

MINUTES
CITY & SAFETY SERVICES COMMITTEE
NOVEMBER 23, 2020
7:00 p.m.

Members in Attendance via Videoconference: Sarah Grace, Chair
Chris Fahl, Vice-Chair
Beth Clodfelter, Member

Administrators and
Other Elected Officials via Videoconference: President Knisely
Mayor Patterson
Interim Service-Safety Director Pyle
Auditor Hecht

ITEMS DISCUSSED:

- Water and Sewer (rates)
 - Grace – the proposed change in the sewer rate is for a 4% increase and a water increase of 3% -- the storm water monthly rate will be increased as follows: residential from \$2.00 to \$4.00; commercial and industrial rates from \$4.00 to \$6.00 – a significant part of this increase will be used to fund a new Environmental Coordinator position – this storm water rate has not been changed since it was instituted about 10 years ago – there will be an increase from \$0.05 to \$0.065 per gallon for hauled septage – delinquency letters are proposed to be increased from \$15.00 to \$25.00, a delinquent turn-on fee increase from \$40.00 to \$50.00, a transfer turn-on fee increase from \$35.00 to \$50.00, and a proposed new turn-off fee (after hours) at the meter is not yet determined – she has spoken with concerned residents about further increases in the City's sewer and water rates – since the water rates are set by the Service-Safety Director she questioned when that last increase was put into effect and at what percentage – she also expressed concern for increasing the delinquency letter fee and the transfer turn-on fee – she understands that the Auditor would like the sewer and water increases to go into effect on January 1st – she is concerned about the short turnaround time of these rate changes – understands that some percentage of increase is needed in sewer and water in order to meet the City's 2021 debt obligation, but she wants to be sure we are doing the best that we can to minimize the cost to our residents – would like a concise breakdown of our financial obligations, along with project revenue at both the current rate and increased incremental rates

-Clodfelter – shares Grace’s concerns with some of these rate increases at a time when many residents are already struggling financially due to the pandemic – should keep rate increases as low as possible -- would also prefer not to increase the delinquency letter fee

-Fahl – explained the importance of the increase in the storm water funding – certain regulations and reporting are required by the EPA – clean storm water is important to both our health and the environment

-Kotses – questioned whether a number of the miscellaneous fees have not been increased in some time, and whether we are catching up after a decade of no increase

-Grace – understands that general operating costs increase, that associated fees need to be changed, and that we are obligated to provide sanitary services to the City and need to take the steps necessary in order to pay for those services – again, she just wants to be sure that we are being fiscally responsible, and at the same time mindful of the financial hardships to our users, and would prefer changes be done incrementally with smaller fee adjustments

-Fahl – suggested the requested increases be phased in through the year

-Interim S-S Director – the after-hours call out fee is important as a deterrent – contractors tend to call at the end of a day’s shift, requiring a City employee come back in at overtime pay to turn off the water at the meter – he will report back to Council prior to the next meeting about the need for the miscellaneous fee adjustments – the increases in the water and sewer adjustments would amount to an approximate \$3.87 increase per month for the average 2000 gallon per month user – again, the Auditor has recommended the water and sewer increases in order to stay financially sound

-Crowl – understands that rates need to be increased to meet our debt – asked if the delay in the City-County Sewer Expansion Project, and the tap fees expected from that, has impacted our sewer budget

-Auditor – the City has spent quite a bit of money on improvements and equipment for the City-County Sewer Expansion Project, with no monetary return due to delays in the project – the water and sewer rates are typically increased annually to cover the City’s costs for maintenance services and upgrades to our facilities – the debt service in these funds is high, and we have a legal obligation to fund these operations – the annual sewer debt alone is \$1.25 million, and that does not include supplies, maintenance and employees – the suggested rate increases are not unreasonable nor are they avoidable – added that another issue at this time is that there are more than twice the number of delinquent accounts and reduced revenue due to the pandemic – lastly, the Environmental Coordinator is an important position to add to our staffing, noting that a non-renewed third party contract will add \$35,000 toward payment of this position

-Grace – clarified that City Council approval is not needed for the water rate increase – again, she just wants to be sure that the increased rates that we're discussing are truly and absolutely necessary – she does not feel it is best practice for Council to be told at the end of November that rate increases are needed and that they must be in place by January – this timeline can only be met with a special session and an emergency clause on the legislation – would also like there to be adequate time for Council discussion as well as an advance courtesy notice to customers before the rate increase appears on their bill

-Mayor – the delayed tap fees the City expects with the City-County Sewer Expansion Project, and the financial outlay by the City for design engineering and materials will now be a phased-in project due to unacceptable project bids – the County has three years to complete

MINUTES: NOVEMBER 23, 2020

FINANCE & PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

7:00 p.m.

