

**BOARD OF FINANCE
BUDGET DELIBERATIONS – TECHNICAL DISCUSSION
PROPOSED BUDGET 2024/2025
MARCH 5, 2024**

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The Board of Finance held their budget deliberations session on Thursday, March 5, 2024. Chairman Lema announced the Board was out of recess and reconvened the budget deliberations meeting in public session at 5:33 p.m.

Board Members Present

Brian Lema, Chairman
Scott Moulton
Lauren Ranges
Ray Arnold
Meghan Smith

Also Present

Mayor Anthony S. Giannattasio
Peter Erodict, Finance Director

Chairman Lema stated tonight was the technical discussion for both the Mayor's proposed budget and the Board of Education budget for fiscal year 2024/2025. He stated the Board would start discussions with the Board of Education budget.

Mr. Moulton and Mr. Arnold made and second a motion to reconvene the budget sessions. Motion carried unanimously.

(p. 94) 4796 Education Operations

Chairman Lema asked if members of the Board had comments or discussion on the education operations budget. Mr. Moulton discussed money allocated by Covid funds for HVAC. He asked why funds in the budget need to be allocated to HVAC. Sean Brennan, Assistant Superintendent of Operations, explained the funds have been accounted for and it is necessary based on the guidelines to be expended by September 30, 2024. He stated there are some remaining funds, approximately \$847,000 and the funds are accounted for with HVAC specific projects. Chairman Lema asked if there is a budget line for HVAC or ventilation. Mr. Brennan stated there are some related to HVAC in project lines. He discussed various projects that will be completed with the remaining covid money over the summer. Mr. Moulton asked if the state mandate for HVAC evaluation is being removed from the budget. Mr. Brennan explained it is not included in the budget and bonded funds are being utilized through the capital improvement plan. Mr. Arnold asked the number of special education students. He asked where the counselors would be shown in the budget. ??? there are approximately 1,000 students that are categorized as special education with 70 to 80 students being placed out of district. Mr. Arnold where in the pie chart where the school counselors are shown. Dr. Cutaia stated they are teachers and will be in the teacher line. Mr. Arnold asked if they count toward student ratio calculation. Dr. Cutaia stated the class size shown are classroom teachers. She stated elementary is the only place where class size is shown due to variances in the middle and high schools. She stated that the student to teacher ratio is not a necessary metric. Dr. Cutaia stated the school counselor nationally recommended is 250 to 1. She stated the schools are in good standing. Dr. Cutaia discussed specialized programming and the need for more human capital. She discussed cost efficiencies by keeping students in district rather than out placing students. Chairman Lema asked if health insurance for retirees is reflected in the board of education budget and active

employees in the City budget health insurance contribution. Dr. Cutaia confirmed that is correct. Chairman Lema asked if the retiree blue cross/blue shield plan is self-insured. Peter Erodici, Finance Director, stated it is fully insured.

(p. 63) 054320 Public Works

(p. 65) 054321 Highway Parks

Chairman Lema asked Chris Saley, Director of Public Works, if there was any additional information he would like to provide. Mr. Saley stated the Master Mechanic positions classification will need to be determined. Mr. Erodici asked what the wage range will be. Mr. Saley stated it will be minimum step \$38 per hour and top step \$42 per hour. Chairman Lema asked if that salary range will apply to both positions. Mr. Saley stated it will apply to both. He discussed the difficulty of obtaining qualified individuals and the current wage structure. He discussed providing support to the Fire Department and keeping work in-house which realizes an overall savings. Mr. Saley discussed the departments serviced. Mr. Moulton asked where outsourcing vehicle repair is shown. Mr. Saley stated it auto supply and upkeep. Discussion ensued concerning Fire Department support. Mr. Saley discussed the wear and tear on garbage trucks. Steve Johnson, Assistant Director, stated the account does not accurately reflect what is expended. He stated funds were used from other accounts when necessary. Mr. Saley discussed aging trash trucks and the expense of maintaining them. He discussed municipal grant-in-aid for additional trash trucks. Chairman Lema noted the fire department has a line item for auto supply and upkeep. He asked if that would supplement the work to be performed by public works. Mr. Saley commented that he believes that would be line item to be utilized. He stated the Wheelers Farm Road fire station has the garage to accommodate the work. Chairman Lema note the fire maintenance mechanic under fire department. Mr. Saley stated he is not aware of that position. Chairman Lema asked if the position is vacant. Mr. Erodici stated there position is filled. Mr. Arnold commented on changing heavy machine operator to light equipment operator. Mr. Saley discussed eliminating the heavy equipment operator and adding light equipment operators. Mr. Saley discussed changing a maintainer position to maintainer/traffic controller with a \$3,000 increase. He discussed utility work within the City where traffic control assistance is required.

