

CITY COUNCIL WORKING MEETING

JULY 10, 2023
203 Broadway Ave N

PRESENT:

Pam McClain	Mayor	Autumn Jones	Treasurer
Michael Higbee	Council President	Jason Scott	Public Works Director
Kelly Peterson	Council Member	Jeremy Engbaum	Police Chief
Amanda Hawkins	Council Member	Maegan Hanson	Library Director
Marla Sisson	Council Member	Andrew Wright	City Attorney
Karen Drown	Clerk	Concerned Citizens	

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

CONFIRMATION OF QUORUM:

Karen Drown confirmed a quorum.

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Minutes of June 26, 2023 – Working Meeting
2. Bi- Monthly Claims for Payment
3. Clerk Report
4. Treasurer Report

Marla Sisson moved to approve the consent agenda. Kelly Peterson seconded the motion. Mayor McClain noted that on page 3 in the last paragraph it states “I was” and it should be “it was”. There was no further discussion. There was a roll call vote. Kelly voted yes, Amanda voted yes, Marla voted yes and Michael voted yes. The motion passed.

ENGINEER REPORT

Scott congratulated the city and chamber on a great parade.

He announced the city had made the short list for the IDEQ water study grant. He noted the city is not bound to accepting but he recommends pursuing it. He stated he is looking at miscellaneous grants that are coming across his email. If he sees one that is a good fit for Buhl’s needs, he will pursue it. The URA will be meeting on July 19th. He is also trying to schedule a meeting with Wilbur-Ellis to close the construction project. It was noted this meeting would include a discussion on fixing 11th Ave S with problems caused by the construction.

He also congratulated the Council on the bike path. He applauded Jason and his crew for the work they have done to stay ahead with all the prep.

He noted Harvest Hills is nearing completion. Once the city signs off on punch list they can start on homes. He is continuing to work on the water/sewer project but currently there are no contractors available for the work. He stated they are looking to bid this fall. Scott noted he had finally made contact with an inspector.

He concluded by noting building permits are scattered, Harvest Hills permits are not being issued until everything is complete. Kelly questioned the location of the multi-family, Scott stated that is on the north end right behind the storage units.

Marla questioned the potential for a stop light at Williams. Scott stated it would require a warrant from the Idaho Transportation Department and a study. He added that is out quite a few years.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was no unfinished business.

NEW BUSINESS:

Review and Consideration of Budget Amendment Proposals for FY 2022-2023 in budgets for Airport & Police: Autumn reviewed the summary sheet provided to Council. She noted the amendment would include \$35,000 in the airport budget for the beacon light project and \$465,000 in the police budget. It would be \$460,000 for the cost of the building and \$5,000 for closing costs. Michael moved to move forward with the budget amendment. Marla seconded the motion. Amanda questioned if these items could be separated. Autumn stated the public hearing would be scheduled for August 14th, the appropriation ordinance would then be considered later at that meeting and the consideration of the ordinance would be based on the motion that was made. There was no further discussion. There was a roll vote. Amanda voted yes, Kelly voted yes, Marla voted yes, and Michael voted yes. The motion passed.

Review and Consideration of Contract for plan review and building inspection services with the city limits: Kelly moved to accept the contract as presented for plan review and building inspections. Michael seconded the motion. There was a discussion with Scott about the inspector he mentioned in his engineer report. Scott noted that inspector would be for the water/sewer line project. There was no further discussion. There was a roll call vote. Michael voted yes, Amanda voted yes, Kelly voted yes, and Marla voted yes. The motion passed.

Budget Discussion: Initial Review of Parks & Rec, Streets, Code Services, Library, Water, Sanitation, Wastewater, & Grants:

Library: Autumn began the presentation by informing Council that until final property tax revenue numbers come in, she has assumed the property tax contribution with a 3% increase to the library and noted there is a chance that could change. Mayor McClain noted Delta Dental came in with no change in renewal and Autumn added LifeMap, life insurance, also had no change. Autumn noted she had assumed a 10% to create a pot for salary increases; she then turned the presentation over to Maegan Hanson, library director. Maegan noted she had included brick and gutter work that still needs done. The library foundation has pledged to help but they were concerned about the market and investment earlier in the year and they wanted to see how the market did. Autumn noted the \$50,000 was included in the current budget but would like to roll that over into the proposed budget to complete that work in 2023-2024. Maegan also noted that with the work being done and the new shelving they would like to have new book ends and book carts. The other major change in the budget the Homling donation in the last couple of years was split into 6 different ways, Maegan would like to consolidate those back into one to allow use of those donations across all types of books and media. Michael questioned the money from the foundation and there was a discussion about maintenance and snow removal.

Code Services: Jason presented nothing changed a whole lot. The 10% had been included on wages. He noted the change in the property cleanup line item and noted nobody wants to do property abatement that had been contacted.

