



City of Ashtabula
Ashtabula City Council
Finance & Personnel Committee Meeting
Friday, March 17, 2023 at 8:30 AM
4717 Main Avenue, Ashtabula, OH 44004

Minutes

Opening of Committee Meeting

Call to Order

The meeting of the Ashtabula City Council Finance and Personnel Committee was called to order at 8:34 a.m. by Committee Vice Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo.

Roll Call

Members Present: Chair: Ward 1 Councilor Kym Foglio- arrived at 8:40 a.m., Vice Chair: Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo, Member: President John Roskovics

Absent: none

Officers Present: City Manager James Timonere, Interim Finance Director Carolyn Sheldon, Clerk of Council McKenzie Burgan

Visitors: None.

Sunshine Law Certification

A quorum was established as defined by the Ashtabula City Council Rules of Order. The meeting met the requirements of the Ohio Sunshine Laws Open Meetings Act.

Welcome and Acknowledgement of Visitors

There were no visitors present.

Finance Director's Report

Municipal Income Tax Assessment notice

Interim Finance Director Carolyn Sheldon stated she gave everyone a copy of the assessment letter that was drafted by Assistant Solicitor Catherine Colgan. The letter needs to state where these appeals need to be sent. She wants to know if the council would like the appeals to be sent to the Clerk of Council or to the Finance Director. The Appeals Board needs to be staffed. Mrs. Sheldon stated she received a letter from a resident on March 9th and she is waiting to respond as she needs to know where appeals will be sent. Mrs. Sheldon was advised by Assistant Solicitor Colgan that assessment letters needed to be sent out for the 2019 tax year. If this is not done, then they will lose out on another tax year that they can legally collect on. For 2019 they are looking at 388 accounts that have a delinquent balance. This does not mean 388 letters will be mailed out because some of these most likely carry small balances of between \$2-\$25. The years 2020 and 2021 also need to be assessed. In 2020 there are 467 delinquent accounts and in 2021 there are 471 delinquent counts. Presumably, there are overlaps with these accounts and there would be one letter that would cover tax years 2019, 2020, and 2021. Assessment letters for 2019 have to be sent out before their deadline of April 18th. Mrs. Sheldon stated she would like to be able to send all three years out at

once but, as that will be a lot, she is going to concentrate on 2019 as she still has time for 2020 and 2021. She mentioned again that the appeals board needs to be staffed. Member Council President John Roskovics asked if we do not currently have an appeals board and Mrs. Sheldon stated there is currently no one on it. Mr. Roskovics asked what this would consist of and if we have had one before. Mrs. Sheldon said yes. City Manager Timonere stated there has been a board, but since he has been with the city, they have never met. Mrs. Sheldon stated that the City Manager has one appointment to this board and the council has two appointments. Vice Chair Jane Haines-DiGiacomo asked if the members needed to be accountants. Mrs. Sheldon stated they do not have to be accountants. The proposed assessment letter that Assistant Solicitor Colgan drafted states that the appeals request should be in writing and should specify the reason why the assessment should be deemed incorrect or unlawful. The income tax department automatically waives the first year of fees and no questions are asked. Penalties each year vary as they are not a set number but a percentage. Mrs. Sheldon recently found out that if a taxpayer comes in and pays all their taxes owed, their penalties and fees are all waived. She stated that with the assessment letter being mailed out for the tax year 2019 having to be certified and paid to be mailed, she does not feel inclined to waive the penalties and interest if these taxes have not been paid by now. After 60 days, these accounts get certified to the Attorney General's office, and they have the legal authority to go after these individuals for these delinquent amounts. Mrs. Sheldon stated she needs to know where these appeals will be sent to. Vice Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo stated that the policy needs to be consistent for everyone and a policy needs to be put in place and needs to fall under the Finance Director's umbrella. Once the policy is created, it needs to be followed by everyone. Member Council President John Roskovics stated he believes the appeals should go to the Finance Director and Vice Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo agreed. Mrs. Sheldon stated that the board needs to be staffed in order for appeals to be made and heard. Chair Ward 1 Councilor Kym Foglio, Vice Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haine-DiGiacomo, and Member Council President John Roskovics spoke about potential residents that could serve on this board and about trying to get them appointed at this upcoming council meeting or the following one. Vice Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo asked Mrs. Sheldon if she knew of anyone who could serve on the appeals board. Mrs. Sheldon said she would have to think about it. Vice Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo stated this board may not meet frequently if it has not met since City Manager Timonere has been with the city. City Manager Timonere stated that we cannot know that, as the Ohio Revised Code states, the Finance Director can settle these things and if the taxpayer still disagrees, then they can go to the appeals board. He believes previously a lot of these situations were handled at the window or in the office. Vice Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haine-DiGiacomo asked Mrs. Sheldon if she is comfortable with the appeals first going to her and Mrs. Sheldon said yes. City Manager Timonere reminded everyone that a decision has to be made prior to an appeal being requested. Vice Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo stated that the Finance Department has to make a decision and then if the taxpayer wants to appeal the decision, this would go to the appeals board. Mrs. Haines-DiGiacomo asked for something to be in writing as to this process and City Manager Timonere said yes, all this would be needed and would be created by the finance and income tax department. Chair Ward 1 Councilor Kym Foglio stated that every instance is different. Mrs. Sheldon stated that she received advice from Assistant Solicitor Colgan that she does not think penalties should be waived because then everyone will be requesting their penalties be waived. Vice Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo asked if Mrs. Sheldon is hiring someone as Assistant Finance Director while she is the Interim Finance Director. Mrs. Sheldon said no she is not doing any hiring, she is waiting for the Finance Director to come and will then go back to being the Assistant Finance Director. Mrs. Haines-DiGiacomo asked if she would be interested in having someone come in as an Interim Finance Director so she could go back to being the Assistant Finance Director. Mrs. Sheldon stated she believes this is something the council would need to decide. She stated that ideally, you are getting someone in for the long-term who will learn the programs, systems, and job. City Manager Timonere stated his concern about bringing in

an Interim Finance Director would be that Mrs. Sheldon is already doing a lot and then would have to train someone on top of that and once a permanent Finance Director gets hired she would have to train them too. Chair Ward 1 Councilor Kym Foglio stated that they have two applicants currently for the Finance Director position.

