

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
January 17, 2023

City Commission Work Session
Civic Center, Gibson Room 212

Mayor Kelly presiding

CALL TO ORDER: 5:30 PM

CITY COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT: Bob Kelly, Susan Wolff, Joe McKenney, Eric Hinebauch and Rick Tryon.

STAFF PRESENT: City Manager Greg Doyon and Deputy City Manager Chuck Anderson; City Attorney David Dennis; Finance Director Melissa Kinzler; Municipal Court Supervisor Morgan Medvec; Fire Chief Jeremy Jones; Police Chief Jeff Newton; and, Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

1. PUBLIC SAFETY LEVY DISCUSSION

City Manager Greg Doyon explained that once the Commission determines a number and whether it wants to combine or separate the requests by the departments, City staff would draft the ballot language. Outside legal counsel indicated that it would not be advisable to combined operational needs and capital requests. He concluded that the Missouri Room would be considered for Municipal Court, if it were moved out of the basement.

He provided and discussed a 2023 Great Falls Public Safety Levy Summary Department Requests as of January 5, 2023 handout.

Commissioner Wolff received clarification that the capital request for the renovation of the Police Department is separate from the Police Evidence Building Expansion project. She further received clarification that American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds would be utilized for the Police Evidence Building Expansion project.

Commissioner Hinebauch received clarification that the proposed \$6.5 million capital request from the Police Department was estimated based on other projects and would be for internal renovations of the Police Department.

Mayor Kelly received clarification that the proposed \$10 million capital request from the Fire Department included land costs for a potential modular design and that any remaining money would be used for renovations to the remaining Fire Stations. He further received clarification that ARPA and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) funds were utilized for Fire Department engine refurbishment and overhead door replacement.

Commissioner Hinebauch received clarification that the language on a ballot for the operational needs could be a number or a mill. He further received clarification that Collective Bargaining Agreements

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could affect the ask with regard to Fire Fighters and related staff. He suggested using a mill instead of a dollar value on the ballot.

Finance Director Melissa Kinzler added that sometimes a mill could increase and a dollar amount would not increase.

Mayor Kelly expressed concern that a mill levy could be confusing for citizens who do not understand how mills works.

Commissioners Wolff and McKenney commented that educating citizens about a fixed amount and value of a mill is important.

After further discussion, it was the consensus of the Commission that the draft proposed language for the ballot include mills and residential property impact.

Commissioner Hinebauch received clarification that there are different laws and requirements with regard to the language for a mill levy and general obligation debt.

Mayor Kelly requested that the Department Heads explain what the impact to the community would be if the operational aspect of a levy passed and when the collection would be.

Finance Director Kinzler responded that the collection would be in November 2024 and the money should not be spent until it is actually received.

Fire Chief Jeremy Jones responded that Great Falls Fire Rescue (GFFR) would go through a major influx of hiring qualified candidates in January 2025 and would be contingent upon the pool of candidates that apply. Having 32 additional firefighters and running a second engine company would have an immediate impact to the community.

Commissioner Tryon inquired if the citizens Insurance Services Office (ISO) rate would decrease and response time would be more in line with what the public expects, if a combined operational and capital levy is passed.

Fire Chief Jones responded that the Good + proposal would address a lack of Fire Station coverage, personnel being able to respond, and a dedicated staffed aerial. He is waiting for a response from an ISO Field Representative with regard to the ISO rate.

City Attorney David Dennis responded that the City Attorney's Office operates in a complimentary capacity with the Police, Fire and Municipal Court. Having a second, Municipal Court would allow for the current workload in the Prosecutors Office to be spread across two courts; however, with the current staffing, there would not be enough resources to allow a second court to achieve the efficiencies it needs.

Having additional Prosecutors would improve communication and follow up with victims and witnesses, allow for a more aggressive prosecution, increase response time for records requests and code enforcement cases. City Attorney Dennis added that because of a lack of capacity in the department, Prosecutors are more likely to either make or accept a deal with cases that consume more resources from the department.

