FINANCE COMMITTEE – BUDGET SESSION #4

Date and Time: Tuesday, October 29, 2024 @ 5:15 p.m., Council Chambers
Members Present: Micheal Martens (C), Gary Gisselman (VC), Becky McElhaney (arrived at 5:22 p.m.), Chad Henke (left at 6:05 p.m.), Vicki Tierney
Others Present: Mayor Diny, MaryAnne Groat, Matt Barnes, Jeremy Kopp, Eric Lindmen

Noting the presence of a quorum Chairperson Martens called the meeting to order at 5:18 p.m.

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

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to eliminate window cleaning at city hall, the police stations, and the fire stations by the Facilities Department was discussed. Gisselman stated the best must be presented to the residents of the city and that means a clean city hall. Martens stated a good appearance is priceless and stated this is a low priority to cut.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to stop funding state mandated assessor training by the Assessment Department was discussed. Martens stated this would be a no-go as this is state mandated and part of these employee's job description.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to close one pool by the Parks Department was discussed. Gisselman stated being in favor of pools and stated support for expanding pool operations as they are a valuable resource. Tierney stated concerns with other pools needing to close for maintenance leading to overcrowding at the only potentially open pool. Martens stated that once infrastructure is turned off, it becomes harder to reopen citing concerns on future reopening should the pool close.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to eliminate Sylvan Hill operations by the Parks Department was discussed. Gisselman stated support of this operation for winter fun and as a service to residence. Martens stated concerns of the loss of funds when a light winter reduces operation at the expense of overhead costs.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to eliminate flower baskets downtown by the Parks Department was discussed. Tierney stated this was a cost on residents that could be looked at to cut. McElhaney stated residents supported the flower baskets that looked nice and requested that this not be eliminated if other reductions can be made.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to eliminate the animal control program by the Police Department was discussed. Tierney questioned if animal control calls would just be handled by the department. It was stated animal control calls would be handled regardless of the program level to be handled by sworn officers. Martens stated there was a balance in an animal control fund that could be used to continue the program as a pilot. Gisselman stated support of the program as was recently reformed by the Common Council as promised to the citizens. Martens stated a preference to see if the pilot program was successful. Henke stated similar support of seeing how the pilot program operates.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to eliminate recruiting expenses by the Police Department was discussed. Martens questioned if there was value in those efforts. It was stated recruitment was valuable but there was an anticipated lower level of recruitment in the next year. Gisselman questioned how much was spent on recruitment. It was stated the full $4,000 was used in the current fiscal year.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to reduce CSO hours by the Police Department was discussed. Tierney questioned if the elimination of the animal control program would negate this proposal. It was stated the remaining funds should be used in the CSO budget.

The budget reduction proposal for expense savings to eliminate leaf pick up by the Department of Public Works was discussed. Tierney questioned how much it would be to eliminate one leaf pick up. It was stated it would be $56,000 to reduce that service. Tierney stated support with reducing the service to one leaf pick up with a preference to the later pick up timeframe.

The budget reduction proposal for revenue increases to create a $25 wheel tax by the Engineering Department was discussed. Tierney stated this is an item that should be discussed in the future. Martens also stated this should be a future consideration should levy limits offer little other options.

The budget reduction proposal for revenue increases to bill for fire services was discussed. Tierney stated opposition to this proposal as it creates additional burdens on people who experience a devastating fire. McElhaney questioned if services are charged for EMS calls where a patient is not transported. It was stated those services are not billed if there is minimal patient contact as an added service provided. Henke stated this was an idea that could be considered in the future. Martens stated more information would be needed to enact on this now.

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. Tierney questioned why concerts would be charged but other events would not. It was stated the fees would be based on the level of services needed. Tierney stated that these fees should be applied to other events.

The budget reduction proposal for revenue increase to levy a special event public safety charges for ticketed events was discussed. Henke stated support of having the Public Health & Safety Committee create a policy for implementing the fees for any ticketed event the Police and Fire Department needs to be at and allocate half the proposed revenue from fees to that effort. McElhaney stated support for staff to explore this policy with the committee and stated this was supported by the community as it is charged in other municipalities for those services. McElhaney stated this demonstrates the expense of delivering those services. Martens stated support for the charges over eliminating the animal control program and other budget reduction proposal for expense savings. McElhaney questioned if the overtime towards special events was tracked to give an idea of the expense. It was stated these events were not formally tracked but estimated to be $100,000 in overtime expenses. McElhaney stated opposition to the budget if this proposal is not included to prevent cutting further services, such as leaf pick up, by city residents at the expense of non-city residents attending these events which require city services. Gisselman questioned how additional funds generated would be accounted. It was stated additional funds would close out to reserves and would only be used for additional department capital expense if directed.

Without objection, staff are directed to use $70,000 as a revenue increase to levy special event public safety charges for ticketed events and not move forward on other budget reduction proposals for expense savings to meet the Mayor's goal of increasing the levy by under 2.5% and send that proposal to the Public Health & Safety Committee to implement a policy on levying the fees.

Henke is excused from the rest of the meeting.

Motion by Tierney, seconded by McElhaney, to increase the budget amount for the Washington Street siphon project. Motion carried 4-0.

Motion by Gisselman, seconded by Tierney, to approve the fee schedule as printed in the packet. Motion carried 4-0.

The budget reduction proposal for revenue increases to remove airboat from service and sell by the Fire Department was discussed. Martens shared concerns of the Fire Chief as to not having a solution to take place of the airboat should it be sold. Martens directed that revenue increase to be removed from consideration as it does not impact the levy targets.

Gisselman questioned the increases in the Fire Department and Police Department budgets. It was stated many of those increase for the Fire Department were towards increases in staffing as increases in firefighter positions had not been increased gradually over time but at once recently which accounts for those increases many of which are covered by grants.

Motion by McElhaney, seconded by Tierney, to approve the 2025 Budget as amended in the subsequent budget sessions. Motion carried 4-0.

Link to the 2025 Final Budget Book:
https://www.wausauwi.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/12870/638669319927630000
Link to the 2025 Initial 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

Discussion and possible action authorizing the Mayor to sign the FHWA/WISDOT Subrecipient LPA Title VI/Nondiscrimmination Assurances for receiving federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Transportation
Motion by McElhaney, seconded by Gisselman, to approve. Motion carried 4-0.

Adjourn
Motion by Tierney, second by Gisselman, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

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