FINANCE COMMITTEE – BUDGET SESSION #3

Date and Time: Wednesday, October 16, 2024 @ 6:00 p.m., Council Chambers
Members Present: Micheal Martens (C), Gary Gisselman (VC), Becky McElhaney, Chad Henke
Members Absent: Vicki Tierney
Others Present: Mayor Diny, MaryAnne Groat, Todd Baeten, Nate Cihlar, Eric Lindmen, Dustin Kraege, Solomon King, Jeremy Kopp, Jamie Polley

Noting the presence of a quorum Chairperson Martens called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

Budget Discussions and Actions regarding Recommending a 2025 Budget including setting the 2025 Fee Schedule.

The finalized 2025 Operating and Capital Improvement Project Budgets was presented by MaryAnne Groat, Finance Director. Discussion was held. No action taken.

The budget reduction proposal for expense saving to move the two police officers serving the downtown area from the general fund to grants fund was discussed. Gisselman stated there should be a report on the effectiveness of the officers. It was stated the last two quarterly reports by the Police Department presented to the Public Health & Safety Committee include updates on the impact of those officers. Martens questioned how much would have to be cut in the budget if the officers position funding would be left in the general fund to meet expenditure restraint. It was stated $210,000 would be needed. McElhaney questioned the downfall of putting these positions towards grant funding. It was stated future budgets would be impacted amongst other increases needed in the budget. Martens stated support for keeping the officer position funding in the general fund as to minimize the impact of future budgets. Henke suggested splitting the funding source among the two officers for funding one officer by general revenue and one officer from grant funding.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to cancel membership to the US Mayor's association by the Mayor's Office, move loan software from the general funds to TID and other revolving funds by the Finance Department was discussed. Martens stated this was low hanging fruit to cut expenses.

The budget reduction proposal for expense saving to eliminate window cleaning at city hall, the police stations, and the fire stations by the Facilities Department was discussed. Martens stated this was low hanging fruit to cut expenses. Gisselman stated the city hall should be maintained to its highest quality to represent the city well. Henke stated support for window cleaning as the cleanliness of city hall is often noted.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to close one pool by the Parks Department was discussed. Martens stated this was a non-starter as the city had not even finished paying for these projects.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to eliminate Sylvan Hill operations by the Parks Department was discussed. Martens stated this was a big amenity that is often operated at a loss as an improvement in quality-of-life operation that many other municipalities do not have themselves. Gisselman questioned if the fee schedule could be investigated to cover the costs of the operation.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to eliminate flower baskets downtown by the Parks Department was discussed. Henke stated this was a proposed cut that would upset a number of residents and that this could hinder the promotion of the downtown.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to eliminate the Dragon Natural Speaking software by the Police Department was discussed. Martens questioned if the low utilization rate justified the reduction. It was stated the utilization rate was down year over year prompting the proposed cut. Martens questioned if this technology could be used with other technologies contracted to the department. It was stated this was possible especially with the lower utilization rate.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to decrease the overtime budget by the Police Department was discussed. McElhaney questioned the impact of the reduction. It was stated this would be done without an impact of services and by being more cognizant of authorizing overtime for administrative activities that can wait for regular hours. Martens stated the public safety fee for ticketed events could help with this reduction.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to eliminate the animal control program by the Police Department was discussed. Martens noted the significant effort put into redefining the program in the previous year. It was stated there was a want for the Common Council to see how that new program would pan out over a year. McElhaney questioned if this would eliminate the humane officer training. It was stated that the training would continue with sworn officers regardless.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to postpone hiring a vacant Assistant City Attorney by the Attorney's Department was discussed. McElhaney questioned if this helps with meeting the expenditure restraint. It was stated this would be a temporary help to reduce expenditures. Gisselman questioned if the department could operate without an additional attorney with the current workload. Martens questioned if it would take a couple of months to fill this position even if it was posted now and stated this could be a viable reduction.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to eliminate leaf pick up by the Department of Public Works was discussed. Henke stated this proposal would not reduce the phosphorus discharge rate and stated a yard waste day in the fall could be an alternative. McElhaney stated this is seen as a service which is expected by residents as a return on a higher property tax rate and expressed safety concerns if people need to walk on roads that have large leaf piles alongside. Gisselman stated this is a tree city for which we should be proud and this a service that is needed due to that characteristic. McElhaney question if eliminating one pick up would be a viable option. It was stated this is a tricky thing to plan for with weather and capacity considerations. Martens stated a similar question. It was stated the cost savings would likely be minimal if there was a reduction in services. Gisselman stated the importance in 2025 to get ahead of a possible reduction to give residents notice.