February financial reports

Interim Finance Director Carolyn Sheldon stated that she gave everyone a monthly statement of cash. She stated the only notable thing is that the PI Fund is in the negative and this is due to all the debt being fully encumbered. She believes this will clear up once real estate taxes come in. She is anticipating that the real estate taxes will be here in March. On the revenue and expense report, they are at 16.67% in the year and there is nothing notable there. Vice Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo asked City Manager Timonere if anything in the financial reports concerned him. City Manager Timonere stated he believes they predicted right that they did not need an advance from the county with the delay of the property taxes. Property taxes were due earlier this month and by the beginning of April, we should have the first half collection, which will help with cash flow. He stated we should have received the property taxes by now but they had a delay at the county level. He said everything is okay for the time being. He stated that the ARPA funds will have to be melded back into the budget somehow. Vice Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo asked how much is left in those funds. Mr. Timonere stated they do intend to use some of the funds for paving and the only thing they have used so far was the \$500,000 for the Waste Water Treatment Reports and some for the Rt 84 and Rt 20 projects, so there is about \$800,000 left there. Mrs. Haines-DiGiacomo asked how much we are using this year and Mr. Timonere said a lot. Mrs. Sheldon stated there is 1.3 million in the fund currently. City Manager Timonere stated this is before what we are using this year and there are still payments to be processed from the other projects too.

City Manager's Report

City Manager Timonere stated they have a CDL trainer coming to the city on Monday to work with two of the Sanitation employees and then next week they will be traveling to take their CDL tests. That will provide Sanitation with two more CDL holders. This training is paid for by the city as long as the employees stay employed with the city for three years. If they leave before the three years are up, then payback will be required. For the whole training, it will cost around \$2,000-\$3,000. Some other courses were around \$7,000-\$8,000. Once these employees have their CDL, they can then hire people under the circumstances that they will have to get their CDL within a certain amount of time. They are short two people currently in the entire system. People have not been transferred around yet because sanitation workers cannot be taken away as trash has to be picked up. The Dog Warden/Code Enforcement Officer was replaced before the last one left and he was put in as the job is a lot and could not be left vacant. The new Dog Warden came from Motor Maintenance and when additional staff is needed in that department, a temporary transfer will be made to cover that. This has not been needed yet. The Motor Maintenance Forman job has been open for a long time as they have not found anyone with either a diesel certificate or an ASE certificate along with their CDL. Promotional tests are coming up for both the fire and police departments in April. These are internal, where they have lieutenant positions in the police department open and lieutenant and captain positions open in the fire department. Entrance tests will most likely be done later this year as the current lists are getting old. They have applied for an AFG grant through FEMA for a new ladder truck. The current ladder truck is approaching 45 years old. They completed a major renovation about 6 years ago and were told that would last about 5. The truck is still doing well, but it is time to start thinking about that. New ladders are anywhere between 1.5 and 1.8 million. They have applied for the maximum grant of 1 million and believe they will get it. They would have heard if they were not approved by now. They have reached out to Dave Joyce's office and Sherrod Brown's office to see if there is any nudge they can give FEMA because they have to plan. They are hearing right now there will be about a two-year building time for a ladder truck and they will have to figure out how they will pay their portion of the costs. Vice Chair Jane Haines-DiGiacomo asked if they could use

the CARES Act money for this and he said yes, but he would rather figure out a 5 to a 10-year loan. Mrs. Haines-DiGiacomo asked how much they could sell the current truck for once it is replaced and Mr. Timonere said he is not sure yet but will try and offload it. The place they bought their ambulance from was checking in to see how things were going and told Mr. Timonere that if anything happens and the ambulance is totaled, there will be about a three-year wait for a new one. He stated plow trucks cannot be ordered in 2024 because they are booked. Police vehicles cannot be bought for the next year either as they are booked too. They finally got the bucket truck that was ordered in August of 2021. The funds for the new ladder truck will have to be put aside for when it is received to make sure the funds are available. Staffing is okay overall.

New Business

Member Council President John Roskovics mentioned the raises for the City Solicitor and City Manager positions. He asked if they would like this to be brought out of the committee.

Motion: Chair Ward 1 Councilor Kym Foglio moved to bring this out of the committee; Vice Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo seconded.

Discussion: Mrs. Foglio, Mrs. Haines-DiGiacomo, and Mr. Roskovics agreed that the raise percentage will be as follows: 12/1/2023- 2%, 12/1/2024- 2%, 12/1/2025- 2.5%, 12/1/2026- 3%. This will be for both the City Manager position and the City Solicitor position.

VOICE VOTE

Yeas: Chair Ward 1 Councilor Kym Foglio, Vice Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo, Member Council President John Roskovics

Nays: None

Motion passed.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on April 21, 2023, at 8:30 a.m.

The next meeting will be on April 21st at 8:30 a.m.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:17 AM by Chair Ward 1 Councilor Kym Foglio.

Attested By: Clerk of Council McKenzie Burgan