



October 30, 2014

CITY OF SARATOGA SPRINGS
Budget Workshop
City Council Room
1:00 PM

PRESENT: Joanne Yepsen, Mayor
Michele Madigan, Commissioner of Finance
John Franck, Commissioner of Accounts
Anthony Scirocco, Commissioner of DPW
Christian Mathiesen, Commissioner of DPS

STAFF PRESENT: Joe Ogden, Deputy Mayor
Lynn Bachner, Deputy Commissioner, Finance
Sharon Kellner-Byrnes, Deputy Commissioner, Accounts
Eileen Finneran, Deputy Commissioner, DPS

EXCUSED: Tim Cogan, Deputy Commissioner, DPW

RECORDING OF PROCEEDING

The proceedings of this meeting were taped for the benefit of the secretary. Because the minutes are not a verbatim record of the proceedings, the minutes are not a word-for-word transcript.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Yepsen called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Yepsen opened the public comment period at 1:05 p.m.

No one spoke.

Mayor Yepsen closed the public comment period at 1:06 p.m.

BUDGET WORKSHOP

Mayor Yepsen stated they have held several discussions about many of the same items. She hopes that Finance is coming to the table today to address some of those problems that have been expressed and that they can come up with some solution today rather than just revisiting the old problems. Let's get some new solutions on the table and make some compromises so we can move forward.

Commissioner Madigan stated these are budget workshops and the chair of that committee actually runs this portion of the meeting. She asked the Council to keep their comments to 2 – 5 minutes so others would also have time to respond.

Mayor Yepsen cautioned that regardless of what agenda is being considered, business will not be allowed to get out of control.

Commissioner Madigan stated this is the sixth budget workshop. The currently proposed amended budget does not include any increases in taxes, and revenues have been adjusted and updated. The 2 largest departments – Public Safety and Public Works have not asked for any changes; the 2 smaller departments – Recreation and Finance have no substantive changes; and the Accounts Department has provided the largest decrease and she recommended the assignment of prior year taxes. Other than the minor revisions for hospitalization, disability, and health insurance opt outs, there are no additional changes to bring forward. She can assure the Council and the taxpayers that sufficient and protected funds, based upon requests from the Accounts Department have been set aside for Article 7 case settlements. The line for prior year refunds still exists in the Accounts Department budget; she has not removed that line. There is nothing that prevents the Commissioner of Accounts from budgeting what he thinks he needs next year in this line.

Mayor Yepsen stated they have done additional research in her department regarding the part time 'POSH' position. Most of this grant has to be spent on zoning not open lands. We need to match the \$30,000 we are getting from the state with city funds. She read the piece of the Charter that explains the 'POSH' position. She feels strongly about this position and more concerned about satisfying the NYSERDA grant.

Brad Birge of the Planning Department explained the NYSERDA grant's ultimate objective is to gain energy efficiencies and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They indicated they would be able to update their Zoning Ordinance into updated regulatory framework to help people achieve this. This position could be used to look at the energy efficiencies, examine our trail systems, and make progress on the greenbelt initiatives. The items listed in the Charter for this position are in addition to these things.

Mayor Yepsen stated this city is booming and these things won't happen with just tossing this to another staff member. There isn't anyone here that can satisfy the 'POSH' position and take on all the responsibilities that will come to us via the NYSERDA grant.

Commissioner Scirocco how long it has been since the position was vacated and if anyone is taking on these responsibilities right now?

Mayor Yepsen responded no, not adequately and the position was the person was laid off and the position vacated in January 2009.

Commissioner Madigan stated they have heard comments that the duties have been absorbed by the Planning Department.

Commissioner Scirocco stated he realizes it is in addition to what these other people are doing.

Mayor Yepsen said the Administrator of Parks and Open Lands oversees the Heritage Area, the city Historian, in addition to lots of new needs. Coordination needs to happen so we do not get behind economically. The goal is to successfully balance between sustainability and development; the job description will be updated to meet the City's current needs.

Brad Birge said the current staff tries to accommodate these activities to the utmost extent possible but they haven't been able to fully engage all of this in order to accomplish the true goals of this position.

Commissioner Scirocco asked if anyone has been compensated for this.

