

February 23, 2011
CITY OF WINDSOR HEIGHTS STUDY SESSION MINUTES
6:00 pm City Hall
Unabridged version

Mayor Jerry Sullivan called meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. Council present: Steve Peterson, Diana Willits (after 5:15 p.m.), Charlene Butz, David Jenison and Betty Glover. City Administrator Marketa George Oliver, Chief Financial Officer Carrie Brannen, Police Chief Dennis McDaniel, Public Works Director Jason VanAusdall, Community Services Director Josh Heggen, Fire Chief Christopher Cross and City Attorney Matt Brick present.

Item 1: Discussion regarding 63rd Street Sidewalk.

Oliver noted that this project was part of the council's strategic plan and in next year's budget are funds to pay for the engineering and design of the sidewalk. She has been working with Amy Moore, Principal of Cowles on a joint Polk County Community Betterment Grant application. Ideally, she would like to be able to leverage the grant money to apply for Safe Routes to Schools, if there is any funding left in that program. Glover asked if this will decrease residential values to have a sidewalk there. Oliver said that sidewalk typically increases value. Peterson asked if Polk County would consider doing this project for the city. He noted he would also like to see crosswalk at 63rd and College. Oliver said a pedestrian crossing survey would need to be completed and the City could work with the school to accomplish this. Council agreed to continue to move forward with working towards outside funding to complete the project.

Item 2: Discussion regarding the CIP.

Butz asked if Washington should be resurfaced this year. Peterson asked VanAusdall when the sliplining will be done in the northeast part of the city. VanAusdall said they are still videoing the entire city and root cutting. He said it will be up to the sanitary sewer board, but most likely after the videoing is done, they will bid the project as one large project or three smaller projects to see what the cost savings may be. He believes they will start in the northeast part of the city first. Willits asked if money can be appropriated this year and saved as an earmark for the future resurfacing of Washington if the sliplining does help prevent the amount of water in the sewer. The council agreed that was the best course of action at this time. Oliver said staff can put it in a certificate of deposit and name is the Washington Avenue CD.

McDaniel explained the need for the basement improvements for an evidence storage facility. Jenison asked how a non-revenue producing building like city hall could use TIF to make improvements. Oliver said that while the city is non-revenue producing because of being tax exempt, city hall is in a revenue producing TIF district, which allows the funds to be used. Oliver also talked about plans to turn the old jury box in the council chambers into a walled off storage closet for storage lost in the basement and lost when multiple heating/cooling units were put into closet spaces a few decades ago. McDaniel said by doing the basement project the city is taking steps against a huge liability issue.

Butz asked if the delay on the resurfacing Washington Avenue between 70th and 73rd Street would affect the reconstruction of the intersection at 70th and Washington. VanAusdall said no; staff would still plan to have it reconstructed.

Item 3: Discussion regarding the FY 2012 Budget.

Oliver said the proposed budget kept expenditures fairly stable and the levy rate also stable. However, even though the levy rate went down ever so slightly, the cost to a homeowner would increase slightly (around \$34 per year) due to the residential rollback percentage. Overall though, that was also very stable and consistent and still slightly lower than two years ago.

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Glover asked if the budget was a starting point from which more cuts would be made. Oliver said that working through committees and keeping the council goals at the forefront, staff developed and presented a budget that was bare-bones. There were zero across-the-board cost of living adjustments, except 1.1% for those for the council and mayor that are dictated by Code. If there was a desire to make cuts, there would need to be policy decisions about what services should be cut.

Glover asked if there were possibilities for job sharing. For example, could someone help out at the front counter. Brannen noted that happens routinely now. Glover asked for example, if the city has a need for a full-time person at the community center. Oliver said that employees job share now in that employees are all doing two or three jobs. There are no employees in the City who have just one job. They all wear many hats. Additionally, for exempt employees, there are no 40-hour work weeks. She noted that in the Fire Department, for example, the City brought rental inspections in house, so fire fighters do rental inspections. They also have taken on grounds maintenance for City Hall to free up Public Works to focus on more important, community-wide priorities. Staff is constantly evaluating position to ensure they are function at optimal levels and see how they could serve the organization better by changing.

Peterson spoke and noted the excellent level of service Windsor Heights' citizens get from their employees. He noted how well trained the employees are and how the streets are known metro wide for being excellent during the winter. He said the Police Department is well-respected and Chief McDaniel is doing a great job. He spoke about what the City has been able to accomplish towards its sustainability goals, a lot of which has been possible because Josh got the City grant money to do it. He noted Brannen handled the CFO duties and took on payroll duties. Peterson said that the City Administrator was always looking for ways to bring in outside monies, such as the I-Jobs grant and partner with other organizations.

