

MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL BUDGET STUDY SESSION MEETING
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
MAY 15, 2023 – 6:00PM

The special budget study session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Barnett at 6:00pm.

Council Members Present: Barnett, Boleware, Bruce, Knol Massey and Newlin

Council Members Absent: Bridges

Others Present: City Manager Mekjian, City Clerk Smith, Assistant City Manager Valentine, Directors Kettler-Schmult, Schnackel and Skrobola and Fire Chief Unruh, Police Chief King and City Attorney Joppich

Gary Mekjian, City Manager, commented that the budget reflects the council goal objectives including appointments for a DEI Director and Director of Communications and Community Engagement. The city is financially stable and the budget is fiscally responsible while maintaining core services for residents. He noted that the Police Department is fully staffed per the authorized positions at this time and while Police and Fire Departments have requested additional staffing, he is not recommending additional full-time staffing for those departments at this time. The Fire Department just recently moved to a 24-hour shift schedule and he would like to see if that new schedule reduces over time as anticipated. City Manager Mekjian recognized the department heads and their staff for the hard work they have put into their budgets, particular Finance Director Tom Skrobola who has been short-staffed during this entire budget cycle.

Tom Skrobola, Finance Director, thanked his staff and in particular Stephanie Keimer for all of her hard work putting together the budget document for Council. Director Skrobola reviewed the budget process that will include a public hearing and request for adoption at their regular meeting of June 12, 2023. He reviewed the taxable values, property tax income, millage rates, the division of the tax dollar by entity, revenue assumptions, general fund revenue, expenditure assumptions and general fund expenditures and the general fund total fund balance. He noted that special services revenue projections were met or exceeded projections and mentioned that following the Sports Facilities Company study and report that was presented, city administration had recommended that council develop a study committee to put forth a final plan of action. Director Skrobola went on to review the major and local road funds and city -wide capital expenditures.

Council questions, comments and suggestions:

- Concern with riparian homeowners not clearing the riverbeds and clogging the drains. Suggested reviewing how to fund this sooner than later and consider a special assessment. Utilizing Council of Homeowner’s Association (COHA) as a means of communication to those residents was suggested
- Inquired if the numbers that they repeatedly heard were “typical” was that for Farmington Hills or of a community of this size
- Inquired why neighborhoods had pulled out of projects according to one of the bullets in the budget introduction

- Inquired the money value for the increase in healthcare costs at 4% and whether that figure was for active or retired employees

Director Skrobola explained that the budget figures for Farmington Hills are great figures and the right numbers when looking at other communities. He noted that healthcare costs are captured per department and that is for active employees; but that he would provide an overall value for that to Council at the next budget meeting tomorrow night.

In response to Council regarding delayed projects, City Manager Mekjian explained that some projects were delayed due to the need to obtain access easements in order to move forward or there was not enough interest by residents for a particular project such as gravel road conversion.

City Council reviewed the following budgets with the City Attorney and respective Department Directors and the following highlights, significant changes in budgets, requests, or amendments were noted:

CITY ATTORNEY

Steve Joppich, City Attorney, reviewed his proposed budget that included a 2% increase for rates that have not been increased in a few years. He explained that his contract is ongoing and reviewed during the budget process typically but could be reviewed by Council at any time.

Mayor and Council thanked Attorney Joppich and his staff for their service and excellent representation and advice.

PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT/CDBG FUND

Charmaine Kettler-Schmult, Director of Planning and Community Development, explained that her department has 4 divisions – Planning, Community Development, Building and Zoning. She currently has one full-time and one part-time position still vacant and 1/3 of the department are new employees or new to their position. The department intends to continue to contract with the Planning Consultants to help with workload and staff is undertaking a comprehensive review of departmental fees as this has not been updated since 2017 and any proposed fee increases will be brought to Council for consideration in June, 2023. Director Kettler-Schmult noted that expenditure of the Community Development Block Grant Funds was recently brought to Council for a public hearing and approved by Council at that time.

Council questions, comments and suggestions:

- Pg 138 should reflect 13 positions requested under administrative and clerical – they shifted positions but did not reduce the number of employees in the department
- Council would like to see the department get caught up with the backlog of issuing permits and certificate of occupancies. Council suggested considering OCC students/retirees/apprenticeship programs within the city and hiring more part-time positions if they cannot fill the full-time positions
- There was a concern with shifting to consultants versus utilizing city staff
- Questioned the turn around on zoning complaints. Staff noted that turn-around was typically the same day or next day. Staff recommended the citizen complaint portal as a great option for residents and then staff has a contact with whom they can follow up to let them know when issues are being handled or resolved

SPECIAL SERVICES/PARKS MILLAGE FUND/NUTRITION GRAND FUND/COMMUNITY CENTER RENOVATIONS FUND/RELATED CAPITAL/PUBLIC INFORMATION

Ellen Schnackel, Director of Special Services, stated that the city just celebrated the one year anniversary of the HAWK Community Center. She reviewed the activity generated at the HAWK including active passes and day passes purchased and spoke about the opening of the maker space at the HAWK. She noted that 110,000 meals on wheels were delivered and the department saw over 18,000 volunteer hours. Director Schnackel reviewed activity in the camp programs and at the golf course.

