

Governing Body Minutes – July 11, 2020

CYRUS K. HOLLIDAY BUILDING, Topeka, Kansas, Tuesday, July 11, 2020. The Governing Body members of the City of Topeka met in special session at 9:00 A.M., with the following Councilmembers present: Hiller and Duncan -2; and the following Councilmembers participated remotely: Valdivia-Alcala, Ortiz, Emerson, Naeger, Padilla, Dobler, and Lesser - 7. Mayor De La Isla presided -1.

AFTER THE MEETING was called to order, Brent Trout City Manager provided opening comments and stated the General Fund would be discussed as well as other funds if time allows.

Jessica Lamendola, Administrative and Financial Director, reported the proposed budget keeps the City's overall mill levy rate the same, and continues to support the priority areas of City government.

Brent Trout, City Manager, provided an overview of the Executive Department operating budget and reported the elimination of the Deputy City Manager position and Emergency Management position provided for significant savings in 2021.

Councilmember Ortiz asked how the duties of the Emergency Management position would be managed.

Brent Trout stated the duties will be absorbed by Shawnee County Emergency Management employees.

Brent Trout provided an overview of the Office of the Mayor and City Council operating budgets. He reported the Mayor's budget will be reduced by approximately \$9,000 through the elimination of the Granicus Software Program; and there was little change to the City Council Office budget.

Councilmember Hiller questioned the reduction of over \$40,000 in employee benefits in the City Council Office budget.

Jessica Lamendola noted the benefits line item budget fluctuates from year to year depending on the type of benefits each Council member utilizes.

Jessica Lamendola provided an overview of the Administrative and Financial Services Department operating budget. She stated the significant change to the budget included the elimination of the Grant Writer position.

Councilmember Valdivia-Alcala inquired on the amount of grant dollars generated by this position. She requested staff notify the Governing Body if there was a need to revisit the position elimination.

Councilmember Duncan requested a general cost assessment of the real dollar value of the Grant Writer position. He also requested staff track costs associated with the elimination of services that will be replaced by contracted services to make sure true efficiencies are being realized.

Councilmember Hiller questioned the need for administrative assistance to manage FEMA dollars.

Jessica Lamendola reported she was not aware of plans to hire a person to assist with the oversight of federal dollars; however, there will be a need for some level of administration as they are currently in the process of developing a committee to help monitor and request COVID dollars from Shawnee County.

Brent Trout stated the majority of housing dollars are already managed by outside contracts. He reported staff continues to study the information related to the administration of CARES funding as more guidance becomes available.

Jessica Lamendola provided a high level overview of the Debt Service Fund.

Councilmember Hiller expressed concern with program dollars being spent without approval by the Governing Body.

Jacque Russell, Human Resources Director, provided an overview of the Human Resources operating budget.

Councilmember Ortiz expressed her appreciation for allowing a portion of the Youth Employment Program to be funded. She inquired on the process to apply for the program.

Councilmember Naeger asked if the Topeka Public School District would provide enough dollars to fully fund the program.

Jacque Russell stated she would provide program details to the Governing Body as it becomes available.

Jacque Russell reported the City of Topeka property insurance increased by 340% an increase of \$1.4 million for 2020; however, they do not anticipate an increase in 2021. She stated the City has released a Request For Proposal (RFP) for a risk broker to be proactive moving forward with property insurance.

Councilmember Lesser cautioned staff to move forward carefully in regards to property insurance vendors and remain mindful of overall fiscal outcomes.

Councilmember Naeger thanked staff for working to improve the City's Health plan and prioritizing employee health.

Councilmember Hiller questioned the large increase in contractual service costing approximately \$4 million.

Jessica Lemendola stated she would report back to the Governing Body on the details.

Lisa Robertson, City Attorney, provided a brief overview of the Legal Department operating budget including General Government, Criminal Prosecution and Civil Litigation.

Councilmember Duncan requested the details on all cases handled by the Legal Department; the financial breakdown of what was actually paid to Legal; and why pay outs are listed in the budget as contractual services.

Councilmember Hiller questioned the increase in personnel costs in Special Liability Fund and no reduction being reflected in the General Fund.

Jason Peek, Public Works Director, reported the Public Works Department consists of nine divisions and six different funds; however, only the General Fund budget would be highlighted at this time. He touched on the creation of the Pavement Management Program including the repair of streets and alleys and noted efficiencies continue in regards to equipment management and number of employees. He noted an approximate 12% reduction was being proposed in 2021 for the General Fund relating to Public Works.

Councilmember Hiller referenced eliminating the Socrata Software Program and asked if it resulted in the reduction of other expenses or just the cost of services.

