COMMON COUNCIL
Special Work Session Meeting

October 9, 2000

Mayor Robert Raphael presided at a special budget work session meeting of the Common Council held at 7:02 PM on October 9, 2000, at One Court Plaza.

Present:
Mayor Robert Raphael
Ald. Gary Clark
Ald. McNeil
Ald. Jeffrey Thornton
Ald. Sharon Jeffer
Ald. Joseph Biviano

Also:
Director of Finance William Roberts
City Historian Patricia Scott
Police Chief Joseph Angelino
EMO A. Jones
Members of Parks Commission:
Chair, Muriel True
Stewart Chase
Linda Getchonis
Francis Hailey
Gilbert Harrington

Absent:
Ald. Robert Rabinowitz

Review of Tentative 2001 Budgets – Mayor Raphael turned the meeting over to Director of Finance Roberts to review scheduled categories of the tentative budget.

Records Management & Historian: Ald. McNeil asked what the contracted services line represented for Records Management. Ms. Scott indicated that it entirely related to SARA grants. Ald. Biviano asked if this meant that any of those costs were funded through local taxpayer dollars. Roberts responded that no, it was entirely through the SARA State Aid program. He also referred to a schedule reflecting SARA grant funds for 1999 through the 2001 projected budget year. Ald. McNeil asked about slight increases in the Historian's budget. Ms. Scott stated that the cost of minimal office needs and books & subscriptions required a little more than has been available in past years. Ald Biviano asked about the City Clerk requesting a complimentary subscription from the Evening Sun, official City newspaper. This will be looked into.

Police Department & Dog Control: Chief Angelino summarized the major changes indicated in the 2001 tentative budget versus the current year. They are primarily all related to the two new officers positions and the acquisition of a vehicle for dog control / parking in addition to the usually scheduled rotation of a patrol car. Discussion followed around possible alternatives such as switching vehicles with Fire or Codes and/or the timing for the vehicle purchase to reduce the cost and/or spread it out over an additional year. Chief Angelino will coordinate with the Fire Chief on exploring possibilities. Part of the discussion also touched on building facilities, and Ald. Biviano asked that a analysis be made of operational and maintenance costs of buildings city-wide. Also, he asked for a listing of insurance costs on city vehicles.

Emergency Preparedness: EMO A. Jones reviewed the details of the expanded operations of the office in its new location in the Police Department facility. Virtually all of the increased costs center on equipment and telephone & communications. Jones explained that $1,500 of the total cost of $2,950 for general equipment would be planned for 2001, and the other $1,450 would be in 2002. In addition to the $1,500, another $550 for 3 telephones would bring the total equipment line for 2001 to $2,050. Further discussion on possible alternatives resulted in a reduction to the equipment line of $125, changing it to $1925. Ald. Thornton asked where the departmental function was going in terms of scope and size and corresponding budget costs over the next 2 to 5 years. A. Jones responded that he believed it could be stabilized fairly close to the 2001 budget level over the next several years, while meeting its current mission and purpose. A related question was asked as to how the function was performed in previous years (about five or six years ago), when the cost was close to only $1,000. Mayor Raphael indicated that it had been performed as an extra duty by various police officers. Jones pointed out, however, that nothing significant was ever accomplished in that mode, and that to appropriately meet the needs and goals of effective emergency preparedness it requires the current operating model. Ald. McNeil suggested that a new capital reserve account for emergency preparedness equipment be established. Ald. Biviano also requested that the Clerk write a letter to the Internet service company requesting a contribution of complimentary internet connection for the department.

Parks Budget Follow-Up: At this point, approximately 8:00 PM, Mayor Raphael asked the Parks Commission members who had arrived about ten minutes earlier, following their regular monthly meeting, to discuss questions regarding capital reserves and special projects items in their budget. W. Roberts added that earlier confusion revolved around definitions of terms, such as "Green Belt", "Green Way", and the "River Enhancement Project". Chairman Muriel True first pointed out that to the Parks Commission, "Green Belt" and "Green Way" were one and the same project. The "River Enhancement Project" concept, however, was not a Parks concept and did not involve them. The $8,000 amount designated in Special Projects for Green Belt was to pay for professional consulting costs to have a thorough study prepared of how the project might most effectively be accomplished. Discussion followed regarding the original Parks Green Belt concept that has been explored over the past several years, and the recent Community Development department initiation of a grant application for a walkway / trail. While separate, the two concepts overlap in terms of the geographical areas they involve, running approximately from north of the City line through parts of the City, and down to the Wastewater Treatment Plant location. Additional discussion suggested that while they overlapped, the two initiatives did not necessarily duplicate each other, but rather could probably be interwoven in a complementary fashion. Meanwhile, W. Roberts clarified the accounting effects from how items were budgeted. If an operating expenditure line item (top section of the budget) is not spent or encumbered by the end of a year, it is permanently deleted and no longer available. Amounts designated under capital reserves, however, are transferred into the corresponding reserve by year end, and are accumulated and maintained to be available for future years' needs. These are the only two categories under which items wind up in the final budget. The "Special Projects" listed at the bottom of the preliminary worksheet need to be moved into one of the above two groups once they are approved. Otherwise, they will not appear in the final budget. Roberts also observed that the Parks Commission and others have envisioned specific intended applications within Parks reserves accounts, and said he would pursue setting up a simple means to keep track of how much of a particular reserve is earmarked for such purposes. Ald. Biviano pointed out that the special projects amounts of $8,000 for Green Belt, and $10,000 for Weiler Park walkway, would have to be weighed against many other demands on the total City budget, and balanced with the overall taxpayer impact. Meanwhile, the Council thanked the members for their efforts and time.

Revenue - Sales & Use Taxes: W. Roberts reviewed the analysis of history and current year's projected results, plus the 2001 budgeted amount. He pointed out that the repeating seasonal pattern that the past several years' worth of data demonstrates makes for a valid statistical extrapolation of predicting near-term revenue (over the next year to sixteen months). While the last couple of years have been on an upward trend and it continues to track accordingly, he has projected a leveling off and even slight reduction going into next year for two reasons. One is basic conservatism on the ongoing economic recovery, and the other is to allow for a full year impact of the footwear and clothing exemption that became effective on March 1, 2000, plus a possible additional exemption under the new State Empire Zones program.

General Purpose Revenue Sharing-State Aid: Roberts briefly discussed this category of unrestricted state aid, pointing out the supplemental aid amount was increased from the $100,000 level of the past two years to $250,000 in the current (2000) year. This is on top of a 5% across the board increase for all cities in the state budget passed earlier this year. Since the State fiscal year ending March 31st overlaps with the City's calendar fiscal year (ending December 31st), the amount of supplemental aid for the City's 2001 budget cannot be reliably predicted, and next year's budget is therefore limited to only the new base level of aid of $465,804.

The Council concurred with the major revenue projections, and concluded the review for this session.

Adjournment – Ald. McNeil moved to adjourn at 9:05 PM. Seconded by Ald. Clark and duly adopted, ayes all.