Butz asked about part time salaries in the police department as there was a significant increase. McDaniel said the reason is the ASAP program through the Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau. The grant pays for extra enforcement on the weekends to catch drunk drivers. The city has a 50/50 match requirement on the grant. The City was awarded the grant last year as well but had to turn it down due to budget constraints. Oliver asked McDaniel to compare his calls for service to other cities in the metro. McDaniel distributed information on police calls over the past five years. He noted his staff is very busy and compared to other cities, much larger cities and our city is still busier with police calls. Willits said it is important that we keep protecting our borders. Jenison asked why we are number one in the metro for incidents. McDaniel said it does not mean Windsor Heights is rampant with crime, but that the police department is really busy. The measures used were development and implemented by the FBI so crime figures can be compared across communities. Oliver noted that the City's 8,000 calls for serve has only a few less than numbers for the City of Clive, who is nearly three times as large.

Willits asked if the city should increase the rental fees. VanAusdall suggesting making the conversion fee higher. Oliver noted that any fee must be justified in terms of expenses. Peterson asked about requiring rentals to have sprinklers. Butz expressed concern about elderly people unable to sell a home that then turn to rent it but cannot because they could not afford a sprinkler system. Jenison asked, in that case, who would monitor the home if an elderly person rented it out. Willits is also concerned about not getting young families moving into the city. Glover asked why it matters what the age is of people moving into the city. She would like to appeal to anyone wishing to live in Windsor Heights, regardless of age. Peterson asked what other cities are doing. Oliver said some cities, like Clive and Urbandale, do not have a rental program at all.

Butz asked about the increase in the Fire Department pay since she thought there were no increases in salary. Cross noted that the employees in department have merit increases and one employee is changing job classification because of increased education and certification as a paramedic.

Butz asked how long ago were employee health care contributions looked at. Oliver said approximately two years ago. Butz said that everyone should be paying differently for the different categories instead of just paying single or family. Glover asked about the \$75 monthly annuity given to people opting for single coverage. Brannen said it is an incentive to keep people who could have family insurance from having family insurance since it saves the city so much money.

Butz asked about the difference between the year-end estimate and the proposed budget for council salaries. It looks like it is more than 1.1% for the cost of living increase. Oliver explained that staff budgets for more in case there are additional council meetings needed throughout the year.

Glover asked if the City was comfortable in its revenue projections. Oliver said yes and noted that staff tries to make sure to budget revenues conservatively. For example, the number that comes out in the fall that is the per capita projection of what to budget for road use tax is usually revised in the spring, so Oliver will budget it less than initial projections. The proposed budget addresses costs and revenues to meet those costs. Oliver noted, however, that the recommendation for the one-year use of reserves to boost expenditures for street resurfacing and reconstruction is not a sustainable effort and on-going funding for street projects needs to be identified. One option is a short-term loan on the debt service levy each year, once the City's debt levels are at a point where TIF is abating all of the debt service. Oliver said that the staff intends to bring forward an ordinance for Council discussion to return the City's Cable Franchise fee to 5%. When the transition was made to a State Franchise agreement, the franchise fee amount for Windsor Heights was inadvertently lowered to 3% and in order to return it to 5%, the City must adopt legislation. This represents approximately \$10-12,000 in revenue annually.

Sullivan asked if there were any other questions about the budget. He asked the council members what they thought of the budget. The council agreed the budget looked good.

Item 4: Discussion regarding a merit pay system and proposal.

Brannen discussed a proposal for a private firm to come in and design and merit pay system for the city. They would provide training for all of the managers and employees about the system, so people would understand that it is objective. The council liked the idea and asked if it could be brought back for future discussion.

Item 5: Discussion regarding Council Meeting time and frequency.

Oliver noted about a year ago the council changed the meeting time to bring in more people to the meeting. It was in the goals that this should be revisited in a year, so she was just reminding them that it was in their priorities to do that. After a short discussion, there was agreement to keep the meeting time at 6:00 p.m.

Oliver also said a suggestion was made as a cost-saving measure to have a council meeting only once per month. Sullivan said it would make the meeting a longer meeting, but that meetings were a little longer now anyway. Peterson suggested if the shift was made, to go to the second Monday of the month in order to give time to receive the bank statements and reconcile them to have the report on the agenda. Jenison asked if other cities met once a month and Oliver said many other cities meet only monthly, but they are typically in less populated areas. She suggested the possibility of keeping the meeting schedule the same, but giving greater latitude for cancelling a meeting, if it not needed. For example, if the proposed budget had not been on the agenda, the council meeting held on March 21st, really did not have much on the agenda. Glover said this was a good idea and it would be good to let people know that this is done as a cost saving measure. There was consensus to cancel meetings if there were too few items or items that could be consolidated into a different meeting.

The meeting ended at 8:15 p.m.

Jerry Sullivan, Mayor

ATTEST:

Marketa George Oliver, City Administrator/Clerk