

Aiken City Council Minutes

WORK SESSION

April 1, 2019

Present: Mayor Osbon, Councilmembers Diggs, Girardeau, Gregory, Price, and Woltz.

Absent: Councilmembers Dewar and Price

Others Present: Stuart Bedenbaugh, Sara Ridout, Kim Abney, Lex Kirkland, Tim Coakley, Charles Barranco, Kymberley Wheat, Angela Hales, Jessica Campbell, Mike Jordan, Ryan Bland, Tim O'Briant, Mary Ann Burgess, Marty Sawyer, Brian Mills, Craig Burgess, and Brian Brazier.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Osbon called the work session of April 1, 2019, to order at 5:05 P.M. Mayor Osbon stated for Council discussion is the FY 2019-20 budget.

BUDGET

FY 2019-20

General Fund

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he would like to review the various departments in the General Fund. He reviewed the City Council budget noting that the expenditures are basically the same as last year. He pointed out the Election budget noting that an election for Mayor and Districts 2 and 3 will be conducted in November. He pointed out that we contract with the Aiken County Election Commission to run the election as they have the equipment and trained election workers. He then reviewed the Solicitor and Staff Attorney, Municipal Court, and City Manager's Office budgets. He pointed out that Tim O'Briant and Gary Meadows were transferred into the City Manager's Office from the Community Affairs Division. It was also pointed out that the Salaries in the present CMO budget included payments to the former City Manager. In the Municipal Court, the Public Defender is a part-time position with a contract.

Mr. Bedenbaugh reviewed the Building Inspection Division. It was noted that the budget amount had increased for Building Inspections as Council had added an additional Property Code Inspector and a part-time Secretary. Regarding the lot clean up funds, it was pointed out funding is in the Northside Fund and the Community Development Block Grant Fund, not in the General Fund. He pointed out that last year Council also amended the Property Maintenance Code regarding lot clean up.

Mr. Mike Jordan, Building Official, stated they are in the process of working 100+ properties that have been on the books for a long time, including vacant, uninhabitable properties. He said they are getting calls regarding tall grass. He also pointed out that with the information on the city's website, the office has been receiving more calls with neighbors not happy with the way their neighbors' properties are kept. It was pointed out that the public is much more informed about who to call and what mechanisms there are for enforcement with the new Property Maintenance Code. Mr. Jordan stated they try to take the worst cases first and are working through the changes in the ordinance. He said at some point we may need to re-evaluate the ordinance and tweak it. He said they would make every effort to accomplish the goals set by Council and the department.

Mr. Bedenbaugh then reviewed the IT Department. He pointed out that about two-thirds of their budget comes from the General Fund with one-third in the Water and Sewer Fund. He pointed out that one employee had been added in that department in the current budget.

Ms. Hales, IT Director, noted some of the large projects that may be of interest which will help in the long run going forward. She pointed out that with the new Public Safety

Building the requirements were that they have two directional feeds of the data network. She pointed out we have not had that capability in the past. Because there was that requirement, we were able to negotiate with Atlantic Broadband and redesign the whole network to give us rings for each of our buildings that were eligible for this to have redundancy. She pointed out that had been a very large project for IT this year. Most of the buildings are part of that ring. She pointed out the city has 26 buildings and 22 are connected through our fiber network. She noted that those not connected are Public Safety Stations 3, 4, and 5 and the Water Treatment Plant which are on the outskirts. She pointed out that there are now six employees in IT.

Mr. Bedenbaugh complimented the IT staff which is a hands on staff. He pointed out that having the redundancy helps tremendously. He also noted that having a generator installed at the Municipal Building had helped with operations. Council also thanked IT for the tremendous job they do.

Ms. Hales also pointed out the licensing cost is a large number, most of which is for software which serves every city department. She pointed out the email archiving solution which was put in place in April, 2014. She noted that all emails that come in and out of our system are archived for a period of five years. She pointed out that in updating Public Safety they were able to replace a large number of switches which allow traffic in and out of a building, and we were able to get a faster backbone for the whole network. They are planning to start building up the server communications for those switches to communicate faster.

In response to a question regarding the software for Engineering, Ms. Hales stated IT handles the server for them, but the software itself is handled through Engineering. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the city's GIS service is in Engineering and goes back to the 1990s when we set up GIS to primarily map utility lines. He pointed out that at some point we may want to transition GIS to IT, as other departments use GIS, but he felt it is not fully utilized by other departments.

