



City Council Special Meeting Minutes Municipal Budget Session II Monday, May 17, 2021 - 6:00 p.m. Council Chambers, City Hall

Council in attendance: Interim Mayor Olivia Zink, Councilor Jo Brown, Councilor Scott Clarenbach, Councilor Bob Desrochers, Councilor Jay Chandler, Councilor Ted Starkweather, Councilor Karen Testerman, Councilor, Councilor Paul Trudel. **Absent:** Councilor April Bunker

Others in attendance: City Manager Judie Milner, Planning and Zoning Director Dick Lewis, Municipal Services Director Brian Sullivan, Parks and Recreation Director Krystal Alpers, City Clerk Katie Gargano, Finance Director Pessy Gaudette, Library Director Rob Sargent, and members of the public.

Mayor Zink called the meeting to order in Council Chambers at 6:03 p.m.

Salute to the Flag was led by Councilor Trudel.

Agenda Item I.

City Manager Milner provided a recap of last week's presentation. Next week will focus on Economic Development, Solid Waste, and Sewer & Water.

FY2022 Manager's Budget Proposal – May 10, 2021 Review

- Budget Timeline
- Vision/Mission
- Budget Preparation Guiding Principles
- Revenue Review
- Payroll & Benefits
- Executive, Legal, Insurance & Other
- Police
- Fire

FY2022 Manager's Budget Proposal – May 17, 2021 Overview

- City Clerk/Tax Collector
- Finance & IT
- Planning & Zoning
- Recreation
- Library
- Assessing, Health/Welfare
- Municipal Services – Admin, Highways & Streets, Street Lighting, Mechanical Garage, Buildings & Grounds

Katie Gargano provided an overview of the challenging year in the Clerk's office. Absentee Ballots tripled due to the pandemic. It takes 15 steps to process just on one ballot for a registered voter and additional steps if they were not registered yet. She reviewed the names of the election staff and described their job functions during and after election times. Part of their job is to check and recheck the electronic ballot counting machines to make sure they are working correctly. They do this multiple times. Thankfully the machines were doing their job perfectly.

Gargano thanked all of the election staff for their help through all four elections during the pandemic. H.R. 1 (For the People Act) is a very large bill. The first section would require the implementation of early voting with polls open 15 days prior to an election to include 10 hour days including weekends. Gargano stated that it is already difficult to recruit people to work the elections as they currently run. She further explained the difficulties of finding multiple locations for elections to run for 15 days. This Bill would also require absentee ballots be mailed out to those who wish to vote absentee with prepaid return postage which would add \$7500. In postage fees per year. Also allowing absentee ballots to be received for up to 10 days after an election. If this Bill passes, Gargano would ask the Council to consider changing the Charter so City elections could be held every other year instead of every year. Gargano stated that there was mention in the Bill that some Federal funding would be available to assist with the added costs resulting from these changes however it is unknown how much the City would actually receive back from the Federal Government.

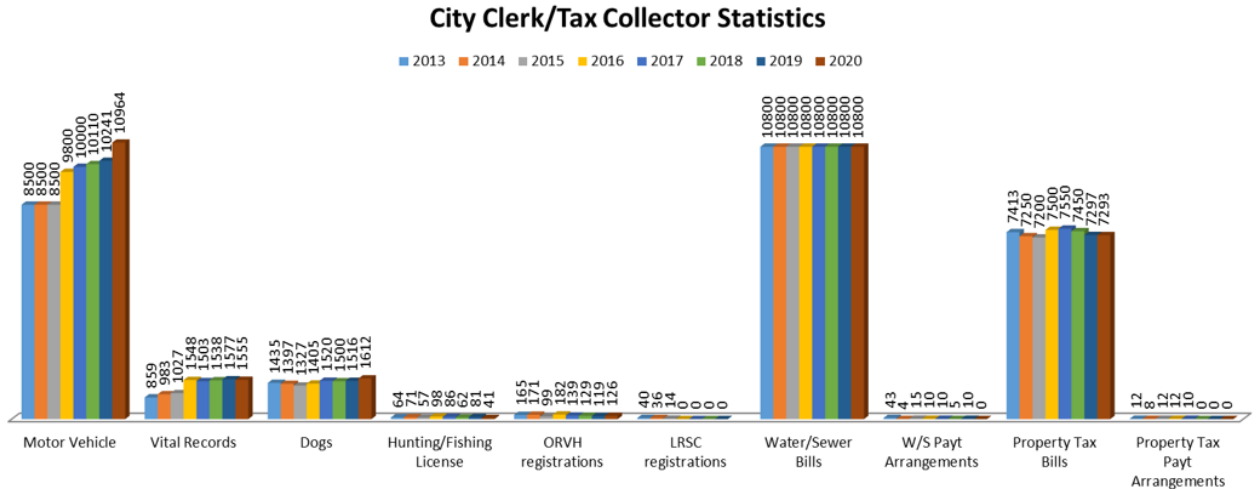
Gargano is preparing a letter to send to Senator Shaheen and Senator Hassan with a request to amend this Bill.

