

City of Columbus
Regular City Council Meeting
12.11.19

The 12.11.19 meeting of the City of Columbus City Council was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Mayor Preiner at the City Hall. Present were Council Members Janet Hegland, Jeff Duraine, Denny Peterson, and Shelly Logren; City Administrator Elizabeth Mursko, City Attorney Bill Griffith, City Engineer Dennis Postler, and Public Communications Coordinator Jessica Hughes.

Also in attendance were: John Taylor, Kim Taylor, Barb Bobick, John Young, Kris King, Paul Peskar, John Freed, Olivia Olson, Jackson Lund, and Lyle Nelson.

A. CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING

1. Call to Order – Regular Meeting – 7:00 P.M.

B. CONSENT AGENDA

- 2. Motion – Agenda Approval with Additions**
- 3. ~~Motion – Approval of the 08.28.19 City Council Meeting Minutes~~**
- 4. Motion – Pay Bills as Posted**

Motion by Duraine to approve the Consent Agenda items 2 and 4, with the removal of item 6 – 2020 Budget, item 9 – 2020 Columbus Fee Schedule Ordinance and Publication Summary, and the addition of Snowblower Discussion under item 14. Seconded by Peterson. Motion carried unanimously.

C. PRESENTATIONS

5. Truth in Taxation Forum

Mursko explained that each year the City is required to adopt a levy for property taxes. A preliminary levy was adopted by the City in September, and the next step is to adopt a final levy. This particular meeting is held in order to hear feedback or questions from the public about the levy. Mursko explained that the budget will be formally adopted on 12.30.19.

Mursko continued by providing an overview of the budget as it stands today. This year there was a cost of living increase added throughout the budget. In addition, Council member Hegland researched the situation with the loan for the Senior Center space. This research clarified that the City is no longer required to pay back the loan for the space and will be allowed to rent it to groups other than the Senior Center.

The Senior Center group also indicated that they were having difficulty affording rent payments. As a result, there are plans for the City to take over management of the Senior Center space, and

as such there has been a \$12,000 line item added to the City's budget to take on responsibilities and operation costs. Mursko finished by saying the Senior Center group and the Columbus Lions will continue to be able to hold their events as usual.

Mursko continued to say that a new capital fund was added to collect money over a long period of time so that the City can pay for updates to City Hall and other administrative items like a new copy machine.

In addition, changes were made to the City's gravel maintenance fund. The City has roughly 53 miles of roads, just over half of which are paved. In order to continuing maintaining and upgrading roads in the City Mursko added a 6% increase to the General Fund.

Overall, there is an increase in the City's budget of 5.4% which equates to \$170,849. Mursko encouraged anyone who may have questions about the budget to call City Offices to discuss.

At this time Mayor Preiner opened the forum to hear any questions from the public regarding the budget.

John Freed – 6838 167th Avenue NE

Freed asked what the difference is between the budget and the levy? Mursko explained that the City budgets for certain funds and there are certain funds that are funded through revenue. The City's levy is the total budget less the revenue.

Freed continuing by asking how much the valuation of the City increased? Mursko explained that the tax capacity is the proper measure of how the City has grown. Columbus' tax capacity increased roughly \$150,000 (assuming the City Council does not increase the levy). Freed replied by asking if the budget is increasing more or less than the amount the tax capacity increased? Mursko explained that the Council has increased the budget by a similar amount of \$155,728.

Freed noted that he has seen a lot of commercial-industrial development in the City and was under the impression that would create a net gain in revenue. His taxes personally increased 12.5%, which he said does not seem right because of the amount of commercial development he has seen recently. He finished by saying as the City considers the budget, if there is an increase in revenue from commercial taxes, he encourages the Council to refrain from spending it and instead try to use it to offset the increasing residential taxes in the City.

Mayor Preiner responded by saying that since he became Mayor one year ago he has seen how hard City Staff work to ensure that no money is spent wastefully. In addition, he encouraged Freed to stay tuned because there are projects coming to the City (especially in the freeway

district) which will hopefully help offset the rising cost of residential taxes. He agreed with Freed that taxes generated from industrial businesses need to play that role in the City.

With that, Mayor Preiner closed the Public Hearing.

Motion by Peterson to adopt Resolution 19-31, a resolution approving the 2019 Final Tax Levy and Tax Abatement for Property Taxes Collectable in 2020. Seconded by Duraine. Motion carried unanimously.

6. Planning Commission Report

Planning Commission Chair Ron Hanegraaf reported that at their 12.04.19 meeting they considered a non-binding concept review and held a workshop on land use and zoning.

