the City’s various operations and also its current sharing and coordinating activities with the towns.

Ald. Jeffrey moved that it be moved forward to the full Council. Seconded by Ald. Laughlin, ayes all.

Codes Vehicle Use – Reimbursement Costs – Budget Transfer – Unfunded Mandate

An overall discussion revolved around the need to provide adequate vehicle availability for the Codes Officer and part-time Code Enforcement Technician, which also led into reviewing increased codes activities and new State requirements. When a vehicle is not regularly available, personal vehicle use has been incurred, along with the reimbursement costs. Ald. Jeffrey asked Chief Angelino if he could designate a vehicle for dedicated availability to the Codes Officer, and the Chief affirmed that he would. J. Lawrence pointed out that personal vehicle reimbursement would still be needed for the part-timer and will require a budget transfer. He estimated an average of 236 miles per month would be incurred for the balance of this year. W. Roberts said he had not received any cost estimates yet and will need that to determine the transfer details. D. DeForest said they could probably have that by the Council Work Session.

Ald. Jeffrey moved to refer the transfer to the Work Session. Seconded by Ald. Laughlin, ayes all.

Additional discussion followed, in which Lawrence distributed a chart depicting the level of permit fees for 2004, 2005, and 2006 to date. The chart also indicted the value of storm-related permits issued at no charge since last June. Noting that the State has extended the flood reimbursement application deadline again (to October 16th), Ald. Laughlin asked about the need to continue with the no charge for the permits. It was concluded that the decision to end the free period could be determined next month. Ald. Jeffrey asked if FEMA reimbursement to the City could be obtained for the time and cost to administer the free permitting. Lawrence and DeForest indicated that this was already attempted and turned down by FEMA. However, they indicated that they would re-try.

J. Lawrence then briefed the committee on the new State requirements for code enforcement procedures that will take effect on January 1, 2007. This unfunded mandate will involve new minimum

standards including detailed pre-inspections and establishment of operating permits to be administered on all buildings with over 50 occupants. D. DeForest added that this will at least double just the inspections workload. Lawrence said that various municipalities have voiced opposition to this and have requested an extension of the deadline to ease the impact, but have been rejected by the State.

Public Safety Items:

Police: Court Security Contract

Chief Angelino reported on the status of the current contract with the State Court System. The agreement provides that either party can opt out after a 30-day notification. He has been advised that in a couple of weeks, the State will be sending a letter to opt out. D. DeForest pointed out that she will be laying off the part-time security officers, which may result in unemployment insurance costs.

Fire: (no items)

EMO: (no items)

Public Works & Engineering Items:

Authorize Capital Reserves for Flood Damage Repairs Pending Federal & State Reimbursement

W. Roberts stated that like last year's flood, this year requires a Council authorization to utilize Capital reserves funds as up-front money to get the work done for repairs and replacements, pending Federal and State reimbursements. As the reimbursements come in, they will strictly be used to replenish any reserves used. One difference this time is that the State will be covering what had previously been a local share amounting to approximately 9.5% after FEMA, SEMO, and administrative reimbursements, resulting in a 100% reimbursement. The only possible area of less than 100% could be with regard to the ongoing issues around remedying the Canasawacta dam situation. Also needed, is approval to execute agreements with Delaware Engineering on a time and materials basis for the necessary design and related engineering work.

Ald. Jeffrey moved to recommend Council approval to use advance capital reserve funds for flood damage repairs, to be reimbursed by State and Federal funds, and to authorize contracts with Delaware Engineering for the needed related engineering services on a time and materials basis. Seconded by Ald. Laughlin, ayes all.

Prior to the vote, Mayor Maiurano asked if alternative cash flow measures were available in case the reserves funds were not sufficient. C. Iverson responded the reserves would be. W. Roberts also replied that he had spoken with the bank (NBT) a couple of months ago and confirmed that special borrowing arrangements would be available if needed, but since the reserves are adequate and would cost less to use, that they would be preferred.

Lab Technician Position Instead of New Lead Operator

C. Iverson reported that in lieu of waiting to secure a lead operator in the wastewater facility, he has determined that a laboratory technician would be a better option at this time. The slot would serve both water and wastewater lab work needs at the same cost as an operator, projected at a 2007 annual pay rate of \$34,507. This would free up other current personnel to focus on fieldwork. When asked if this would be a new post, D. DeForest confirmed that it would, and a complete job description was provided to the committee.

Ald. Jeffrey moved to recommend approval of the new position. Seconded by Ald. Laughlin, ayes all.