Chief Barranco pointed out that the Records Management System for Public Safety is all GIS based and those layers are invaluable to responding officers, fire trucks, etc. because of how it is mapped. It was pointed out that program is all budgeted under the Public Safety budget for the licensing, but IT does take care of their servers.

Ms. Hales pointed out that the 911 services had been moved to the new building, and it is an entire wall of circuits, racks and equipment at the Public Safety Building. Everything has been moved and is operational at the new Public Safety Building. However, the state is working from 2015 to now for a next generation 911 service which will go live this year. She said they started that with our dispatch services in 2015 and we got everything IP based communications and new phones for the Dispatchers. She said Aiken County, North Augusta, AT&T and the City of Aiken are doing weekly conference calls. They will be adding another cabinet probably in May and the calls will be social media based.

Mr. Bedenbaugh pointed out these things are some of what IT does. He noted that two-thirds of their funding come from the General Fund and one-third from the Water and Sewer Fund. It was pointed out that IT does support all departments, but the various departments have their own software maintenance costs reflected in the individual budgets.

Ms. Hales pointed out that IT is heavily involved in security and vulnerability testing to secure our network.

Mr. Bedenbaugh then reviewed the Finance budget and pointed out that Finance also has two-thirds of their budget in the General Fund with one-third in the Water and Sewer Fund. One item funded in Finance is the annual audit. He pointed out that the Finance Department will be putting a proposal out for a new audit firm for the next five years. Mauldin & Jenkins will do the audit for 2018-19, but a new auditor will do the audit for 2019-20.

Ms. Wheat, Finance Director, pointed out that the Finance Department budget includes support for maintenance of the software and the cost will increase because they have new pieces of software. Mr. Bedenbaugh noted that the city will go to paperless time keeping before the end of this calendar year.

There was a question as to whether staff felt the charging of two-thirds of the cost of the Finance Department to the General Fund and one-third to the Water & Sewer Fund was pretty accurate and captured the costs for the two funds. Ms. Wheat stated she had discussed having a study done to determine what costs should be charged to the General Fund and the Water & Sewer Fund, but felt the cost was close. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated staff could look at that. He noted that charging two-thirds to General and one-third to the Water & Sewer fund had been done for a very long time.

Mr. Bedenbaugh reviewed the Human Resources Department next. He pointed out the reorganization of Human Resources would take place in 2019-20. He noted that he had moved the Risk Manager from the City Manager's Office budget to Human Resources. He said organizationally it makes sense that Risk Management be an important component of Human Resources. He pointed out that included in the HR budget is training for employees and the employment attorney. He pointed out that beginning July 1 there will be three employees in Human Resources. He pointed out that Tracy Lott is working toward being certified by SHRM.

Mr. Bedenbaugh reviewed the Planning Department budget. He noted that Planning is a small operation. Their budget is very straight forward, but an important component. Many issues that Council deals with touch Planning.

Mr. Bland, Planning Director, noted that a good portion of the Planning budget is for outside services, including the on-call Traffic Engineer, and a contract employee who helps with annexation policies. He noted included in the proposed budget is a request for funds to purchase a new plotter as they are having trouble finding parts for the present plotter. Mr. Bedenbaugh also pointed out that another thing Planning pays for is façade grants. He said he wanted to include more funding for façade grants if possible. He pointed out that if the Downtown Business District expands or if Council wants to review the façade grant program to potentially expand what types of projects or properties are eligible, he felt we should add funding to the façade grant program. He said he would like to fund \$50,000 if possible if we are going to expand the Downtown Business District. He noted that persons in the area for potential expansion are very interested in the Façade Grant Program.

There was a question regarding the curb and gutter program and where funding is for the program. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the curb and gutter program funds come from the Water & Sewer Fund. He pointed out staff did some research after Council asked about the program. He noted that the last time the city paid out for the curb and gutter fund was in 2005. We paid about \$35,000 in reimbursement to Woodside Plantation.