Brad Birge advised no one has been compensated.

Commissioner Madigan stated she believes this is a good start at this point. She is willing to continue to work with the mayor into next year regarding this position. Eventually it may lead to a full time position.

Mayor Yepsen reminded everyone that part of the 'POSH' position is to seek grants. We are not going after these grants because we do not have anyone to go after them. This position would pay for itself.

When the staff did pursue grants, some of their regular duties were being ignored so they could prepare the applications.

Commissioner Madigan stated she believes a majority of the Council believe this is a good start.

Commissioner Scirocco stated it would be good to start with a part time position. Do we know what a full time position salary would be?

Mayor Yepsen stated she would like to see \$60,000 which would be about \$105,000 with benefits and retirement.

Commissioner Scirocco stated we need to proceed cautiously; possibly bringing it back to the table during the year when we are able to assess needs and changes to make. Once a person is in the job, we will learn the parameters; we've done without the position for 8 years.

Mayor Yepsen stated we are behind the times. She is concerned that no one with the required capabilities would be available for a part time position and money.

Commissioner Scirocco stated he would support it if she wants to bring it back sometime during the year. The part time person will still be able to do everything just 20 hours less.

Commissioner Franck stated he appreciates what Commissioner Madigan said earlier about the assignment for Article 7s being sufficient and protected. He asked the City Council to put that in writing. When he came into office in 2006 there was \$85,000 in the line and he was told from Commissioner Towne that the amount should be sufficient and if it wasn't, there are contingency funds. Because of various lawsuits and 2 re-evaluations, that didn't scratch the surface and then he was told the money wasn't there. Over the last 9 years he has built this fund for the reason of having sufficient funds for certiorari and Article 7 tax refunds. There has to more than a statement of this as to what we are going to do. It should be put into a resolution before anything is voted on. The assignment should be restrictive, permanent, and binding for only 3 things – refunds, statutory interest we may have to pay, and any penalties the court hits us for relating to the tax refunds. It can't be used for future lost tax revenues to the City due to the lower assessment. A floor and a ceiling should also be established and should be reset annually at the second meeting in August. The money can't be transferred out for any other use; it is restricted to the use previously mentioned. He also asked that as of January 1, 2105 this line is no longer in the Accounts Department. His fear is the Accounts Department will be stuck with trying to fund the account like he was when he first came into office. Any short falls will have funds transferred in from unrestricted fund balance or other reserves or contingency. If we lose and get sued and lose for insufficient tax fund reserves, those monies also do not come from this line. The City guarantees to pay the tax refund within 30 days from the date the vote is accepted by the Council.

Commissioner Madigan state these are good ideas and she will ask the city attorney to help draft something.

Commissioner Franck stated his other concern is taking a vote on Monday. The longer they can stretch the vote out the better as they may have more knowledge and they can gauge better of what is going to happen into the next year. They may also have the announcement regarding the casino. He is hearing if the casino goes to Schenectady, the VLT funding will go down drastically. He believes as a Council they need to wean themselves off the VLT money and within 3 years have zero in that line.

Commissioner Madigan stated as finance commissioner she is well on top of the issue of VLT revenue and has no intention at this point to reduce VLT revenue in this budget. That is why she is setting up a Revenue Committee. She feels comfortable putting the \$1.8 million in.

Commissioner Mathiesen stated he too feels they need to wean themselves from reliance of the VLT funding.

Commissioner Madigan stated she is planning for it.

Commissioner Franck stated he believes they are the Revenue Committee. Now is the best time to start doing something.

Commissioner Madigan stated we have plenty of reserves to cover them if something were to happen to the VLT funding. They have \$1.5 million sitting in a tax stabilization fund; however, it is difficult to tap into that fund.

Commissioner Scirocco asked for clarification if there is legislation that gives the City a percentage of what is generated at the racino.

Commissioner Madigan advised there is a percentage based upon the 2008 formula.

Commissioner Franck stated they could take it at any time.

Commissioner Madigan advised they place a call to the Budget Office each year to find out the amount. That is how she found out we were getting \$1.8 million this year unlike the \$2.4 million from last year.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Mayor Yepsen adjourned the meeting at 2:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Wagner
Clerk

Approved:
Vote: