

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
February 7, 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 and Deputy City Attorney Rachel Taylor; Finance Director Melissa Kinzler; Municipal Court Judge Steve Bolstad and Court Supervisor Morgan Medvec; Fire Chief Jeremy Jones; Police Chief Jeff Newton; and, Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Brett Doney, Great Falls Development Authority (GFDA), 405 3rd Street NW, commented that GFDA supports the City with regard to the Public Safety Levy.

Written correspondence, via February 6, 2023 email, was received from **Terry Bjork**, suggested that City staff consider levy mills calculation based on January 2022, sharing the load for the extra Public Safety funding, and specific numerical targets for public benefits with regard to the charts showing the “Public Benefit” column for each requested item from each department.

1. SECOND JUDGE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

City Attorney David Dennis explained that he is seeking Commission approval with regard to the proposed application process, timeline and interest form for appointing a candidate to fill the second judge position. The Commission can appoint a qualified person to serve as Municipal Judge until the next Municipal General Election in November of 2023. Interviews and selection of an appointee could possibly be accomplished at one Special City Commission Meeting.

Municipal Court Judge Steve Bolstad commented that he is aware of a few candidates interested in the second judge position. He expressed support of the proposed timeline for submitting the interest form and would appreciate the Commission’s expedience with regard to the recruitment process.

Mayor Kelly received clarification that the position for a second judge was advertised through the State Bar Association, Cascade County Bar Association and by word of mouth.

Commissioner McKenney received clarification that there would not be an unfair advantage to appointing a qualified person to serve as Municipal Judge until the next municipal general election in November of 2023. He further received clarification that qualified applications would be vetted prior to the Commission interviewing the candidates.

Commissioner Tryon expressed concern that the appointed person serving as a second judge would have

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an advantage going into the election.

After further discussion, it was the consensus of the Commission that City Attorney Dennis proceed with the proposed timeline and coordinate one meeting, depending on the number of qualified applications received, for the Commission to interview the candidates.

2. SAFETY LEVY DISCUSSION – PROPOSED BALLOT LANGUAGE

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that City staff has been working with outside legal counsel, Dorsey & Whitney on the proposed ballot language and it approved Commissioner McKenney's revised ballot question format.

Commissioner McKenney commented that citizens would make their decision about a Public Safety Levy during the education campaign or on election day. The ballot language could be a deciding factor if there was a close vote and explaining the purpose in the first paragraph of the ballot is important.

Commissioner Wolff concurred with Commissioner McKenney's revised ballot question format.

Mayor Kelly commented that it is important for the public to understand that even though the City would be seeking a levy up to 101.52 mills, the assessment would not have to be right away for the full amount because of the length of time it takes to get fire and police personnel hired.

Commissioner Wolff explained that there is currently an agreement with the School District and the City should consider adding the need for two additional SRO's. She concluded that children are the most vulnerable and if the City does take care of them, it is not taking care of its future.

Commissioner Tryon received clarification that the current SRO Agreement would have to be negotiated for two additional SRO's and would require added costs and personnel, in addition to the Great Falls Police Department (GFPD) operational request.

Mayor Kelly received clarification that adding language to the ballot that specifically addresses the addition of two SRO's would need to be determined by outside legal counsel.

City Manager Doyon added that he believes outside legal counsel would prefer keeping the wording in the ballot language as is. He reiterated that the amount of the GFPD operational request would have to increase to accommodate adding two more SRO's.

Mayor Kelly received clarification that adding two more SRO's would increase the mills to 103.75 and the operational amount to \$10,717,305.00.

Commissioner McKenney inquired if two additional SRO's would help take the load off SRO's in the middle schools.

Police Chief Jeff Newton responded that it would depend on where the needs are; however, the majority of calls for service are in the high schools.

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Commissioner McKenney commented that school shootings are a tragedy and the lack of SRO's in schools is a common denominator. He would not want to look back knowing that the City had an opportunity to add more SRO's in the schools and passed it by.

Commissioner Tryon inquired about the School District's ability to go out for its own Safety Levy if the City Public Safety Levy did not include two additional SRO's. He further inquired if the School District's budget would cover the full cost of two additional SRO's in some sort of an agreement with the City, if the School District decided it needed two more SRO's.

Tom Moore, Great Falls Public Schools Superintendent, responded that the legislature has given School Districts some flexibility in how it can address safety issues with surplus and other funds. However, he would not recommend that the School District go out for an additional safety levy to include SRO's without having support from the City.

It was the consensus of the Commission that the tax increase for adding two additional SRO's is a minimal amount to expand security in the schools.

Mayor Kelly requested that City staff provide the Commission with numbers for a Public Safety Mill Levy including two additional SRO's.

Commissioner Tryon suggested that City staff address Terry Bjork's written comments and questions. He commented that the City would need to show how it will measure the results and performance of the requested items from each department.

City Manager Doyon responded that there should be Commission action prior to City staff responding to questions from the public about the Safety Levy language.

City Finance Director Melissa Kinzler explained that contacting the State to get an idea how the valuations might go up this year before setting the mills is not feasible because the legislation is in session and things could change. The ballot language includes valuations based on this year because the City would not receive new taxable valuations until August 2023.

City Manager Doyon added that City staff would provide the community with a good idea of what the impact would be despite the many variables.

Mayor Kelly reiterated that the mills could be adjusted.

Commissioner Wolff added that the City has not increased taxes in the last two years.

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DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS

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

Mayor Kelly requested that an AARP update be added to an upcoming work session topic list.

City Attorney Dennis introduced Deputy City Attorney Rachel Taylor.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Kelly adjourned the informal work session of February 7, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.