

MINUTES

MARCH 11, 2024

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

7:00 P.M.

Council Members in Attendance: Beth Clodfelter
Micah McCarey
Solveig Spjeldnes
Alan Swank
Michael Wood

Administrators and/or
Other Elected Officials: President Pro Tem Risner
Acting Mayor Crowl
Auditor Hecht

Items Discussed:

- Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia (ORCA 2024 Membership)
 - Wood – mentioned ORCA's Director's recent presentation as to the positive economic development impact this trail has brought to our area
 - Clodfelter – agrees, was impressed with the presentation, noting the economic development impact figures in her report, both direct (\$3.5 million) and indirect (over \$5 million) – believes the trail has a definite impact on the economy of Athens County
 - Swank – understands this is not a pressing issue, as Director Jesse Powers reported ORCA has not been totally reliant on funding operations through membership dues since 2021, only supplemented funding, as they have other sources of income; can cover expenses through the end of 2024; she stated the Council has time to figure this out, there is wriggle room – pointed out that ORCA's payroll in 2021 was \$65,000 + benefits, and the current payroll range is \$354,000 to \$400,000 only three years later – salaries appear to be high – expressed concern that Council's Finance Committee, next on tonight's meeting, is the discussion of a hiring freeze in our General Fund, and he questioned a payment to ORCA at this time of \$90,000 for bike trails – agrees the Baileys has benefit, but he would like to look at the implications of a hiring freeze, and suggested revisiting this membership fee in the second half of the year
 - Acting Mayor – shared concern by the Mayor that ORCA may be at risk without the City's membership dues payment, and noting this \$90,000 has already been encumbered and simply needs authorization by the Council
 - Auditor – understands this \$90,000 has been encumbered, but our budget has changed due to 2023 increased medical expenses – the General Fund cash

reserve is slightly under our stated policy guidelines – this policy was put into place at the request of our bond counsel, and the City should adhere to it – she is supportive of paying this membership fee when the money is there – agrees with Swank, it would be helpful if the City could wait until later in the year to make this payment

-Swank – questioned whether fiscal management of funds and adherence to policy affects our bond rating

-Auditor – yes – she cautioned not want adhering to our policy

-Swank – emphasized that a slippage in our bond rating would increase the cost of borrowing and could potentially cost the taxpayers more money

-Auditor – that is correct – need to remember that once our bond rating slips, it is hard to recover in a reevaluation

-McCarey – asked about the balance of the City's cash reserve

-Auditor – bond raters like the reserve to be 12-13% of the General Fund balance at the end of the year – City's policy range is 7.5-15% -- we are currently slightly below 7% -- the lowest the fund balance should be is \$1,391,339 and at the end of February that balance is \$1,314,733 – noted that an influx of tax revenue will be coming in, however, the idea is not to count on future revenue, but to keep it constant year-round

-McCarey – asked about any changes in revenue that may make this \$90,000 a safer decision to allocate this membership fee

-Auditor – always count on tax revenue for our expenses

-Swank – questioned what if, in 2024, our medical funds are no better

-Auditor – is hopeful that with the recent transfer of \$300,000 to the Medical Fund, changing the income tax mix, and increasing the employee transfer from \$19,800 to \$22,000 per employee, the fund balance will be sufficient

-Charlie Adkins, Athens County Commissioner – in 2021 ORCA asked for a 3-year \$90,000 commitment from the County Commissioners – the Commissioners opted to pay annually depending upon the County's budget – in 2021, 2022 and 2023 the \$90,000 was available, and an additional \$270,000 was committed to ORCA with the understanding that this Council of Governments needed to be on its own – to date, the County has paid over \$500,000, and the City over \$250,000 – the 2024 County budget does not have the \$90,000 available to commit to ORCA – he now serves on the ORCA Board, pointing out there is also a non-profit in place, the Baileys Trail, that is tasked with sustaining maintenance of the 88-mile trail