2006 Streets Re-Paving Costs – Over CHIPS/FEMA Reimbursements by \$7,913.04

C. Iverson reviewed the final costs of the street re-paving program. After C.H.I.P.S. and Federal and State flood-related reimbursements, the costs are \$7,913.04 more than the available revenues. Streets that exceeded the planned costs were Hillview Drive and Birdsall. These streets involved a need for improved crowning to prevent pooling of water in the center area, which in turn

required increased quantities of materials. W. Roberts advised a budget transfer from sidewalks personal services, which has an unused budget of \$8,268, and C. Iverson concurred that it would not be used at this late point in the year.

Ald. Jeffery moved to recommend a budget transfer from sidewalks personal services to the interfund transfers to permanent streets in the amount of \$7,913.04. Seconded by Ald. Laughlin, ayes all.

Parks Position – Regrade/New Job Description

C. Iverson reported that the individual in the parks maintenance position had recently retired. He recommended a new job description, which he had just developed, for a pool and grounds technician. The requirements would qualify the position as a maintainer of larger sized pools such as the Kurt Beyer, and also as a pesticides technician with corresponding certifications. It would also require a CDL to allow for versatility in manpower utilization. The position would be one grade above the MEO 1 level, amounting to a 2007 annual rate of \$28,142. Ald. Jeffery moved to recommend approval of the new position by the full Council. Seconded by Ald. Laughlin, ayes all.

Elevator Service Contract

C. Iverson briefed the committee on the need for an elevator contract in the firehouse facility. He had only one proposal from ThyssenKrupp Elevator in East Syracuse. He said that Otis never returned several calls he had made. The proposal was for a monthly rate of \$75 for a one-year contract, and \$65 for a three-year contract. He advised that before any approvals, the agreement be reviewed by the City Attorney, since it had several features he considered unusual.

2006 Tree Removal Bid

Iverson said this was the first time in a few years that more than one bid was submitted. Out of the four bids submitted, the lowest was from Cook's Tree Service in Vestal in the amount of \$16,385. Roughly \$2,000 or so would be charged to the Water fund, leaving around \$14,000 for the General Fund. However, this is higher than the General Fund budgeted amount of \$10,000. He said he felt that he could come up with the difference from unused budget funds in various DPW personal services accounts since he did not have full manpower all year. Ald. Jeffery moved to recommend approval of the bid award to Cook's, and a corresponding budget transfer as indicated. Seconded by Ald. Laughlin, ayes all.

Old Business:

Flood Damage Costs – Reimbursements Update

It was noted that updated information was already addressed in the other parts of the meeting, except W. Roberts mentioned that the FEMA people were expecting to continue using the EMO office facilities for a couple of months longer than originally planned, and there would be a little more rental reimbursement as a result.

New Business:

November Meeting Date (1st Tuesday is Election Day Holiday)

Based on the Election Day holiday for the first Tuesday, the committee consensus was to reschedule the November meeting to Wednesday, November 8th, and the same time of 6 p.m.

Time and Procedures for 2006 Tax Auction

W. Roberts reviewed the annual auction process with the committee. (He pointed out that this is different from and is to be distinguished from the annual tax sale, which this year is scheduled for October 24th, and is with respect to unpaid 2006 taxes.) He explained that the tax auction is for the four still unredeemed properties for which the City purchased tax sale certificates in October of 2004, and for which the 15-month redemption period expired back on January 26, 2006. He said that the auction would normally be conducted earlier in the year around June or July, but that his department was

extremely backlogged with work this year, resulting in a later date. The City's approach has always been to avoid taking title to unredeemed parcels immediately after the redemption period expires, and rather to hold an auction with the goal of not owning unnecessary property. The auction would be held on December 1, 2006, and affected property owners would have up to October 31st to redeem them. Ald. Jeffrey asked if T. Dreyer could look at these parcels to see if they could fit into the "Restore New York" state rehabilitation grant, prior to the work session, in case that might be a better option. He would rather see it approached from a community development perspective first. Mayor Maiurano pointed out that the auction stipulations provide that the Council can reject any or all bids, and no sale is final until approved by the Council. DeForest and Roberts will follow up and report back at the work session meeting.

Executive Session:

Ald. Laughlin moved to go into executive session at 7:18 p.m. to discuss the employment history of a particular individual. Seconded by Ald. Jeffrey, ayes all.

Ald. Jeffrey moved to go out of executive session at 7:24 p.m. Seconded by Ald. Laughlin, ayes all.

FMLA Request:

Ald. Jeffrey moved to approve the Family Medical Leave Act request of Police Officer Craig Berry for a period of four weeks. Seconded by Ald. Laughlin, ayes all.

Adjournment:

Ald. Jeffrey moved to adjourn at 7:29 p.m. Seconded by Ald. Laughlin, ayes all.