Regarding the façade program, Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he would like to fund \$50,000 for the program if Council agreed. It was noted that grants for the façade program would be paid if funds are available. It would be a reimbursement for work done. It was noted that we should probably encumber the funds when a request is made for a façade upgrade. It was noted there are rules for grants under the Façade Program, and the process has been in place since 2006. He said Council approves the budget line item, but staff implements the program. He said the cap is \$10,000 over the life of a building or façade. He wondered if Council may want to look at the program and include awnings as part of the façade grant. Mr. Bland stated another thing is that some communities have moved their façade program from a general program to a targeted program where one year we would push painting things and another year target doors. Council felt the façade program should be revisited regarding awnings and that targeted items is a good idea also. It was suggested that Planning come to Council with some recommendations.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated possibly in the fall we could bring some recommendations from Planning to Council for consideration regarding the façade program. It was pointed out that if expansion of the Downtown Business District is approved, there will be more

interest in the program. It was pointed out that the program reimburses the businesses for their expenses for upgrading the façade. There was a question as to how many had applied for a façade grant this year. Mr. Bland responded there had only been a couple this year so far. He pointed out that several had expressed interest and given their notice of intent to draw funds, but had not finished their project yet.

Councilman Girardeau pointed out that back in the 1980s and 90s curb and gutter reimbursement was a big thing in terms of development of roads in a subdivision. He pointed out that things got changed in the early 2000s. He pointed out there is no one building a residential subdivision in Aiken now. Mr. Bedenbaugh pointed out that the city had not funded the program since 2005. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated Councilman Woltz had mentioned that he would like to see resuscitation of the program. The way the ordinance is set up the program is active, but no money has been funded for the program. He pointed out if Council does not fund any money during the annual budget process, then there is no reimbursement program. Councilman Girardeau felt the curb and gutter program is a good program that should be put in place, especially if we want to see new residential subdivisions built on the north side and east side. He felt the program had helped developers in the past. It was noted that the program could be done on a case by case basis via a development agreement, with reimbursement done when certain increments of the subdivision have been built and houses occupied. It was noted that it may take years for a subdivision to be built out.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated basically he had rolled Community Affairs into the City Manager's Office. He also put Tourism back in Parks and Recreation. That is the reason for no budget figures for the Community Affairs Division.

Mr. Bedenbaugh reviewed the Municipal Building which is the custodians and maintenance of the building on Park Avenue and on Laurens Street and payment of the utilities. He said we are looking at consolidation of the offices. Should that happen it would certainly affect the budget.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated when he talked about non-city third parties that get city funding, he named several agencies. One he left out is that every year we give \$10,000 a year to the Economic Development Partnership. He said including the EDP funding in addition to the Library, Downtown Development Corp., the Best Friend Express, and the Council on Aging the funding is \$112,000 rather than \$102,000.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the next department is Public Safety. He pointed out that Chief Barranco and the Command Staff are present. Public Safety has several divisions. The first will be the Admin & Support Division. He pointed out that Public Safety had moved to the new facility on Beaufort Street. He said we are able to staff Station 6 (old headquarters on Laurens Street) with three Driver/Operators through the natural funding with cost underruns throughout the budget year. Through June 30 we are in good shape. However, to fund Station 6 in the 2019-20 budget he needs to find about \$138,000 which includes salary, plus benefits and related uniforms, etc. He said that is not in the proposed budget.

Chief Barranco stated as far as the Driver/Operators there would be three. They would be on 24 hour shift of 24 on and 48 off. That does not account for any relief which he believes they can absorb with what they have now with the rest of the shift. That would be adding one person to each Fire X, Y and Z shift. He said three Driver/Operators would need to be hired to man the station on Laurens Street.

Councilman Girardeau asked if a Station on Laurens Street is necessary to be kept open. He pointed out that we have moved to the new station on Beaufort Street.

Chief Barranco stated when the Beaufort Street location was proposed the question was can we keep our ISO 2 rating in the Fire Department with the station on Beaufort Street. He said he had said they could make it work, however, it would not be ideal because our biggest fire threat is downtown. When you move away from downtown, that increases the response time. He pointed out one of their goals is to work to an ISO Class 1 Fire

Department. He said they feel keeping a station on Laurens Street will help us work towards achieving that goal.