The budget reduction proposal for revenue increases to modify township rates by the Fire Department was discussed. Henke stated other municipalities are getting a great service by the department provided to residents of other municipalities who do not pay city property taxes. Henke further questioned if there were state rules on the amount that these rates can be charged at. It was stated there were no general rules on rates and the only risk would be if a township decided to seek another municipality to cover those services. Martens questioned if this was part of a mutual aid assistance. It was stated this would not impact that assistance agreement. McElhaney stated city residents can't subsidize these services for non-city residents.

The budget reduction proposal for revenue increases to remove airboat from service and sell by the Fire Department was discussed. Martens questioned the annual maintenance fee for the airboat. It was stated the maintenance had a high cost. McElhaney questioned how often the vehicle is used. It was stated this has been utilized 26 times since its initial purchase in 2017.

The budget reduction proposal for eliminating the warning for first annual parking offenses downtown for time expired, overtime, and no permit violations by the Police Department was discussed. Martens stated the city changed parking goals in 2019 and stated the one free warning was to get people used to the new system. It was stated that after five years, people should be used to the new system. Henke questioned if there would be a change in parking enforcement staff. It was stated this would not require more staffing. Gisselman questioned the revenue increase amount. It was stated it would be flexible in the amount collected as people may be more careful with parking violations with this change. Martens stated concerns with balancing the budget based on enforcement of violations. McElhaney stated a large savings would be punitive. It was stated that $40,000 would be a better estimate for a possible revenue increase in the budget.

The budget reduction proposal for revenue increased to initiate vehicle lockout service fees of $40 and modify the false alarm fee schedule and eliminate the second annual free alarm response rate structure by the Police Department, and levy fees for lock out assistance using Knox Box Keets and modify reinspection charges by the Fire Department was discussed. Martens stated surprise that the department had offered a free vehicle lockout service for so many years and stated concerns on the administrative cost of collection on those invoices.

The budget reduction proposal for revenue increased to implement a public safety fee to cover 400 Block Concerts via permit fee adjustment by the Police Department was discussed. Martens stated the focus should be on ticketed events.

The budget reduction proposal for revenue increase to levy a special event public safety charge for ticketed events was discussed. Gisselman questioned how the revenue increase amount was calculated. It was stated this was using past estimates of previous ticket sales for these events with the estimated $1 per ticket fee. Gisselman questioned if the Wisconsin Valley Fair was currently being charged. McElhaney questioned if other city services were charged for providing such services and the overtime impact of past services offered by the Fire Department of a special event. It was stated services are provided and done so in a way to ensure regular services are not impeded. McElhaney stated attendees of these events are not just city residents, but city residents pay for the services offered. Martens stated the fees could be used for other services the city offers to special events.

Without objection, public comment was provided.

1. Peter Valiska, current President of the Board of Directors for Wausau Area Events – spoke on concerns of adding fees to special events for public safety.
2. Alissandra Aderholdt, current Executive Director at Wausau Area Events – spoke on concerns of adding fees to special events for public safety.

Martens directed staff to compile a complete outline of the proposals discussed to bring to the next Finance Committee meeting to bring a finalized motion for the committee to consider.

Link to the 2025 Budget Book:
https://www.wausauwi.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/12669/638648621517800000
Link to the 2025 Capital Improvement Program Planning Book:
https://www.wausauwi.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/11711/638538937698600000

Adjourn
Motion by Henke, second by McElhaney, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

For full meeting video on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6Y1zwYfsEU