Horticulture Services Concept Plan

Horticulture Services approached the Planning Commission to discuss the possibility of locating their business at 14384 W. Freeway Drive in the City. Horticulture Services is a lawn and snow service and landscaping company. They have 35 trucks, 25 trailers, and 80 employees (12 of which would work at the Columbus location). They mostly conduct business in Woodbury and the east metro. Their clients are mainly townhomes, associations, and commercial businesses or sites. Hours are usually 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., except on heavy snow days. The site is 26 acres in size; 8 of which are upland and 18 are wetland. They would like to put up a 10,000 square foot precast building for their office and maintenance shop. They would also need above ground fuel storage. A berm near the front of the property is included as part of their landscape plan.

Hanegraaf continued to say that the Planning Commission will consider Horticulture Services' application at their next meeting, so the Council will likely see this topic on 12.30.19.

Land Use and Zoning Workshop

City Planner Dean Johnson also gave the Planning Commission a report which chronologically detailed the City's Comprehensive Plan and Zoning processes starting from 1990 to the current date. Mursko also took the Commissioners through workshop to assist in reviewing a concept proposal and application. Hanegraaf said that the workshop was enlightening and helpful.

Mayor Preiner said that he was at the meeting and he felt like everyone who attended gained a lot of great information. He added that revising the ordinances will help a lot with planning for the future.

7. Public Open Forum

John Taylor 13518 Lyons Street NE

Taylor asked if they are still going to install a traffic signal at the intersection of Hornsby Street and TH 97? City Engineer Dennis Postler replied that the traffic signal will be installed in the spring of next year.

8. ~~2020 Columbus Fee Schedule Ordinance and Publication Summary~~

9. Public Notice - 2020 Schedule of Regular Meetings

Mayor Preiner asked the Council Members to review the draft 2020 Calendar of Public Meetings. Logren noted that the meetings for 11.09.20 and 11.23.20 are on Mondays rather than Wednesdays. Mursko replied that due to the Veteran's Day Holiday and the Thanksgiving Holiday both meetings were moved to Monday of each week. Mursko said that the Council can choose to hold the meetings on a different day of the week, but they cannot be held on Veteran's Day.

Motion by Duraine to adopt the 2020 Schedule of Meetings as presented. Seconded by Peterson. Motion carried unanimously.

E. ANNOUNCEMENTS & REMINDERS

10. Engineer Report

Final Pay Request - 2019 Street Improvement Project

Postler reported that he is looking for a motion to approve a Final Payment Request for the City's 2019 Street Improvement Project; the reclamation of Notre Dame Street and 181st Avenue NE. The Final Payment Request is in the amount of \$24,098.88.

Motion by Duraine to approve the Final Payment Request to Knife River Corporation for the City's 2019 Street Improvement Project (City Project 2019-01) in the amount of \$24,098.88. Seconded by Peterson. Motion carried unanimously.

Hornsby Street South

Following up on discussion that was held at the City Council Workshop, Postler asked the Council Members if they were interested in ordering a survey and/or design for the reconstruction of Hornsby Street south of TH 97. Mayor Preiner replied that he would like to pursue this project but would prefer to wait to order a survey or design until the next City Council meeting. Peterson disagreed saying that he thinks that the survey and design should be ordered rather than waiting any longer to get the project started. The consensus from the group

was to not order anything for the project at this meeting.

11. Attorney Report

City Attorney Bill Griffith reported that he recently attended Anoka County's Legislative Kickoff meeting with County Engineer Joe McPherson and City Lobbyist Margaret Vesel. He said that the County offered to include the request for Local Road Improvement (LRIP) Funds for the extension of W. Freeway Drive to the north in their legislative package.

Mayor Preiner asked when Griffith thought the City will know if they have received the funds? Griffith replied around 05.17.20, which is the end of the Legislative Session. It is likely that the LRIP money would be included as part of the Capital Bonding Bill which is usually approved at the end of the session.

Postler added that he should also know by February or March if the City was successful in receiving state park road funding, which would also go toward this project. Mayor Preiner asked when the project would begin if the LRIP funds are approved? Postler replied that assuming they are approved in May it would be possible to begin designing the project in late summer 2020, and complete construction in 2021.

12. Mayor & City Council Member's Report

Council Member Peterson

No report.

Council Member Hegland

No report.

Council Member Logren

Logren gave an update from the Branding Committee. Their next meeting will be on 01.09.20, where final details regarding the ColumBiz event being held on 01.23.20 will be discussed. Part of the Committee's efforts will be distributing a survey to business leaders asking them about the perception and future of the City of Columbus. The results from this survey will help inform the Committee's strategy moving forward. Logren continued by saying she would like to ask the Council Members to volunteer to personally deliver invitations to the ColumBiz event to increase attendance. She will bring more information to the Council after the Committee's next meeting.

Mayor Preiner

No report.

Council Member Duraine

Duraine followed up on discussion that he raised at the City Council Workshop, saying that he is in favor of extending the Mayor's term to four years.

Motion by Duraine to extend the Mayor's term to four years.