Members in Attendance via Videoconference: Sam Crowl, Chair
Jeff Risner, Vice-Chair
Peter Kotses, Member
Arian Smedley, Member

Administrators and/or

Other Elected Officials via Videoconference: President Knisely
Mayor Patterson
Interim Service-Safety Director Pyle
Auditor Hecht

ITEMS DISCUSSED:

- Athens County Convention & Visitors Bureau (ACCVB)
 - Crowl – 3-year agreement renewal – 50% of the City's Tourism Fund revenue goes to operation of ACCVB – he recommends no changes
 - Boone Troyer, Interim Executive Director of ACCVB – as Interim Director he has focused on organizational tasks, updating policies and procedures, and design aspects of their website – noted that several staff members were on furlough last summer due to COVID-19 – of the remaining 3 full-time employees and one part-time employee, one has been permanently laid-off – budgeting has been reviewed down to the penny – has been in contract negotiations with an inordinate number of companies related to the agency – was able to decrease the amount of money being paid into those agencies – important to continue those relationships as ACCVB rebuilds in 2021 for increased marketing/funding – focus moving forward in 2021 is toward offering regional tourism in a safe way – the Windy 9 will, again, be happening, along with promoting outdoor recreation (mental health and wellness in outdoor spaces) – would like to work on a 3-5 year plan – marketing outreach will be closer to home due to safety precautions – again, he is intently focused on the budget, and ensuring a high return on investment in terms of marketing
 - Kotses – asked about his interim status
 - Troyer – he will be voted in as Executive Director on December 1, 2020
 - Kotses – asked about ACCVB's hit from the Transient Guest Tax (TGT) during the pandemic
 - Troyer – lodging tax is fairly low – through the negotiated contract savings and lower payroll payouts, he is confident that ACCVB will make it through the winter – hope is that during the spring things will begin to turn and more folks will be visiting our area – even with the virus, people are still staying at the Airbnb's, and are focused on outdoor recreation – unfortunately, that is not the case for the hotels
 - Smedley – cannot imagine the challenges he has faced in his first months as Interim Director

-Troyer – is focused on taking on the challenge; it's not going to be easy with the decreased funding, but his goal is to change that

-Clodfelter – believes the “parklet” idea for restaurants can be used to promote visitors to dine uptown Athens

-Troyer – agrees, they give a unique perspective to dining on Court Street

-Clodfelter – even half a percent of the 4 million people a year visiting Hocking Hills would be really good for our local economy

-Troyer – he reaches out to those folks through very specific programming

-Mayor – asked if ACCVB tracks tax coming in from short-term rentals vs hotels

-Troyer – yes, this funding can be tracked

- Third Party Health Insurance Administrator

-Crowl – this is an annual agreement as part of the City's self-insurance plan – there are no plans to change the administrator (Employee Benefits Center) in 2021

- Stop-Loss Medical Insurance

-Crowl – this, too, is an annual agreement – again, no plan to change organizations (Sirius America) in 2021

-Fahl – asked for clarification of stop-loss

-Pyle – since the City is self-insured it also enters into a stop-loss insurance program to protect the City from catastrophic health issues – the stop-loss program covers costs over and above a certain amount

-Grace – asked if this is a limit per employee, or as a family

-Pyle – it is per insured, so also applies to all dependents

- Cemetery Fund

-Crowl – this fund has struggled since acquiring the West State and West Union Cemeteries in 2015 – revenues do not meet expenses – Auditor is recommending a transfer from the General Fund into the Cemetery Fund – the City plans to begin selling plots

-Auditor – revenues coming in average \$5000-\$7000 annually for monument placement and interment, but is not enough to support associated maintenance costs – expenses have been as high as \$50,000-\$60,000 per year – the General Fund has been subsidizing the Cemetery Fund – a fund will be created to better track revenue – clarified that State Law does not permit a levy to raise funds for cemeteries

-Kotses – asked whether staffing for the cemetery work will continue to be paid out of the Lands & Buildings Fund