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Having an additional Prosecutor and Paralegal would get the Legal Department where it needs to be to handle and allow a two-court system to be efficient and productive. To fill the need over the next several years would depend upon what happens with the Police Department and volume of cases in Municipal Court. City Attorney Dennis estimated that an additional Prosecutor would get the Legal Department by for the next two or three years at the most.

Police Chief Jeff Newton responded that having additional police officers would also require support staff. Hiring challenges, legislative changes and unfunded mandates have an impact on the Police, Fire, Legal and Municipal Court. The capital improvement for the Police Evidence Building Expansion project should get the Police Department by for approximately 10 to 15 years.

Municipal Court Supervisor Morgan Medvec reiterated that work flow of Municipal Court would be impacted by the number of police officers on the street. She explained that an additional Jury Clerk would allow other Court staff to process records requests and a Compliance Officer would allow other Court staff to contact citizens before they go into warrant. The Municipal Court operational request would potentially decrease the amount of warrants issued and increase the efficiency of the court.

Commissioner Wolff received clarification that the more police officers on the street, the higher the crime statistics would be, because of more enforcement.

Commissioner Tryon commented that he is not as concerned about the crime statistics as he is about what citizens are saying and experiencing in the community.

Police Chief Newton concurred with Commissioner Tryon's comment and added that the concern is about the citizens perception of what local law enforcement is doing for the community.

Mayor Kelly commented that the City has been behind with regard to the operational and capital needs of the Police, Legal, Fire and Municipal Court Departments. The total amount for combined operational and capital requests for a \$200,000 home would be a minimal tax increase in order to have better equipped Public Safety Departments. He expressed appreciation to the Department Heads for their efforts with regard to reducing their request to a minimal ask that is reasonable, but also has some performance.

It was the consensus of the Commission to allow the voters to decide if they are willing to invest in some very necessary aspects of community life.

Mayor Kelly requested that City Manager Doyon, Finance Director Kinzler and City staff start the process and add this on an agenda for public input.

City Manager Doyon responded that he would provide the Commission with revised ballot language that include mills, as well as combined and separated department requests, at the February 7, 2023 Work Session.

It was the consensus of the Commission that City Manager Doyon combine the departments.

Commissioner Hinebauch requested that City staff also include bond information.

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Commissioner Tryon inquired if there would be a benefit to separating the departments.

Mayor Kelly responded that Police, Fire, Legal and Municipal Court are departments that work together and have a unified approach to public safety. The Department Heads have made it clear their need for each other to do the job that the community expects them to do.

Commissioner McKenney concurred with Mayor Kelly's comment about the tax increase being minimal for the safety the community expects, as well as the requests being narrowed down as low as possible with having positive outcome for public safety in the community.

Commissioner Wolff commented that, with the consideration of an additional 22 Police Officers, the School District is in need of more School Resource Officers (SRO). If the City does not include SRO's in its Public Safety Levy, the School District would have to consider doing its own levy. It is important to show the community that starting with the youth could have an impact to negate the crime situation.

City Manager Doyon reported that one applicant submitted a proposal with regard to the Public Safety Levy Community Education Program.

After further discussion, it was the consensus of the Commission that City Manager Doyon have the applicant present its proposal to the Commission at an upcoming work session.

Commissioner Tryon expressed concern with regard to utilizing taxpayer money to pay for a Community Education Program, as well as public perception that the City is advocating for something instead of educating.

City Manager Doyon responded that the City has CARES allocation to utilize for a Community Education Program to help the public understand why the City is asking for a Public Safety Levy.

DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that a Public Safety Levy recap will be a topic for the February 7, 2023 work session. A blight discussion about certain properties will be a topic for the February 21, 2023 work session. Collections option for outstanding warrants will be a topic for the March 7, 2023 work session.

Commissioner McKenney requested that the City Manager's contract review be added to an upcoming meeting.

After a brief discussion, it was the consensus of the Commission that City Manager Doyon provide the Commission with a revised contract language.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Kelly adjourned the informal work session of January 17, 2023 at 6:45 p.m.