



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

SUMMARY
November 16, 2022
5:30 P.M.
Hybrid Meeting

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

J. Cepeda-Freytiz, D. Reed, C. Miller, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, C. Daubert, M. Ventura - in person

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher, J. Kelly, W. Heim, K. Talbot, F. Freytiz, E. Moran - in person and M. Gombar, S. Smith, M. Oppenheimer, BCTV - virtually

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz called the Budget Review COW to order and she announced that the Parking Lot topic is deferred.

Note: During Budget Review this symbol → will be used in all meeting summaries to show items referred into the Parking Lot for further consideration.

I. Budget Review

Mayor Budget

Mr. Kelly reviewed the budget for this office. There are no substantive changes. He noted that the revenue line item for the Potteiger Trust has been transferred to the Agency fund. He noted that the salary increases relate to employees only, not to the mayor's salary which remains at \$72,600.

Mr. Kelly stated that the Summer Initiative program for high school youth is continuing for the next three (3) years through ARPA Fund 47 Grants and Gifts at \$50,000 plus an addition \$50,000 for a website for the non-profits for the Youth Violence initiative. The website will track and coordinate the activities of the group. As the City convened this group, the City should take this initial step to set up and maintain the website for a three (3) year period. He stated that this was put out to bid and 21 responses were received. Based on the responses received the cost for this project was estimated at \$50,000.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned who is maintaining the website. Mr. Kelly stated that the management of the site is included in the contract. The non-profits will provide content for the site. The site will also include the web addresses for the participating non-profits that have websites.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she has no problem creating a site for the participating non-profits; however, she stated that she does take issue with the misdirection of the RFP process proceeded which may require a meeting apart from a COW discussion or an executive session.

Mr. Moran interjected that the RFQ process was utilized.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that originally volunteers offered to create the website. She inquired if the volunteers were paid and they were selected through the RFQ process. She stated that two organizations experienced in web design provided input on the creation of this new site.

Mr. Kelly stated that as the original two (2) proposals received exceeded \$10,000, the RFP process was used. He stated that the two organizations did not provide services; the organizations provided only submitted proposals.

Mr. Moran stated that one of the organizations offered to begin work to create the website and submitted a quote which exceeded the limits in the Purchasing Policies which started the RFP/RFQ process. Mr. Kelly agreed.

Ms. Reed stated that the majority of those at this meeting do not understand what is being discussed and she requested additional information prior to committing an additional \$50,000.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz summarized the discussion that just occurred noting the disconnection between Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz's statement that the organization(s) provided a service and the administration's claim that only a quote was submitted.

Mr. Moran reminded everyone that Mr. Waltman wished to provide \$1M in ARPA funding to address youth violence.

Ms. Reed asked who will be the arbiter of the content on the website. Mr. Kelly stated that the non-profits will send content to the site creator. He stated that the site will not be managed by the City. Ms. Reed inquired why the City is paying \$50,000 for a site that is not under the City's control.

Mr. Moran explained that this is similar to the ARPA funding provided to the non-profits, noting that this website will collocate youth violence information. The organization selected

through the bidding process will manage the site. Mr. Kelly stated that this approach eliminates the City's liability.

In response to a question from Mr. Daubert, Mr. Kelly stated that \$50,000 in ARPA funding for the website is a one (1) time expense for a three (3) year period.

Ms. Reed inquired about why the ARPA budget crept into a meeting about the General Fund Budget. Mr. Kelly stated that the overall budget incorporates approximately 50 different funds and that the ARPA allocations need to be included as a budget line item.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the information she received outside of City Hall about the creation of this website made her uncomfortable and caused her to ask questions. She noted that she has no issue with the creation of the website; however, she stated that the correction of the youth violence movement requires more than an auxiliary website.

Mr. Moran stated that additional consideration can occur when the administration forwards the award of contract for Council consideration.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz referred this issue to the Parking Lot.

→ \$50,000 in ARPA funding for the creation and management of a youth violence website for a three (3) year period

Council Budget

Mr. Kelly reviewed the budget. He stated that the Consulting Services line item for \$75K includes fees for activities associated with the 275th Anniversary. *(Note this amount includes the consultant's \$35K salary. The sum in this line item is transferred to the Community Foundation and expenses are approved by the Elected Auditor and the City Clerk prior to payment)*

Ms. Kelleher stated that the line items for Maintenance Agreements and Contracted Services covers the Council Chambers hybrid system. These services are billed in December, according to IT. She stated that the Office Supplies line item increase is due to the need to replace the aging iPads.

Ms. Kelleher explained that the Community Promotions line item includes the MP3 COG annual dues, the Office Chamber dues, etc. Mr. Kelly stated that the Aulenbach's Cemetery contribution was transferred to Non Departmental.

Mr. Kelly stated that no funding has been utilized from this line item to date. Ms. Kelleher referred to the spreadsheet she received to prepare the 2023 budget which shows 2022 expenses paid in the amount of \$7,958.24, (of the \$8,000 budgeted) noting the MP3 dues were paid in January 2022. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that at times coding errors are made and suggested that this simple posting error can be corrected.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz suggested adding funding for community events in each Council District annually and she noted the success of the neighborhood block party in the Lauer's Park area. Mr. Miller and Mr. Daubert agreed with the need to add funding for District functions versus city-wide events.

→ *Add funding in the Council Budget for Council District events.*

In regard to translation services, Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz noted a constituent's suggestion to advertise meetings with Spanish media, in addition to that required by the Sunshine Act. Mr. Kelly stated that the Communication Coordinator provided bilingual notices about meetings. This vacant position will be filled as quickly as possible. In the chat feature, Ms. Smith stated that the City Clerk's office is exploring solutions to this issue.

Mr. Kelly shared a flyer regarding the new ice skating event planned for the Santander Arena during the month of December. This new program will require a City contribution of \$8,400 and \$5,000 from both RAWA and RPA. He stated that the City's contribution can come from the unexpended funds in Community Promotions under the Council Budget.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that while Mr. Kelly believes the City's \$8,000 is available in the Community Promotions line item; however, Ms. Kelleher reports that bills in the amount of \$7,958.24 were paid from this line item during 2022. Mr. Kelly stated that if the Council budget cannot pay for this event, he will need to find funding elsewhere.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned why funding for a 2022 event is being raised during a meeting to review the 2023 budget. She suggested a separate discussion, noting that while the Council President may be aware of the event, others are not aware.

→ *Discussion on Ice Skating event planned for December in partnership with the Santander Arena, RAWA and RPA.*

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz agreed with the need to fund the skating event this year and next year.

Ms. Ventura also agreed with funding this event.

In response to a question from Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz, Mr. Moran stated that 60 sets of skates will be available for both daily sessions which will take children and young adults off of the streets, as a part of the youth violence prevention initiative.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz, while noting her supporting the event, countered that events such as these are not the solution for getting young adults off of the streets; more comprehensive solutions are required.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz agreed with Mr. Moran that creating events such as the skating event, provides positive alternative opportunities for young adults which can steer kids away from unproductive activities.

Mr. Daubert and Mr. Miller stated that they support the event, as it is similar to activities offered in New York and Philadelphia. Mr. Miller noted that the event is a City event, not a Council event.

Ms. Reed suggested that the ice skating event will reach a limited number of people, noting that ice skating has fallen off as a normal winter activity. She also suggested the need to offer skating lessons for those who have no experience skating. She stated that looking at the success of the event afterwards will be helpful for future planning.

Mr. Moran took issue with Council's discussion and argument about the plan to produce a positive event at the Santander. He stated that these issues are discussed in weekly Council leadership meetings, noting that Ms. Reed has not attended one session since she was elected to the Vice President position.

Ms. Reed attempted to explain why she and Council had questions about the event; however, Mr. Moran interrupted and stated that he is tired of micromanagement and negative energy when he is trying to create positive partnerships. He disagreed with Ms. Reed's constant questioning of and arguing about various proposals.

Mr. Daubert left the meeting at this time.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that the leadership meetings have stalled out but she agreed with the need to plan activities that engage people and create positive experiences. She also agreed with creating these events with the City's partners. She suggested making meetings productive. She stated that email updates about this event were circulated prior to this meeting.

Mr. Moran left the meeting.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that differences of opinion is a part of the normal democratic process and that offering honest opinions usually leads to improved ideas. She noted that if this discussion had occurred in a different setting or meeting, it may have had a different outcome. She agreed with providing alternative events; however, these events are not the be all and end all to cure youth violence.

Ms. Reed noted how the ever changing body of Council has supported the mayor's proposals and that asking questions is part of the check and balance process Council is charged with. She agreed that this topic should have come forward at a different session. She noted that the questions were not intended to be argumentative or negative.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she did not intend to behave aggressively, but only to ask pertinent questions.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stressed the need to separate personal issues from discussions on policy. Ms. Reed agreed with this need and the need for officials to always avoid taking issues personally.

Auditor Budget

Mr. Kelly reviewed this budget. There are no substantive changes.

Managing Director Budget

Mr. Kelly reviewed the budget.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz inquired about the part-time communications position. Mr. Kelly stated that the position will remain part-time as an aid to the full time communications position.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz inquired about transferring the Downtown Coordinator and Ambassadors from Public Works to this budget.

Mr. Heim explained that the Downtown project was relocated out of Public Works to provide more oversight and to interject more direct policy from the mayor and Council.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed, noting that there are a variety of functions that do not fill well into the departments.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz expressed the belief that the cleaning function should remain in Public Works and be separated from the Ambassador functions. She opined that the Ambassadors should be communicating with business owners and visitors and the Coordinator should be provided with clear direction and objectives that work to improve the quality of the downtown. She stated that there is no desire to recreate DID objectives or outcomes.

Mr. Heim agreed, noting the difficulty in providing effective service across the downtown area without an assessment to help cover those costs and operational hours.

Ms. Reed agreed and she described her conversation about the issue with Mr. Waltman, who suggested dedicating Real Estate Transfer Tax transactions (or other tax source) in downtown Reading to assist with the Downtown costs.

Mr. Miller noted that when DID began the downtown had different needs than it does today or what it will need tomorrow. He stressed the need for a flexible model that can be reshaped as downtown needs change.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz inquired if the work of the Coordinator has been evaluated to determine how well this new position is working. She questioned why the hours of the Ambassadors have not been changed to begin cleaning the downtown before the normal workday begins which would present a clean downtown to those arriving each morning. She suggested creating a merchants association to bring business owners together so needs can be identified and addressed.

Ms. Reed agreed with the need to reestablish a merchants association, noting that such an association prompted the creation of the Penn Square Commission and then DID.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz again stated that there is no need to recreate DID but there is a need to provide a new innovative way to address the needs of the downtown.

Ms. Reed and Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz agreed that DID was disbanded shortly before the start of the pandemic which disrupted conversations about the needs of the downtown.

Mr. Heim stated that he is open to holding these conversations and taking ideas for downtown services.

Ms. Rodriguez noted that the Ambassador salaries are not included in the Position Ordinance.

→ *Add salaries of the Ambassadors to the Position Ordinance under the Managing Director's Office*

Human Relations Commission Budget

Mr. Kelly reviewed the budget, noting that the two (2) part-time file clerks were merged into one (1) fulltime position.

In response to a question from Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz, Ms. Talbot stated that it would be very helpful to have four positions in the office.

In response to a question from Ms. Reed about the application backlog that exists in the HRC, Ms. Talbot stated that there has never been a backlog. She stated that she has the ability to react with flexibility when program needs in the office shift.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that Council appreciates how well the office adjusts to handle the changing needs of those requiring assistance.

Ms. Talbot thanked Mr. Heim for his support in allowing her to make office hour adjustments to allow the improved management of applications and other paperwork.

Ms. Ventura questioned why Ms. Talbot is not provided with a sally port or Cedar Street parking space like other directors, noting that Ms. Talbot is also not provided with a parking placard allowing her to park on North 8th Street.

Mr. Kelly stated that all the rear lot spaces are taken. Mr. Heim stated that he will have a parking placard issued to Ms. Talbot.

Non Departmental Budget

Mr. Kelly noted that the contract for animal management with ARL expires this year and the cost of their services is increasing to \$285,336 from \$100,000 – or \$3 per capita.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz noted the need for this cost to be justified.

→ *COW meeting with ARL to justify the cost of their services*

Mr. Kelly explained that the agreement with the Parking Authority charges \$87 per employee for garage parking. Prior to this agreement employees paid \$40. He stated that the City agreed to cover the gap to free the employee from this additional burden. *(Note the cost per employee is expected to increase to \$50 per month)*

No other business was brought forward. Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz apologized for not managing the overly emotional discussions well. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed the belief that Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz managed the issue well, noting that at times honest discussions go awry and that is not the fault of the person leading the meeting.

Ms. Reed moved, seconded by Mr. Miller, to adjourn the meeting at approximately 7 pm.

*Respectfully submitted by
Linda A. Kelleher, CMC
City Clerk*