Gargano explained the data on the services the clerk's office provided to the public last year. She stated that the number of transactions is increasing and believes this is due to the increasing population. Gargano further explained the number of water and sewer billing cycles and the challenges in collecting some of these payments. She stated that approximately 24% of homeowners do not pay their bill on time or at all. The state reduced the percentage that the City can charge on delinquent property tax bills and also reduced the City's tax lien rate as well.

Gargano reviewed the Clerk's office budget:

FY2022 Manager's Proposed Budget –
Expenditures

–City Clerk/Tax Collector (page
104; statistics page 71)



Desrochers stated that the Clerk's Office is severely understaffed. Gargano replied that there has been an unfunded position in the Clerk's Office for the past 6 years and she would be happy with just a part-time person. There are times when the office is very busy compared to other times during the month and Gargano offered the suggestion of moving some services to on-line only to help alleviate the work load.

Testerman stated that any changes to the process of electing our officials would have to be changed by way of amending the Constitution which cannot be done through Legislation.

Finance Director Pessy Gaudette provided information on the workload that the Finance office has been handling this past year. She stated that her small office has handled many additional tasks this year due to the pandemic and for other reasons. Their added workload consisted of additional payroll processing, grant processing, audits, and claims processing.

FY2022 Manager's Proposed Budget – Expenditures

- Finance (page 106; statistics page 72)
- IT (page 108)

Gaudette stated that at this point she could utilize a full time grant manager and would like more time to assess the other areas of HR and Finance after the pandemic settles. She would like to see if the extra work will also slow down or if an additional person is truly needed in the HR side of the Finance Department.

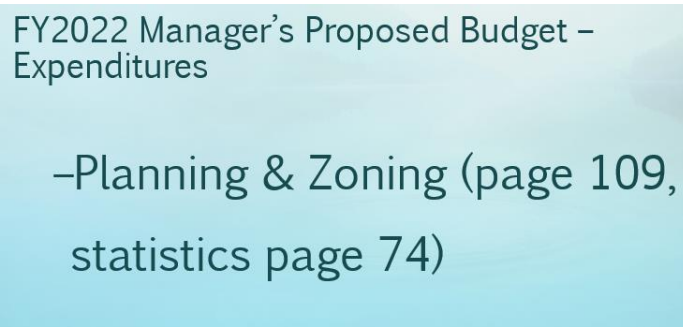
A member of the Finance Department is retiring and she will need to train someone in advance before she leaves.

Gaudette further explained that there may be some training needed with the financial tracking software to see if it works properly and to better understand why multiple spreadsheets are being created outside of the software. The software doesn't appear to do what is needed. However, If after the training of the software, it is found that it does not work properly, there will be a request to purchase different financial tool software.

Gaudette explained the IT Expenditures on Page 108 from the budget book.

City Manager Milner explained what the Bristol Terminal is, which Franklin purchased, and stated that we service Bristol so it made sense for us to own and manage the actual terminal. It is now located at the Franklin PD.

Planning and Zoning Director Dick Lewis discussed the following:



FY2022 Manager's Proposed Budget –
Expenditures

–Planning & Zoning (page 109,
statistics page 74)

Lewis stated that the Planning and Zoning office budget remains fairly low and mainly contains the salaries of the two employees.

Building permits provided some good income over the past year and expect that it will continue with the Chinberg property coming soon. Lewis works closely with Code Enforcement on some issues where there are permit violations, inspections, and some code issues. Lewis stated that there is also some overlap with MSD when there are trash related violations. Typically, many issues end up having to involve the court system and that can add a lot of time to resolving some of the issues.

Lewis suggested that a permit managing system would be very helpful and create efficiencies for the teams collaborating.

Parks and Recreation Director Krystal Alpers discussed her department challenges and budget needs. She began by acknowledging her amazing team, fellow department heads, and City Manager. She continued to describe her staff as a group of professionals who are always thinking outside the box. It is not always fun and games especially when the staff needs to clean up vomit and other bodily fluids in addition to dealing with disgruntled parents at times and children misbehaving. Alpers stated that she spends hours cleaning goose waste from the beaches as well.

Alpers continued to explain that the staff is frequently trying to help children who come to the program with no supplies, no bathing suit or towel for beach day, or snack during snack time.