Mr. Bedenbaugh asked Chief Barranco to explain how ISO works for Council and would ISO provide a preliminary review on how that might affect the rating if you are considering adding a station. Chief Barranco stated when looking at the new station we looked to see if we could keep our ISO 2 rating if we moved our headquarters station. He said we did not include keeping the station on Laurens Street. He said Captain Brazier was in training about some changes in the ISO make up and how they judge that. They look at everything from the water supply, to the training, to the response time, etc. All the little pieces are put together. He pointed out that adding a station will lower the response time for the districts. He said they had been working with Tim LeTroy on GIS, with six stations and using a 35 mph gauge we can get just about everywhere in our suburban fire district within 5 minutes once they leave the station.

Councilmembers discussed the proposal and felt that having a station downtown is necessary. Chief Barranco stated in discussing the downside for the new location on Beaufort Street, the only downside he had heard through the process was the concern about the presence downtown. Councilmembers pointed out that the community wants a station downtown.

Captain Brazier stated with a Station 6 downtown, he felt we would be closer to a Class 1 rating. There is no guarantee because ISO is doing some changes in the system. Chief Barranco stated the grading of ISO is from 9 to 1 with 1 being the best. Aiken is a Class 2. That is anything between 80 and 89.9. We were almost an 88 at our last rating. He pointed out the things they struggle with are training and personnel. He pointed out that when Aiken became a Class 2 in the early days we went from a Class 5 to a Class 2 by being a Public Safety Department and having a quick response as patrol officers get to the scene quickly. There was a question as to how a Class 1 rating might affect property owners. Chief Barranco stated the change in Class affects rates very minimal for residential but affects commercial more than residential.

Chief Barranco stated the proposal is to have an engine company at Station 6 on Laurens Street. There would be one person to drive the fire truck to the scene. The firefighters are out in the patrol cars on the road so 98% of the time the patrol officers are able to get the scene before the fire truck gets there. It was noted that Station 6 would be staffed like the other sub-stations. Chief Barranco stated with Council's permission, if we are able to modify the station, we would also like to have offices for our downtown officers and some storage. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated we have money in CPST IV for Public Safety Substation Renovations. We have almost \$2 million allocated for that.

Chief Barranco pointed out that the repeaters for city services are still there. The tower is still there. Keeping the building with the tower and the redundancy and coverage is beneficial to everyone. He said SCE&G said do not take the tower down unless you have to.

Mayor Osbon stated it seems that it will take about 1 additional mill of taxes to operate Station 6. Mr. Bedenbaugh pointed out that for every \$100,000 value of a house, 1 additional mill will be \$4 on the annual tax bill. The average real estate sale for the price of a home in the City of Aiken was around \$165,000 so it is estimated that would be about a \$7 increase in taxes with a 1 mill increase.

Councilwoman Gregory asked what it would cost to run the building as Station 6. Chief Barranco pointed out that the water, electricity, etc. would be much less than it was when the headquarters station was there. He noted there would be the personnel. Equipment is a concern as well. Chief Barranco stated for the equipment they were waiting to hear from a grant. He pointed out to fund a fire truck is about \$500,000. We have about \$279,000 in current Depreciation funds. If the grant falls through, we will not be starting at zero to buy a new truck. He pointed out that we are operating out of Station 6 right now with 1 reserve pumper. He pointed out that in CPST IV we requested money for a ladder truck and another pumper to try to make up for a Depreciation shortfall in the past.

It was noted that the proposed budget has fully funded depreciation funds for all the fire trucks.

Chief Barranco stated there were other staff requests other than the Driver/Operators. He said those needs were sent to the City Manager's Office. He said he knows we can't fund all of them in the proposed budget. He pointed out that with proposed changes in the laws, a 17 year old person will be considered a juvenile. That will put a work load on our Juvenile Division. We requested personnel for that. A Crime Analyst would help the whole department to focus our resources to be able to not just be on patrol but to be in targeted patrol areas. We have software to help with that. We can take that to another level. A School Resource Officer is requested by the School District and approximately \$47,000 is requested in the budget. Just looking at salary without benefits the cost will be about \$50,000.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated one item Councilman Dewar had mentioned to him was the funding for the School Resource Officer. Council then discussed the School Resource Officers in the schools and how they are funded. Chief Barranco stated we currently have 3 School Resource Officers, with one being at each of the two high schools and one at the Center for Creative Learning. (Pinecrest). The newly requested School Resource Officer is for the new Aiken Middle School. The School District would provide \$47,000 for the new School Resource Officer.