(p. 14) 05998112 Elections

Chairman Lema stated the Registrars submitted some additional information. He stated we do not know exactly what amount is needed and if necessary, a transfer can be requested. Mr. Arnold stated ultimately if there is a cost it should be funded and next year, he will look to know the actual cost. Ms. Ranges stated she agrees with Chairman Lema. Mr. Moulton discussed costs expended in 2020. Chairman Lema suggested increasing the budget to \$150,000. Mr. Arnold asked if potential increases for non-represented is anticipated and included in the budget request. Mr. Erodici explained how he projects for salary increases.

(p. 22) 054129 City Clerk

Chairman Lema asked if a position is being eliminated. Mr. Erodici discussed changing an Assistant Clerk and making a Certified Vital Clerk a grade lower.

(p. 29) 054143 Board of Assessment Appeals

Chairman Lema asked when the next revaluation will take place. Mr. Erodici stated it will be the Grand List 10/1/25 which will affect the 26/27 budget.

(p. 35) 054593 Public Library

Mr. Erodici discussed technical changes to adjust the wage for assistant library director based on an MOU with the union.

(p. 39) 054170 Information Technology

Mr. Arnold asked who is responsible for assisting departments with technology acquisitions and support. Mr. Erodici stated that would be through the IT department. He discussed consolidation of computers into the IT department.

(p. 43) 054210 Police Department

Chairman Lema noted the one additional police officer and two social workers being requested. He stated the Chief stated this is the last year for the addition of police officers per the prior agreement. Mr. Arnold noted the social workers will no longer be funded through ARPA. He asked if they are state mandated. Chairman Lema stated it is the new approach.

(p. 51) 054220 Fire Department

Mr. Arnold stated historically for the department has had a 2% increase and this year it has increased by 9%. Mr. Moulton stated the department has run a deficit for several years. Ms. Ranges stated the wage increases are a substantial driver and noted they are contractual. Mr. Moulton stated equipment maintenance is also a cost driver and usage is up due to ambulance transport. Mr. Arnold discussed the revenue received by the department. Chairman Lema stated the department brings in revenue of approximately \$2.5 million. Mr. Moulton noted they are bearing more expenses and are not realizing the revenue brought in by transport. Mr. Erodici stated most of the revenue goes to the general fund with 25% going to the department to supplement equipment and supply purchases. Mr. Moulton asked if the funds are restricted. Mr. Erodici stated if related to paramedic services it could be reclassified.

(p. 76) 054331 Solid waste

Chairman Lema asked about the not concerning commercial waste. Mr. Erodici stated it goes into a special revenue fund.

(p. 79) 054410 Health Department

Chairman Lema noted the request for the reinstatement of a Community Health Coordinator. He note the Deputy Director was added in 22/23 and discussed his hesitancy to add new positions. Mr. Arnold discussed adding people and recurring costs. Mr. Erodici discussed the position is currently

funded through ARPA and the department request to reinstate. Mr. Moulton asked if there are vacancies in the department. Mr. Erodici stated there are currently no vacancies. Mr. Arnold discussed the Community Health Coordinator being on the front lines.

(p. 84) 05998310 Employee Benefits

Mr. Arnold asked for an explanation of the significant decrease. Mr. Erodici discussed using savings in the health insurance fund to replenish the fund balance. He stated there is an increase overall and to help off-set there are other sources of revenue to fund such as cost shares and savings from the fund balance.

(p. 4) 054000 General Fund Revenue

Chairman Lema asked if there is any information on education cost sharing. Mr. Erodici stated the Governor's proposed budget the ECS number is higher than proposed in the current budget. He stated he will look for updated information before the vote.

Mr. Moulton and Ms. Ranges made and second a motion to take a 5-minute technical recess. Motion carried unanimously.

The Board recessed at 6:56 p.m.
The Board reconvened at 6:58 p.m.

Mr. Arnold asked when the ECS becomes final. Chairman Lema stated when the stated budget is adopted. He stated the Board of Aldermen should have the final number available for their vote. Mr. Arnold asked if miscellaneous stabilization is part of the ECS. Mr. Erodici stated the stabilization is the former state hold harmless and municipal share in sales tax. Chairman Lema discussed decrease in beach parking fee revenue. Chairman Lema asked if the appropriated fund balance is projected to be \$11,700,00. Mr. Erodici stated that was the amount approved last year by the Board of Aldermen to be used out of the fund balance. He stated it has fluctuated over the years.

Mr. Moulton and Ms. Ranges made and seconded a motion to recess until March 20, 2024, at 5:30 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Lema stated the Board would stand in recess until March 20, 2024. The Board recessed at 7:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Toni Jo Weeks
Recording Secretary