Sometimes the staff is witness to a parent or grandparent hitting their child during a simple basket ball game.

During the pandemic, Alpers stated that the programs remained open to serve the community and was one of a very few that remained open during the summer of the pandemic.

FY2022 Manager's Proposed Budget – Expenditures

–Recreation (page 138, statistics
page 84)

Alpers continued to explain that her staff is mainly part-time and underpaid but still show up to work every day.

She reviewed the departments weaknesses starting with the staff pay rate. Camp counselors start at \$10 per hour but McDonald's starting wage is \$14 per hour plus a sign on bonus. A bank teller at Franklin Savings Bank starts at \$15 per hour. A dental hygienist with no experience and on the job training starts at \$17 per hour. She lost two employees this past week to one of the aforementioned. Alpers informed the Council that just tonight, two more employees have resigned.

Alpers stated that she needs more staff and is the only department in the City that does not have an executive assistant to assist with administrative duties.

Alpers further explained that additional staff is needed and with the future of Franklin becoming a Recreation Destination, the parks need to be revitalized and maintained. She stated that the playground at Odell Park is already 13 years old and since the lifespan of a park is generally 20 years, funds need to be put aside to plan for the future. The Tennis court and skateboard park also need

renovations. They too are decaying.

Councilor Brown asked if there could be revenue opportunities to use the tennis court. Alpers responded that due to HB 111 if the City began charging, the liability would shift back to the City.

The Parks and Recreation Department is mainly funded by a 21st Century 5-year Grant. They are in year 4 going into year 5. Alpers stated that they will apply for another grant but the process has been very disorganized and demanding even after the grant has been awarded. There have been guideline changes to the Grant already submitted and approved almost monthly.

The Council and Alpers discussed the challenges to the repair and maintenance of the tennis court.

There were no further questions for Director Alpers.

Library Director Rob Sargent provided the Council with how things are going at the library.

FY2022 Manager's Proposed Budget – Expenditures

–Library (page 150, statistics
page 86)

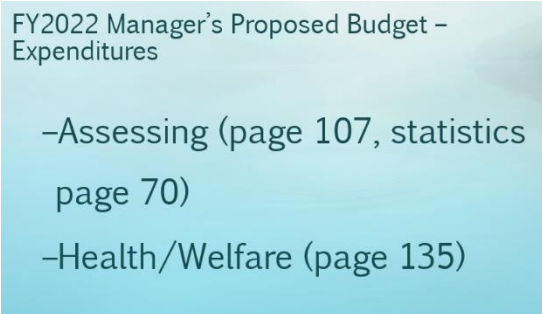
City Manager Milner reminded the Council that per state statute, the library is funded from a Special Revenue Fund and not through the General Fund. However, the General Fund does pay the salary, benefits, and \$51,500 for operating expenses.

Director Sargent stated that this is his 20th budget discussion with the Council. He gave some background on his becoming the director of the library. He then explained the changes to library services to the public during the pandemic and how they adjusted their work processes to continue to serve the community. Sometimes, they delivered books to a homebound resident. During the pandemic, Sargent and his librarian Kristy also inventoried all the books, cleaned, and dusted every space.

Sargent is looking toward the upswing of library visitors once the pandemic dies down and with the economic growth of Franklin. He further explained the ways that the library plays a critical role in the City's Mission Statement.

In conclusion, Sargent stated that the library is in the center of the business district in Franklin and is situated alongside the river. The library staff will aid in the turnaround of the pandemic and continue to offer free services.

City Manager Milner stated there haven't been many changes in the Assessing Department budget from last year.



Milner stated that Health/Welfare are level funded this year. She also discussed the Mayor's Drug Task Force budget and Grant timeline. Welfare expenditures is very low due to the additional federal funding and extra stimulus provided last year.

Municipal Services Director Brian Sullivan reviewed the Municipal Services department and budget needs. Director Sullivan stated the following:

The Municipal Services Department's overall mission is to deliver the necessary functions expected of our crews, in order to maintain a wide variety of quality-of-life services to all residents and businesses, year-round.

The department contains seven divisions, each handling a multitude of tasks, which are: Administration; Highways; Mechanical Garage; Buildings and Grounds; Solid Waste; Water and Sewer. Due to minimal staffing levels in each division, we have become, for the most part, a maintenance department. Over the past 18 years as the City's Municipal Services Department Director, I have come to realize that our mode of operation is reactionary but effective. Due to lack of capital funding, it makes it difficult to provide short term and long-term planning however, we do accomplish the many seasonal demands placed upon the department by means of prioritization. Prioritizing becomes very difficult when needs outnumber our staffing level and the lack of resource's necessary to effectively fulfill what is expected of us.