-Auditor – the City has two part-time staff that in 2021 will be paid out of the Cemetery Fund

-Mayor – the City is exploring the cost of a columbarium at the West Union Cemetery, large enough for 300 + urns – if cost effective, will consider moving forward

- Appropriations/Transfers (2020)
 - Crowl – Auditor’s Office is recommending transferring \$60,000 from the General Fund to the Cemetery Fund
- Vacant Staff Positions
 - Crowl – Council requested the Administration apprise the Council before staffing vacant positions during the pandemic – at this time the Service-Safety Director is recommending filling a number of vacant positions – he also wished to express his condolences to the family of Ray Gerren, a valued member of our staff serving the City as electrician
 - Interim S-S Director – the Administration would like to fill the following positions:
 - Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator
 - Mechanic
 - Maintenance Tech
 - Street Supervisor
 - Solid Waste Inspector
 - Mayor – need to be sure that critical positions are filled to maintain daily operations, and to keep down overtime costs
 - Auditor – requested a list of the positions to include those that will be filled in-house, along with a timeline
 - Pyle – he will provide that – with full-time, permanent part-time, and intern vacancies the City is well over 20 positions down
- Environmental Coordinator
 - Crowl – this is a new position that has been contemplated for well over a year to coordinate and serve as inspector for the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit program designed to protect our rivers, lakes and streams from polluted storm water runoff, and will directly manage protection of our surface waters, National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit – it will also alleviate some of the issues with staffing the Wastewater Treatment Plant – this position will be funded from storm water, sewer and water fees
 - Kotses – noted that the City has contracted out a portion of these duties with the Athens Soil and Water Conservation District (ASWCD)
 - I S-S Director – that is correct – the contract rate was slightly over \$33,000 – one of the auxiliary duties Service-Safety Director Stone had intended for this position was to be a backup technician for the Water and Wastewater Lab – both employees are of retirement age – this position could provide a built-in backup
 - Kotses – clarified that there will be a cost savings with removing the need for the ASWCD contract
 - Auditor – the associated tracking and reporting associated with this position has strict requirements for testing, and is State mandated
 - Grace – believes this would be a very valuable position – her only reservation is funding this position in that it will require raising the storm water rates on City residents, and this gives her considerable pause – would like a review of other ways our safety and reporting obligations can be met a bit longer – the cost of this new position is significantly more than the contract with ASWCD – while she understands this employee’s duties would be more encompassing, she would

like additional information on other cost saving measures – fee increases can be justified to meet existing obligations, but she hesitates increasing them over and above for a new hire – it's not that she doubts the value of the position, but perhaps the additional information will reflect on the necessity of the timing, along with any expenses the City may incur if this position is not approved

-Crowl – shares her concerns on raising fees at this very difficult time, noting that one of the fees that has been proposed is the storm water fee that has not changed in quite some time

-Kotses – acknowledged that the storm water fee has not changed since its inception approximately ten years ago

- ACC Title 17, Taxes

-Crowl – due to COVID-19, many Ohio employees are working remotely from home, no longer within the municipality – some suburbs of larger cities would like the income tax that would normally go to the municipality to go to where the work is actually being performed – obviously, this would be a huge problem for a rural municipality like Athens who relies heavily on income tax revenue – the proposed amendment is temporary in that it is directly related to the pandemic – this amendment is to ensure that these income taxes will continue to come to the City of Athens and not where a remote worker is currently living

-Auditor – estimate from our largest employer is a \$2 million loss to the City if we are not able to tax those Ohio University employees who do not live within the City limits – this would be a terrible loss for the City – added, if City employees live in an area that does not collect local tax, such as Athens County, the employee would not pay any local income taxes – it is important that the law continue as it is through this period of the pandemic, and in order for that to happen this amended temporary wording is required to be part of our City Code

-Crowl – this change is part of HB 197, Section 29

ITEMS NEEDED ON THE NEXT CITY COUNCIL AGENDA:

- 1. ACCVB**
- 2. Third Party**
- 3. Stop-Loss**
- 4. Cemetery**
- 5. Environmental Coordinator**
- 6. ACC Title 17**

MINUTES
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
NOVEMBER 23, 2020
7:00 p.m.