-President Pro Tem – hearing no reason to move forward at this time, the Council will address this issue later in the year

MINUTES

MARCH 11, 2024

FINANCE & PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Members in Attendance:

Jeff Risner, Chair
Beth Clodfelter, Member
Micah McCarey, Member
Michael Wood, Member

Administrators and/or
Other Elected Officials:

Acting Mayor Crowl
Auditor Hecht

ITEMS DISCUSSED:

- Hiring Freeze (General Fund)
 - Wood – asked about the impetus behind the need at this time
 - Auditor – this is an \$18 million expense fund – City needs to insure a healthy fund balance to cover unexpected expenses – a review of vacant positions will be discussed with HR before hiring into – HR will look at need and how the hire will affect the budget – emphasized this is just for employees paid out of the General Fund – her office will review the budget and report back to Council in August
 - McCarey – asked if these hires will be decided administratively, and about the role of Council
 - Auditor – Council has already approved the 2024 staffing, and hiring into those positions is now an administrative decision, however, Council does hold the purse strings – elected officials are not looking to go outside the budget Council has approved, and Council would need to approve any additional appropriations for staffing – HR is already reviewing posted vacant positions – this Resolution requesting a hiring freeze is a tool to put elected officials on notice
 - Swank – noted that the Code Enforcement (Intern) and Municipal Court (Clerk of Court and Court Administrator) are current posted vacant positions, and asked for clarification that all are being paid by the General Fund
 - Auditor – responded that these are all funded through the General Fund, adding, the Court Administrator is a new position
 - Swank – asked whether other reductions such as major capital items and travel are being considered
 - Auditor – not at this time, but should certainly be considered by elected officials in charge of their budget – unanticipated expenses will be more difficult, and need to be evaluated and approved by City Council
 - Acting Mayor – Mayor's Office understands the need for the requested hiring freeze in the General Fund and will comply to every extent possible
- Then & Now Certificate
 - Clodfelter – questioned the need for an emergency clause
 - Auditor – ORC states that these certificates must be acted on within 30 days

- Appropriations
 - o BWC (\$100,000 to General Fund, 101, T.C. 300, for 2024 payments)
 - Auditor – for several years, the City received rebates from a BWC surplus – this year that surplus is no longer there, and the City will need to fund these BWC payments once again
 - Acting Mayor – clarified that moving forward the BWC payment will come from various funds, not just the General Fund
 - Auditor – that is correct
 - o ARPA Fund (transfer of \$160,432.70)
 - Wood – asked for clarification of ARPA and ACIC funds
 - Auditor – ARPA is the American Rescue Plan Act, and ACIC is the Athens Community Improvement Corporation

ITEMS NEEDED ON AN UPCOMING CITY COUNCIL AGENDA:

1. Hiring Freeze Resolution
2. Then & Now Certificate
3. Appropriations

MINUTES TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE MARCH 11, 2024

Members in Attendance: Solveig Spjeldnes, Chair
Beth Clodfelter, Member
Micah McCarey, Member
Jeff Risner, Member

Administrators and/or
Other Elected Officials: Acting Mayor Crowl

ITEMS NEEDED ON AN UPCOMING CITY COUNCIL AGENDA:

- Stimson Avenue Bridge, Project #358 (amend 0-63-23)
 - Spjeldnes – this is for regular maintenance to keep the bridge safe – two-way traffic will be maintained with a traffic signal to lessen the impact on businesses
 - Clodfelter – asked whether the City has pursued federal funding for bridge improvements through the U.S. Infrastructure Plan
 - Acting Mayor – noted that 90% of this project is being funded through a State ODOT grant – the City is required to pay for the engineering services which is what this Ordinance is authorizing
 - Clodfelter – hopes this federal funding will be pursued for future projects

ITEMS NEEDED ON AN UPCOMING CITY COUNCIL AGENDA:

1. Amend Project #358