The best way for me to phrase the state of our department and the magnitude of infrastructure, much of which needs ongoing attention is we are in a **"Run it to Failure"** mode of operation. Deferred maintenance effects how efficient we can be and how creative we have become to deal with this type of operation. Deferred maintenance creates numerous operational challenges, which has an effect on our workforce and the public we serve.

The reason we are in this **"Run it to Failure"** mode is no one person's fault but because of the fact that the City is revenue starved! This impact is significant and presents ongoing and increasing challenges for the department such as:

- ✓ Age and condition of Department equipment.
- ✓ Age and condition of our subsurface and above ground infrastructure and facilities.
- ✓ The department's ability to deliver timely service.

- ✓ Retainage of qualified employees.
- ✓ Attracting and hiring new qualified employees especially during a very competitive job market
- ✓ Replacing our aging workforce.
- ✓ Lack of additional positions in various divisions, thus inhibiting our ability to cross train personnel within the Department.
- ✓ Constant, increasing operational costs for materials, vehicle parts, outside labor and contract services.
- ✓ Lack of funding for capital items which has an adverse effect on our ability to “get ahead “rather than to fall further behind.
- ✓ Lack of the proper staffing level to get ahead and meet the demands facing us while at the same time, the City is in a critical “Economic/Revitalization Stage.”
- ✓ Meeting the demands and expectations of new residents and businesses.
- ✓ Adhering to ever increasing “Regulatory Requirements” in Water, Wastewater, Solid Waste, Labor Laws, ADA requirements and factors placed upon us by outside sources.
- ✓ To quote Chief Goldstein, “Exhaustion to Extinction.”

Thinking outside the Box:

- ✓ Solid Waste Enterprise Fund
- ✓ Re-establish a Water Sewer Commission
- ✓ Creation of a Stormwater Utility
- ✓ Capital Improvements Revenue Bond

There are opportunities and enabling State Legislation to expand revenue sources in order to offset some General Fund expenses (i.e. Solid Waste) however, these create an additional economic burden on residents and businesses. Sullivan stated that he is willing to go into further detail at our May 24th budget presentation if the City Council is interested in further exploring these concepts.

Sullivan reviewed the budget starting on page 110 of the budget book.

FY2022 Manager’s Proposed Budget – Expenditures

Municipal Services (statistics page 80):

Admin (page 125)
Highways & Streets (page 126)
Street Lighting (page 127 bottom)
Mechanical Garage (page 128)
Buildings & Grounds (page 130 & 131 msd, 110 general, 117 police, 123 fire)

Sullivan discussed the paving priorities and challenges. This isn’t a problem only in Franklin. This is a statewide issue. In the mid 1930’s the state gave everyone urban compact on the state roads. It might be worth contacting the state to address the state roads with urban compact.

Councilor Clarenbach stated that the City has to get creative about obtaining revenue and prioritizing the work that much be done versus what the City would like to do.

Councilor Brown stated that the directors have done exactly what they have been asked to do and worked tirelessly to present a tax cap budget highlighting their prioritizations. It could be helpful for the CIP Committee to come together and look closely at these issues.

Councilor Testerman stated that the City staff work extremely hard and the City should look at the performance of the schools with the budgets they have been working with and with even more money again this year. The schools have not offered paying the City back some of the funds that the City has given the schools over the past few years. It is unfortunate that the Police Department, Fire Department, and other departments scrape by with pennies but are expected to do more with no extra money.

Councilor Desrochers stated that if the City puts off finding a way to fund the Capital projects, they will cost even more next year and the year after that. The City should look at buying a bond. There have been Capital projects on this list for the past 20 years and it's time for the Council do something about it.

Councilor Starkweather stated that ever since the City voted in the tax cap, the Capital Improvement Projects stopped.

City Manager Milner responded to a few items and stated that there were projects completed in the CIP plan. At the time when the last CIP Plan was completed in 2017 for 2018, \$16M in Capital Improvements were completed. She is looking forward to the CIP meetings coming over the summer. Milner also stated that some ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds are coming to address a few of the roads.

Councilor Desrochers stated that patching the City Hall roof is important but just patching it may not be worth spending \$4K on it and that it really needs a new roof altogether.

Director Sullivan concluded his presentation with a description of a town in Florida that was in disarray. The fire department was in the back of City Hall. There were outdoor laundry matts. It was a mess. They did an \$8M bond and matched it and turned the whole town around.

There was no further discussion.

Motion to adjourn was made by Councilor Brown and seconded by Councilor Chandler.

All in favor. Motion PASSED.

The meeting adjourned at 8:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Audrey Lanzillo