Parks & Rec: Jason noted he had bumped up training for spraying, fertilizing and arborist classes. He stated previously this department had three fulltime employees and he has requested with this budget two fulltime and one part time for seasonal work in the summer months. He stated one of this year's lifeguards has already committed to that seasonal position for next summer. There was a discussion about the park's employees being used as fill-ins to other departments. Jason noted that code and streets have actually been the fill-ins for sanitation. Jason did inform Council that Nic Alvey one of the parks department employees passed away today. So right now, this is a department of one.

Pool: Jason noted chemicals are going up. Autumn noted the salaries for lifeguards had been left the same as the current year. Amanda stated she would like to look at an increase for returning guards. Michael added an increase would incentivize guards to return. It was noted to increase returning guards to \$11.00, the assistant manager to \$13.00, and manager to \$15.00. Autumn noted she would calculate the changes. There was a discussion about the \$175,000 that had been budgeted for pool upgrades. Autumn noted that had been in there several years incase a grant was received but she stated there was not any current grant or plans in the works for that project. Mayor McClain also noted that WEMA will not be giving the \$50,000 after a WEMA member took a tour and saw the condition and understood the amount of work that will need to be done. Mayor McClain asked if her Blue Cross Health Academy and Walking Challenge could be used at the pool; Autumn confirmed it could. Autumn noted she would remove the \$175,000 from this

budget and remove the \$21,000 from the admin budget and include it in the pool budget. She also noted this budget has a \$3,000 general fund drawdown for a new diving board and \$12,500 in the parks budget for park equipment replacement.

Streets: Jason noted most of the operating and maintenance stayed the same. The wages included 10% with one change for a position to a lead position. He stated he had removed the fourth position that he had never been able to fill. He stated that on projects that the current walking paths he was out with the crew doing what needed done. Additional items included Burley Ave is hoping to go next year and he separated street maintenance and engineering. There was a discussion about the Burley Ave project; Jason noted that previously it was budgeted at \$3.9 million and now it is \$4.6 million. They are working on completing the property use agreements so the contractors may access the properties and make the connections with the residence's approaches. There had been discussion about using some URA funds to complete the match required for this project but there was new funding from the governor and the state that completed that match. The URA money would be used on a project on Fair Street which is also a part of the URA district. Michael also applauded the city crews for the work on the walking path project. He noted he has seen constant use of the paths since even before they were completely put in. Jason said there had to be some changes but, in the end, they will get 90% done of what was planned.

Water: Jason noted the increase in fuel, chemicals and, he has separated out chemicals from distribution maintenance and power was increased. Jason noted they are going to be doing quite a bit of maintenance in the water department. He stated an excavator has been included; Autumn noted this \$100,000 is being recommended to use the utility fund balance to purchase this and keep capital funds for other capital needs. There was a discussion about the excavator Jason noted he would do a trade-in because of the low hours on the city's current machine. It was also noted the \$83,000 match for the drinking water study was included in this budget. Jason noted he changed wages in this department when he took over public works by removing the 25% of his prior positions wage paid from this department to provide additional funds to have a wage he could even hire an individual at; he noted they are looking for one more to fill a position. Amanda questioned if the water study is required. Scott noted it is not required but staff does have areas of concern and this study will look at growth and addresses in future needs. He stated that IDEQ recommended going bigger on the funding and then if awarded the city could pair it down to what is needed. Michael questioned if this will address all the annexed are and future well site. Scott confirmed it would and it will be beneficial for the growth. Amanda questioned if there is a way to have new users to cover growth. Scott stated there is case law about 15 years ago that addressed that but also noted IDEQ's efforts to help cover the costs of the studies to review growth.

Sanitation: Jason stated he had included costs for new garbage cans as they have been in service for a good amount of time and are wearing out. He noted the new garbage truck will be here in about two months. He added we continue to look for a third operator. He stated when we had that position filled, they rotated and a sanitation operator would float through other departments and help especially in streets. In this department the 25% of Jason's prior position wage has been removed in this recommendation to allow for additional retention amount.

Wastewater: Jason noted this department has increases in chemicals, power, and maintenance. Autumn pointed out the reduction in the line item for bad debt which is reduced in all three utility departments as the collection rate and accounts left with balances has been reduced significantly with procedural changes in the collection process. Karen noted that reduction allows for those funds to be available for actual department costs not just paying off old accounts. This department had wages at 10% increase. Kelly questioned Misty Barnes, wastewater superintendent, that employees listed were the same crew. Misty stated they have been the same crew for over 1 ½ years. Kelly questioned what her secret was; she noted they had a range of ages and they are all women and they get along and work well together.

Grants: Autumn stated this budget included the ARPA water/sewer project that Scott had referenced in this engineer report. She noted some money had been spent out of those fund this year so the amount budgeted was the remaining funds. There was a discussion about \$350,000 noted for the 2026-2027 fiscal year. Autumn noted this was the years anticipated for a possible ICDBG project but nothing was current scheduled on that or planned at this point; it is just a place holder or reminder to be looking forward at possible projects.