Griffith said that he has not researched this topic recently, but he believes that it will require more than a motion by the City Council to make this change. He offered to research the question and bring answers back to the 12.30.19 meeting.

Hegland agreed with Duraine that the Mayor's term seems short because it takes a lot of time for a new Mayor to learn the City's processes. But she would like to hear from Griffith about process for making that change. Griffith noted that the reason for a two-year term is that, as a citizen, if you are concerned about the make-up of the Council you are able to vote out a majority of Council Members in one election. Peterson said that he is not in favor of having the City Attorney research this question, as he is supportive of the current two-year term system. The remaining Council Members agreed to have Griffith research the topic.

Motion by Duraine to direct City Attorney to look into the process and requirements for changing the Mayor's term from two years to four years. Seconded by Logren. Roll call vote; Peterson - nay; Hegland - aye; Mayor Preiner - aye; Duraine - aye; Logren - aye. Motion carries.

Mursko explained that when the City was incorporated in 2006 the Judge who ordered the incorporation established the Mayoral terms. Griffith added that is the standard practice, but the Council has the ability to make that change. Duraine asked Mursko to compile a list from the League of Minnesota Cities of which cities have two-year mayoral terms and which cities have four year mayoral terms.

13. Public Works Report

Public Works Superintendent Jim Windingstad gave a brief background on discussion that was held during the City Council workshop. Public Works has been using a snowblower that a previous Council member borrowed to the City, however they no longer has access to that snowblower. As a result Windingstad is requesting to purchase a new snowblower for the City so that Public Works can snow blow the park trails, emergency exits at City Hall, roundabouts, and the new pedestrian trails on the TH 97 bridge over I-35 and the realigned Hornsby Street.

Motion by Duraine to approve the purchase of a Skid Steer Snow Blower for a not to exceed price of \$10,000. Seconded by Peterson. Motion carried unanimously.

14. Public Information Coordinator Report

No report.

15. City Administrator's Report

Human Resources Memo

Mursko presented a human resources memo which talks about a Cost of Living Increase being recommended for City Employees. Nation-wide research shows that the cost of living has increased by 2% as of April 2019. She has done additional research to see what surrounding cities are doing to address this cost of living increase. The average cost of living increase being instituted by these cities is 2.7%. Based on this information, Mursko is recommending that the City approve a Cost of Living increase for all employees of 2.5% for 2020, to be effective 12.26.19. The cost for this increase is included in the City's budget.

Duraine asked when the last cost of living increase was given to employees? Mursko replied that there was a cost of living increase given last year to all employees. The next most recent cost of living increase for all employees was given in 2012.

Logren said that she would like more information such as what employees are making and what other cities are paying their employees. She asked if there was a survey that exists which could show the wages of employees at other cities. Mursko explained that many other cities are union communities. Unions require a consideration of cost of living increases every three years, along with their contract negotiations. As such, it is hard to compare Columbus' employees to union employees.

Mursko explained that in Columbus there is a step system in place for wage increases. New employees are eligible for a step increase after their first six months of employment. After that, employees are eligible once each year for a step increase. Each step is a 20% increase in the employee's wage. The policy is that the step increase will be given each year if expectations of the job are being met. However, Mursko explained that the system only has seven steps. This means that employees that have been working at the City for longer than seven years are no longer eligible a step increase each year. For those employees, the only opportunity for an increase in their wage is the cost of living increase.

Mursko continued to explain that the League of Minnesota Cities used to do a wage study where they would ask cities to fill out information about their wages, and then the league would send back the data from other cities. However, the data was hard to compare because of the size of

the City of Columbus' staff. Due to the small size, employees at the City of Columbus are responsible for many different areas of work, so there are mixed job titles. In larger cities, jobs are much more specialized. This makes it hard to compare what one employee does in one city to an employee with the same job title at a different city.

Hegland suggested that the Council consider a new policy that would give a higher cost of living increase to more tenured employees to address their inability to receive step increases. She added that the City could also consider merit increases for the future. Mayor Preiner suggested that this be a topic for a future workshop.

Motion by Hegland to approve the recommendation from Mursko to administer a 2.5% Cost of Living Increase for all employees effective on 12.26.19. Seconded by Peterson. Motion carried unanimously.

Workshop Items

Mursko asked the Council if they would like to hold a workshop on 12.30.19? Mayor Preiner said he would prefer not to have one because the Council already needs to consider the Senior Center issues and final budget questions. The regular meeting will begin that evening at 7:00 p.m.

16. Calendar of Meetings.

The next Planning Commission meeting is on 12.18.19 at 7:00 p.m.

The City Council Workshop on 12.30.19 is canceled.

The next City Council meeting is on 12.30.19 at 7:00 p.m.

F. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Duraine to adjourn. Seconded by Peterson. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Jessica Hughes, Public Communications Coordinator