Council questions, comments and suggestions:

- Suggested revisiting having the video division staff under the Communications Director. City Manager Mekjian commented that this would be discussed during that department's budget review tomorrow evening.
- Uncertain about annex at HAWK to replace programs at Costick Center due to the lack of parking. Staff reiterated that the city administration suggested a study committee to review the final report on facilities conducted by SFC to bring forth a final plan of action for Council consideration
- Mentioned concern with dogs being brought to Heritage Park and Park Rangers not answering phone numbers listed on signs on the weekends to address these types of concerns
- Suggested review of a policy on cleaning of riverbeds at Heritage Park and to monitor the landscaping and drainage systems and flooding near Quaker Valley so not to clog the drainage systems. Staff suggested more education is needed on this issue as mentioned for the homeowners and those areas on private property
- In response to Council regarding enhanced site security, staff noted that cameras were being installed at most facilities
- Suggested opening the grass tees at the golf course
- When discussing adaptive playground equipment and moving that timeline forward, stock exchange options were suggested

Fire/Public Safety Millage Fund/Related Capital

Jon Unruh, Fire Chief, commented on the recruitment and retention challenges faced last year and was happy to note that with the recent schedule changes and changed the city made to go back to a defined benefit, plan the department is now a gold standard for the region. He noted that the 9 openings were quickly filled from both in and out of state candidates. Chief Unruh commented that the stations and fire apparatus are in good shape but that fire headquarters will need a reconfiguration or expansion in the near future due to additional staffing. The challenge the department faces now is the increase in runs and calls for service. Chief Unruh stated that all departments are open 24 hours with the exception of Station #3 that is sometimes closed at midnight or on occasion all day due to staffing issues. This station was the easiest to cover with other station staffing.

Discussion was held on the EMS transports and fees, average response time that was noted at approximately 6-7 minutes.

Discussion was held on staffing. The department requested 8 positions and 4 positions were recommended by administration. Chief Unruh explained that 4 positions would help reduce overtime and mutual aid and would increase personnel safety; 8 positions would also allow for Station #3 to remain open 24 hours at all times.

Council questions, comments and suggestions:

- Consensus of Council to fund the 8 additional full-time staff needed to keep Station #3 open 24 hours at all times and direction for staff to look at transportation fees and potential increases to help offset costs for the additional staff and report back to Council; administration to review options to fund the additional 8 full-time staff. It was noted that the public safety millage could help fund some of those positions
- Council wants to continue to move towards a full-time, professional Fire Department as the Paid-On-Call (POC) system may no longer be the best system for the city with the increased runs and lack of response/retention from that system

CAPITAL REQUESTS

- Two ambulance replacements and one fleet vehicle
- Holistic Protection (bullet proof vests) for an active assailant incident where firefighters would be entering with Police Officers to care for the wounded

POLICE/PUBLIC SAFETY MILLAGE FUND/FEDERAL FORFEITURE FUND/STATE FORFEITURE FUND/RELATED CAPITAL

Jeff King, Police Chief, spoke to the many programs offered by the department including drill exercises, public safety education, crime prevention capabilities, communing policing engagements, training on equipment and officer wellness. Chief King mentioned that there continues to be an increase in calls for service and there has been an increase in mental health calls. Police Officers face increased performance expectations today. He noted that overtime has gone down from the previous budget due to full staffing numbers for 2023 and they now have 111 sworn officers.

Discussion was held on staffing and the request for 6 additional Police Officers and proposed retirements in the next FY budget.

CAPITAL REQUESTS

- Drone Replacement

Discussion was held on the request for a mobile command post. City Manager Mekjian commented on the cost versus how often it is used given past history. Chief King stated that their request is not for the type of mobile command post that was used in the past but a shelter with a few amenities to be used not only for mass casualty incidents but also for community policing efforts. It would not include built-in technology as it becomes outdated too quickly.

Council questions, comments and suggestions:

- Request for more discretion with regard to issuing tickets for moving violations but to log that information and include that in the budget as well as other reports where possible
- Police Chief and City Manager to continue discussion on the mobile command unit and potential use of forfeiture funds for that purchase

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Adjournment

The special budget study session adjourned at 9:59pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Pamela B. Smith, City Clerk