Jason Peek reported funds were shifted from the General Fund to contractual services for Downtown Topeka Inc. (DTI) Kansas Avenue Landscaping in the amount of \$48,443; and the additional \$52,935 was for pocket park maintenance payments to the Parking Fund.

Councilmember Naeger encouraged staff to closely monitor the cost of outside contracting services and revisit if it becomes too expensive.

Brendan Wiley, Topeka Zoo Director, provided an overview of the Topeka Zoo operating budget.

Councilmember Lesser expressed the importance of balancing costs of the Zoo as it relates to fee increases.

Brendan Wiley reported the \$2 across the board increase will support Friends of the Topeka Zoo (FOTZ) operations not the General Fund.

Councilmember Valdivia-Alcala questioned what reductions could be realized instead of increasing the admission fee by \$2. She encouraged staff to continue to work with area companies to continue corporate sponsorships to provide reduced rates or free of charge admission days.

Councilmember Ortiz inquired on reducing admission fees for senior citizens and asked staff to review the hours of operation.

Brent Trout reported many of the exhibits and related programs involve aging animals; therefore, he felt it was in the best interest of Zoo operations as well as the animals, to increase the admission fee instead of eliminating programs. He stated staff will review the need to eliminate or maintain program exhibits as the animals' age out.

Councilmember Duncan inquired on the revenue generated for a \$2 admission fee increase.

Brendan Wiley stated admission fees for senior citizens could be considered; and most corporate partnerships are generated through the efforts of FOTZ; therefore, the savings are realized by FOTZ not the General Fund. He stated they continue to work on the ideal hours of operations while balancing operational costs. He reported the fee increase will generate approximately \$182,000 covering associated fees for FOTZ and a net income of 2.5% of the Zoo budget or approximately \$62,000 of the General Fund.

Councilmember Hiller stated she understands the need for a rate increase; however, she suggested keeping admission fees the same for children.

Bill Fiander, Planning and Development Director, provided an overview of the Planning Department and Development Services Division operating budget.

Brent Trout provided an overview of the Neighborhood Relations Department operating budget. He reported the Neighborhood Relations Department Director position as well as an office specialist position was eliminated; however, a new position was created for the administration of the Impact Program, keeping the number of full-time employees the same. He also reported as a result of the housing study additional funding would be added for the weatherization of area homes.

Councilmember Valdivia-Alcala expressed concern with duplication of services as Community Action provides weatherization of homes. She questioned how City staff as opposed to neighborhood residents, truly understand the needs of each neighborhood especially the high to moderate risk neighborhoods

Councilmember Ortiz requested details of services provided by Community Action. She expressed the importance of understanding the “need” verses “want” in regards to neighborhood grant funds.

Councilmember Padilla spoke in support of allocating as much funds as possible to the Housing Trust Fund; closely monitoring the allocation of weatherization funds; and encouraged staff to gather input from Neighborhood Improvement Association (NIA) members.

Councilmember Hiller questioned the reorganization of the Department of Neighborhood Relations. She stated she believes this was an opportune time to conduct an overall review of all internal and external programs.

Councilmember Naeger expressed the importance of affordable housing. She spoke in support of additional funding for the Housing Trust Fund, weatherization as well as other programs that would provide for affordable housing.

Councilmember Valdivia-Alcala expressed the importance of providing equitable housing to citizens.

Denise Vaughn, Municipal Court Clerk, provided an overview of the Municipal Court operating budget.

Mayor De La Isla spoke in support of the Alternative Court Program and the positive effect it has on the community.

Chief Craig Duke, Topeka Fire Department, provided an overview of the Topeka Fire Department operating budget.

Councilmember Valdivia-Alcala expressed the importance of keeping all Fire Stations open and applying fair operation processes across the board in regards to the shifting of manpower between stations.

Councilmember Lesser expressed concern with the expense; compromising the health of Fire Department employees due to the COVID-19 pandemic; and the risk related to the Topeka Fire Department allowing the use of Fire Engine Apparatus by firefighters to retrieve food and cleaning supplies from local retail stores. He encouraged City management to create a policy to regulate the issue.

Chief Bill Cochran, Topeka Police Department, provided an overview of the Topeka Police Department operating budget.

Councilmember Padilla asked if the vacant positions would have an effect on community outreach efforts.

Chief Cochran reported position vacancies would not have an effect on community outreach programs.

Councilmember Naeger announced budget discussions will continue through August and encouraged citizens to provide input to their Council representative.

Brent Trout announced budget discussions would take place on July 14, July 21 and July 28, 2020.

Jessica Lamendola stated staff would provide line item budgets and answers to questions as soon as possible.

NO FURTHER BUSINESS appearing the meeting was adjourned at 12:59 p.m.

(SEAL)

Brenda Younger
City Clerk