

CITY OF NORWICH
JOINT MEETING of the
PUBLIC SAFETY / PUBLIC WORKS and
FINANCE/PERSONNEL COMMITTEES
October 3, 2023

Present:

Mayor Brian Doliver
Ald. Eric Warren
Ald. Nancy Allaire
Ald. William Loomis
Ald. David Zieno
Ald. Robert D. Jeffrey

Supervisor Robert M. Jeffrey

Absent

Supervisor James McNeil
Ald. Fred Gee

Also:

Director of Finance/City Clerk Dee DuFour
Director of Human Resources Lynn Murray
DPW Superintendent Edward Pepe
Youth Bureau Director Anthony Testani
Fire Chief Jan Papelino
Deputy Chief of Police Scott Burlison
EMO Stephen Cady
Community Development Director Erik Scrivener
City Attorney Stephanie Hanrahan
Deputy City Clerk Agnes Eaton

Media Representative: none

Ald. Zieno called the joint meeting of the Public Works/Public Safety and Finance/Personnel Committees to order at 6:32 p.m. at the Council Chambers.

Approval of Minutes – Ald. Warren **moved** to approve the minutes of the August 22, 2023 meeting. Seconded by Ald. Jeffrey, approved ayes all.

Department Head Reports

DPW

2024 Budget Presentation – E. Pepe presented his budgets for 2024. Saying that everything is basically the same except for increases in Personal Services. He noted that he added the position of Assistant Superintendent and allocated funds between the DPW departments. He explained that the increase of \$215,000 in Snow and Ice Removal is reallocating labor costs from another line. D. DuFour said this way is different from other years and makes it more difficult to compare year-to-year without that consistency. E. Pepe will go back and change it. Pepe also included and MEO I position, saying when the Working Foreman was promoted from an MEO I position in 2018, the MEO I position was not refilled and has added that into the 2024 budget. E. Pepe said the total **Highway** budgeted for 2023 was \$991,480 and increased to \$1,228,985 for 2024, mostly due to increased labor costs. The **Parks** budget had no increase.

Water – E. Pepe said Revenues are trending down and hoped that would change with the new meters, but still project \$1.484 million in revenue which will exceed expenditures of \$1.419 million. Source of Supply – Repairs & Maintenance increased to \$100,000 due to work needed at the dams and reservoirs and the replacement of motors at Wells 3 and 4. He felt there was no need to increase water rates for 2024.

He removed a Water Maintainer position in the budget and replaced it with a Senior Water Maintainer which he felt would help with recruitment. Attracting new employees has been a real problem. Adding the position would allow for employee growth and added responsibility. Discussion of the need for a Senior position ensued. Pepe said that people from other departments will need to help out due to the lack of Water Maintainers – there are still 2 vacancies to be filled. Meter Replacement will start this month and be done within the next four to six months.

Wastewater budget – E. Pepe said that Wastewater revenue is not keeping up with expenses. Cost of treatment has gone up to meet more stringent regulations. He is recommending an increase of 6% to the sewer rate. Most budget lines are the same as last year with slight increases to a couple and some decreases to others. There is still a Wastewater Treatment Plant Attendant vacancy.

Wastewater Treatment Plant – E. Pepe reported that the screen has broken and is out of service. He is working on a solution. They have been notified we are eligible for the grant of \$2 million.

Filter Plant – E. Pepe reported meeting with the DEC who are “on board” with modifying the permit. They will be filing the official application within the next month. A revised permit from DEC may be issued with an official new permit in another year, but we will be able to operate the plant under the revised permit in the meantime. He also stated there was an algae bloom on the reservoir this year, during which the Filter Plant cannot be run. The algae usually dies off with cooler weather.

Sidewalk Program – E. Pepe stated sidewalk replacement for this year have been completed with a total of 1600’ (20-25 sidewalks) being replaced.

Pickleball Striping – E. Pepe reported no re-bids for the Pickleball Striping were received. Discussion of the Non-Collusion statement was discussed. Feedback from contractors will be received and re-bid will be discussed at November’s Joint Committee meeting.

Ald. Jeffrey asked about the tree cutting on North Broad St. and York St. E. Pepe said the trees will be coming down. He will check with the contractor to see when work will be done. Ald. Zieno asked if there was a possibility of picking up yard debris once a month during the summer in addition to the Spring and Fall pickup. Pepe said that was possible.

The City paving project has been completed. DOT paving will be done by October 16th with the striping after that – the milling of South Broad will begin Thursday. The resin crosswalks will be done next year. The crosswalk south of NBT at the corner will not be replaced as requested.

Ald. Jeffrey **moved** to refill the MEO I position. Seconded by Ald. Warren, approved ayes all.

Fire Department

Outside CON EMS calls – J. Papelino reported 8 calls outside the CON – 3 were billable. One ambulance is down, so we are currently off EMS mutual aid.

ISO Update – J. Papelino hoped to have an update by tonight but has not received one yet.

Fire Prevention week Oct 8-14 -J. Papelino reported their plans for Fire Prevention week including going to Head Start, Holy Family, the YMCA and the Open House at the Firehouse.

Bell Tower – J. Papelino reported progress on the bell tower with the old planter being removed. Burrell’s has been doing a lot of the work such as the cement work and working with Sherburne Steel for the structure the bell will be mounted to. The design was done by Principle Design.

Bottle Drive – J. Papelino received a request from the CV Free Church to do a bottle drive on November 11th at the Firehouse. They will provide a certificate of insurance to the City.

Code Enforcement

Tax properties – J. Papelino reported that demolition of 18 Griffin St. would be approximately \$43,000. They have had some interest in the property recently. The RFP for 6-8 Natoli is due back by October 24th. 61 Cortland RFP is ready and will be going out soon. Papelino reported that eviction papers for 20 Barnes St. have been served.

Drawing reviews – J. Papelino reported that Aunt Mary’s house (Cortland St.) presented a conceptual idea and are waiting for drawings. Codes has been up at Chenango Memorial a few times and progress is moving forward.

RICHO Copier Purchase & Transfer – J. Papelino reported the Code Enforcement printer/copier has been down for 3 weeks with the repairperson having worked on it a few times. It was purchased in 2012 with

700,000 copies and has reached the end of its useful life. A new printer off State Bid would result in a savings over leasing. Ald. Jeffrey **moved** to approve the purchase of a copier/printer for Code Enforcement. Seconded by Ald.

Ald. Jeffrey asked what the next step is for the North Broad St. buildings [old Bluebird building] as the property owner sent a letter stating they may walk away from the property. Papelino reported that owner of 41-45 North Broad is going through the eviction process. Last week there were some fire alarm issues. In the letter the owner stated they would not be putting a lot of money into the building but did agree to fix the fire alarm issue. Ald. Jeffrey asked about the process of eminent domain to take the properties in order to clean up that block. It would be better to have the building empty than in its current state. Mayor Doliver said the buildings didn't get into the shape they are in overnight, and neither will the solution. All options are on the table.

Discussion the City has no Loitering Ordinance and the improvement in the downtown area due to increased Police presence ensued. In the last walkthrough of the North Broad buildings, 2 arrests were made and with colder weather coming an increase of "loitering" is expected to rise.

Finance

NYS Retirement Update – D. DuFour distributed information relating to the ERS and PFRS Retirement System payments. The ERS estimated payment invoice of \$234,082 for 2024 and \$270,107 for 2025 and the PFRS estimated invoice of \$775,807 for 2024 and \$947,375 for 2025. The last time the City amortized NYSLRS payment was 2016 with amortization from 2014-2016 paid in full by 2/1/26; all NYSLRS have been paid in full since 2017. In April 2023 a new law was enacted that allows employers in the Contribution Stabilization Program (CSP) to withdraw, which she recommends the City does. To do so would require payment of all previous amortizations which would need a transfer of *\$87,335 General Fund from the State Contribution Reserve with Water and Sewer portions of *\$15,879 would come from their Contingency accounts. (*Exact amounts will come from the NYSLRS). Benefits of withdrawing will allow payment of a normal rate instead of a higher graded rate and avoid the employer graded payment they charge for belonging to the program. Ald. Loomis **moved** to pay the amortized amounts and request to withdraw from the CPS program. Seconded by Ald. Jeffrey, approved ayes all.

Human Resources

Department Head Benefits & Non-Unit Benefits – L. Murray reported that the benefit summary sheets that were sent to the Council have not been changed in 20 and 13 years respectively and need to be updated. She, along with the Mayor and D. DuFour have updated the benefits to be more in-line with the those that union employees receive. Ald. Jeffrey **moved** to approve the Department Head and Non-Unit Benefit summary sheets. Seconded by Ald. Loomis, approved ayes all.

Police Department

2024 Budget Presentation – S. Burlison presented the 2024 Police budget saying that increases included Personal Services, Overtime, Equipment, Contracted Services, and Travel and Training. The cost of tuition at the Mohawk academy has almost doubled. The new Detective position is not included in the budget because costs for that will be covered by a grant if it is awarded.

Transfer for Overtime - S. Burlison requested a transfer of \$13,100 to cover projected overtime for the year. It was thought this may not be enough and D. DuFour will check with the Police Chief on the actual amount of the transfer. Ald. **Jeffrey** moved to approve a transfer for Police Overtime. Seconded by Ald. Warren, approved ayes all.

Community Development

Downtown Business Relief Program – E. Scrivener gave an update on the Downtown Business Relief program saying to date they have awarded 3 projects, denied 1 and have 2 pending. A closing date for applications is October 31, 2023.

DRI Small Business Grant Fund – E. Scrivener reported the application process for the DRI Small Business Grant Fund is now open. All commercial properties in the DRI district are eligible to apply with applications due November 30, 2023. The grant has a 50-50 matching component.

EPA Grant Update – E. Scrivener reported that out of the \$2.5 million EPA grant for the Watermain project we have received \$1.48 million in reimbursement so far. The next grant will be for the I&I.

Animal Ordinance – E. Scrivener reported that the Planning Commission was asked to look at the Animal Ordinance, particularly about the keeping of chickens. At this time the Planning Commission voted 5 -1 to not recommend any changes to the Ordinance. They will be looking at it in the future and will look at how other municipalities deal with chickens.

Other Items

Leaf Bag Policy – Mayor Doliver announced that paper bags for the City yard waste pickup will be available free of charge at City Hall while supplies last. He proposed that the sole use of paper or biodegradable bags be used effective Spring of 2024. He has contacted stores so that they will be prepared to meet the supply next year. Ald. Allaire expressed concern about the bags tipping over and spilling its contents. Ald. Jeffrey **moved** to approve the use of either paper or biodegradable bags for yard waste pickup by the DPW effective Spring of 2024. Seconded by Ald. Warren, approved ayes all.

Re-appointment of Patrick Flanagan as Part-time City Judge – Ald. Loomis **moved** to reappoint Patrick Flanagan as to a six-year term as Part-time City Judge. Seconded by Ald. Jeffrey, approved ayes all.

Property Tax Exemption for Volunteer Firefighters & Ambulance Workers – Mayor Doliver presented the Committee with the idea of a partial property tax exemption for volunteer Firefighters and ambulance workers that NYS is allowing. He said anything that will help attract or keep volunteers should be done. The limit of the exemption would be determined by the Council. The volunteer would need to be active and have to own their primary residence within the City limits. Mayor Doliver will check with other communities to see how they are doing it.

3 Court Staff Parking Spaces on West Park Place – S. Burlison said the Traffic Commission received a letter requesting 3 dedicated parking spaces on West Park Place for Court employees (not on nights and weekends), citing safety concerns. The Traffic Commission's recommendation is to add the 3 dedicated parking spaces. Currently there is 1 reserved for the judge and a handicap space. The merchants have not been contacted to see if they had any concerns. Ald. Loomis felt that there was enough space in the County Office Building lot. Ald. Allaire understood the safety concerns and would approve the request. Input from nearby merchants was requested and Mayor Doliver would reach out to them.

Set Trick or Treat Hours – Ald. Jeffrey **moved** to set Trick or Treat as Tuesday, October 31, 2023 from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Those not wishing to participate may leave their porch lights off. Seconded by Ald. Allaire, approved ayes all.

EMO

- ◆ **Stream Gauge Update** – S. Cady reported that a crew should be out Friday afternoon. They are bringing a new mother board and other replacement parts for the units. The contract was signed February 21, 2022 after which the company was bought out, so it has been a long time coming. There are no other vendors close by and if we did find a vendor it would be hundreds of thousands of dollars to start from scratch. It was suggested a letter from the City Attorney to sent.

Executive Session – Ald. Allaire **moved** to enter executive session at 8:46 p.m. to discuss the employment history of a particular individual and contract negotiations and pending litigation. Seconded by Ald. Loomis, approved ayes all.

Ald. Loomis **moved** to exit executive session at 9:30 p.m. Seconded by Ald. Allaire, approved ayes all.

Adjournment

Ald. Zieno **moved** to adjourn the Joint Committee Meeting at 9:32 p.m. Seconded by Ald. Jeffrey, approved ayes all.