Council then discussed at length the School Resource Officers, the need for the officers in the schools, and funding for the School Resource Officers. There was also discussion on the staffing for Youth Services. Chief Barranco noted that currently there is a Captain, Investigator and 3 School Resource Officers in the Youth Division. It was noted that the Department had asked for more personnel, but funding was not included in the proposed budget for the additional personnel.

Councilwoman Gregory pointed out in looking at the proposed budget, there are needs but they are not budgeted. Chief Barranco stated the department had presented a proposed budget and had also sent in a list of requested additions to the budget. He said the requests were evaluated; however, we have to operate within the money available. Councilman Woltz asked what the total was for the extra needs. Chief Barranco stated the extra needs for Youth Services were \$104,000. He pointed out there were needs in the other divisions as well, and he wanted Council to be aware of the needs and he was aware of needs in other departments as well.

Councilwoman Gregory stated the needs in the schools are increasing. She said we have to make sure that the Youth Services Division is funded properly, especially if the law is passed that a 17 year old will shift into the juvenile category. She noted that puts a tremendous strain on the Youth Division.

Councilman Woltz pointed out the number one obligation to the taxpayers is public safety and that is Council's biggest task to protect the citizens.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he had asked all the departments to list their needs with the understanding that not everything could get funded. He felt it was important to have an understanding of where we need to go from here. We can't do it all in one year, but we can set goals as to where we want to be over the next few years. He pointed out there is no doubt that public safety is number one so that our citizens feel safe.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated staff can go back and prioritize what the needs are. He noted that we need to have the downtown fire station staffed and look at Youth Services. He said perhaps the other needs could be looked at over the next few years.

Regarding the School Resource Officers, it was noted that the School District needs to contribute to funding for officers in the schools. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the School District does provide some funding for the School Resource Officers. Chief Barranco stated their funding increased this year from \$121,000 and to \$147,000. It was noted that the School Resource Officers are Public Safety Department employees. The additional officer requested this year is for the new Aiken Middle School which is 6<sup>th</sup> graders.

There were questions as to why a School Resource Officer at the Middle School and not at the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade schools.

Captain Burgess noted that the 6<sup>th</sup> grade tends to be a transitional grade and is similar to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. She said there are a lot of issues with 6<sup>th</sup> graders. She felt it was a smart move for the School District to ask for a School Resource Officer for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

Regarding the funding for the School Resource Officers, it was noted that the School District funds about two-thirds of the salary for the School Resource Officers. Chief Barranco stated if we add cost for benefits, then it is more like one-half of the cost being provided by the School District for the school officers.

Councilmembers suggested that city staff ask the School District to more fully fund the cost for the School Resource Officers.

Councilwoman Gregory noted while the School Resource Officers are doing their duty at the school, then Youth Services is a skeleton crew at Public Safety to help take of issues.


Chief Barranco pointed out that the city does use the Public Safety Officers during the summer when school is not in session. He said he thought the national average for fully funded Resource Officers to be about 75%. It was pointed out that if the Aiken County School District is funding about 50% of the cost, then we are short of the national average cost.

Council continued to discuss the issue of cost for providing School Resource Officers in the schools and noted the officers are taking care of 1,500 kids. Staff reviewed the training involved for the School Resource Officers. It was noted that the cost for officers involve cars, salary, training, and benefits. It is hoped that this year the Governor is going to get funding for School Resource Officers in every school. It was noted that in recent years there have not been as many applications for the School Resource Officer positions. It was also pointed out that sometimes a School Resource Officer is placed at the school for summer school. However, that is not required and not a part of the contract. It depends on the need at the time.

Staff was asked to contact the School District and talk to them about the cost of providing the School Resource Officers in the schools which they have requested and request that they provide more funding for the officers.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he felt at this point we could stop and continue our review of the budget at our next work session meeting which will be on April 15, 2019, at 5 p.m. followed by a regular Council meeting at 7 p.m. The meeting for April 8 has been moved to the April 15 date due to school spring break and the Masters event. There will be another Council meeting on April 22, 2019. At the April 22 meeting, there will be first reading of the ordinance for the rezoning of the Downtown Business District.

The work session ended at 6:40 p.m.

  
Sara B. Ridout  
City Clerk