Members in Attendance via Videoconference: Chris Fahl, Chair
Jeff Risner, Vice-Chair
Sarah Grace, Member
Arian Smedley, Member

Administrators and/or Other Elected Officials
via Videoconference: President Knisely
Mayor Patterson
Planner Logue

Items Discussed:

- Comprehensive Plan (update)
 - Fahl – it is necessary to put forward the time and energy needed for a workable City Plan – good planning makes for a stronger community looking toward sustainability and resiliency – aside from the product, the planning process of including community members in this long-range decision-making is important for the City’s vision – our Planner has done a phenomenal job
 - Planner Logue – offered a broad view of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan (see attached presentation)
 - Smedley – appreciates the planning process with strong outreach to the community for feedback, and that the Planner was available to the various neighborhood associations in discussing the Plan – is pleased to see many west side issues being addressed
 - Logue – more than 400 people participated in the Plan through small group discussions, town hall meetings, stakeholder engagement, online survey work, and meetings on campus with students – some of the best parts of planning come through ideas heard in these meetings
 - Crowl – thanked Planner Logue for his tremendous effort in reaching out to the community – great work
 - Grace – participated in the Highland Park neighborhood meeting and extended her thanks for the approach the Planner took in reaching out and being open to community ideas – is a valuable asset to all of us

-Kotses – as a Councilman, making decisions without input is challenging – because of the community participation, this document will be extremely helpful in moving the City forward – asked about making adjustments to this long-term Plan

-Logue – the Plan will be reviewed every 4-5 years for findings and relevancy, and any major changes that may have occurred that were not anticipated

-Fahl – after adoption of the Plan an Ad Hoc Committee will be formed to develop baselines and establish priorities

-Mayor – in year 11 (2016) of the 2020 Comprehensive Plan approximately 80% of the objectives had been accomplished -- the Comprehensive Plan is a dynamic document and should constantly be reviewed

-President – the Plan provides the City with a sense of direction, growth and diversification for our City

MINUTES

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

NOVEMBER 23, 2020 – 7:00 p.m.

Members in Attendance via Videoconference: Peter Kotses, Chair
Sam Crowl, Vice-Chair
Beth Clodfelter, Member

Administrators and/or

Other Elected Officials via Videoconference: President Knisely
Mayor Patterson
Interim Service-Safety Director Pyle
Auditor Hecht
Law Director Eliason

ITEMS DISCUSSED:

- Parking Garage (rental rates)
 - Kotses – an increase in the monthly rental rates is being requested in light of the recent enhancements made to the parking facility pre-COVID-19, and the loss of parking revenue during the past nine months of COVID-19 – the increased rates are needed to meet a note payment that is due on June 1 – this rate increase does not include metered spaces – the spaces seeing a monthly increase are the reserved spaces on Level 1 and below that are currently \$125.00 and will be raised to \$150.00 and the non-reserved spaces above Level 3 will be changed from \$75.00 to \$125.00 – the number of non-reserved permits will also be increased from 50 to 150 – the College Street Lot will change from \$75 to \$100.00 – written agreements for multiple non-reserved parking spaces will be offered an appropriate discount, but the minimum per space cost cannot be less than \$100 – the City currently has \$125,000 and will need \$175,000 by June 1 – hope is that these increases will net an additional \$33,000 to help bridge the gap
 - Clodfelter – asked about the demand for additional non-reserved spaces
 - Interim S-S Director – his understanding is that the 50 non-reserved spaces have only been reserved for County employees – none have been advertised for use by the public
 - Clodfelter – questioned if the demand is there whether the number of non-reserved spaces for rent could be increased
 - Interim S-S Director – it could, as long as it does not impact short-term metered parking – added, the Parking Garage has not been close to full since the pandemic
 - Grace – asked if the leased parking is for one-year or strictly on a monthly basis
 - Interim S-S Director – initially it is one year, with a 30-day escape clause – after the first year it is simply month to month

-Grace – noted that currently, due to the pandemic, the parking demand is low, but in the not too distant future there could be higher demand for short-term parking

-Interim S-S Director – the 30-day escape clause in the rental agreement works on both sides, so the City could invoke that if necessary

-Auditor – clarified that these non-reserved spaces are simply hang-tag usage, not a numbered reserved space – just because you have a hang tag doesn't guarantee you will find a parking space – it is rare, but it could happen

-Interim S-S Director – these non-reserved permits are also called hunting permits

ITEMS NEEDED ON AN UPCOMING CITY COUNCIL AGENDA:

1. Parking Garage