Amanda stated she was told Council considers the cost-of-living increases by Justin Ruen and it was not typical for department heads to suggest wage increases. She questioned labeling it cost of living increases and then give one 3% and another 24%. Michael stated these are not budgeting as cost-of-living increases when budgeting and not budgeting for individuals but budgeting for a position. He added Council looks at budgeting what the city can afford and the 10% figures were determined to try to keep people retained. Amanda stated it was presented as a cost of living across the board. Marla stated she agreed with everything that was presented in the budget sheets. Michael noted nothing is labeled cost of living. Autumn referred to the piece of the pie discussion that was at a prior meeting when she asked Council if they wanted to see other scenarios on wage amounts and nothing else was suggested. Autumn again referred to needing clear direction from Council to move forward to the next step of the budget process in order to complete steps by the deadlines.

Review and Consideration of Utility Rate Committee Recommendations & Utility Rate Resolution for Public Hearing: Autumn began the review with a document showing the historical rate increase summary and the historical rate increases. She also reviewed the current billing.

Mayor McClain asked Scott Bybee to give a brief history of the rate committee. He stated it began after a very big meeting that took place in the fire bays during the time the water and sewer bonds were taking place. He noted the city at the time was very aggressive with the DEQ and EPA requirements and put in place the facilities we have now. He noted the decisions that were made previously of billing bonds on the monthly billings and how things would have been done differently if anyone had known what the outcome would be. He stated he is amazed at the rates from Autumn's numbers. He added the rate committee meets twice a year and those members go out and discuss in the community. He stated the city is tasked to provide a service and he feels it is done well and cost effectively. Karen noted that in the last number of years the rate committee has just met once per year. Amanda questioned if the rate committee considered property tax increases. Scott stated no taxes are not part of their discussion as taxes are a separate topic and not the rate committees focus. There was a discussion that property tax money cannot be used in the utility funds as they are the enterprise funds and must remain completely separate from the governmental funds. Amanda questioned why Buhl citizens are paying more than any other city. She added she tried to meet with the mayor and clerk which is appropriate. Michael voice concern of stopping misstatements as the city utility is not more than any other city's but because Buhl's included bonds and other cities pay bonds on property taxes. He noted this is a big difference as the city is paying off loans. Amanda stated she had asked for this paperwork after the last meeting to allow time to review and Autumn stated it would go out in the packet for this meeting to all members of Council; which was noted the packet was sent on Friday before the meeting. Autumn then requested of Mayor McClain if she could finish her presentation and step down from the podium. Autumn resumed her review with the capital and infrastructure fees she does not see a need for any increase and she reviewed the capital reserve balances. Amanda stated Autumn is charging \$13.00 extra on the bill. Autumn state it is not extra it is charged for capital and infrastructure to maintain the systems and avoid future bonds. Amanda questioned if Autumn knew what the last item purchased from those funds was and if she could account for every penny. Autumn stated she could as she reconciles those funds every month and are audited every year with the auditors. Autumn asked if Amanda had specific questions; Amanda stated she didn't have specific questions just specific statements. Mayor McClain stated she had sent an email and that if any Council member had any questions to email those to Autumn for her to research and provide that information. Autumn stated the third page in the packet provided is information provided as part of the monthly utility comparison worksheets that review the bond payments and bond reserves. The next sheet looks at half way through the current year and anticipates projections for the remaining half to see how the city will finish the fiscal year. Autumn noted she did not know the county landfill fees for the sanitation budget so there is a contingency in that budget for the unknown number. The final rate committee recommendation is a 4.00% increase to water usage and 11.25% to sewer usage for a total increase to a full residential account of \$2.95 per month. Autumn added the first time she ran the figures it was close to \$7.00. Mayor McClain noted that one bottle of water at the convenience store costs more than \$2.95. Autumn noted the total increase amount for a base bill would be \$35.40 for the full

year. Kelly moved to increase the utility bill \$2.95 to coincide with the rate committee recommendations. Marla seconded the motion. It was noted in sanitation the \$1.00 increase from last year was not used so it will roll over. It was assumed a 10% increase on county landfill costs but do not know for sure yet. Michael questioned what the total revenue was for the \$1.00 increase last year; Autumn stated that revenue created \$26,892 in revenue. Michael had a question on return to capital reserves in wastewater and not increasing any capital reserves. Amanda questioned if it would be wise to table this item. Autumn stated she needed to move forward to publish for a public hearing for this proposed increase to move forward with the budget process with a balanced budget and to meet publishing deadlines. Michael stated he has a hard time with this every year and it would be different if the bonds were on property taxes. He understands this isn't the only thing going up. There was no further discussion. There was a roll call vote on the motion. Marla voted yes, Michael voted yes, Amanda voted no, and Kelly voted yes. Autumn stated the public hearing would be August 7th which is a special meeting. The notice would be very detailed and provided on social media and the newspaper. It was recommended to compare this increase to other utility provider increases.

Updates and Council questions over initial budget worksheets: Karen noted there was additional revenue not listed on the administration budget for the rent of the fire station in the new contract. There would need to be an increase to the line item for fire department building maintenance as that contract does require to pay some utilities that previously came out of the fire budget. Karen also noted she had received several questions and statements about the recent 4th of July fireworks show and she herself was disappointed in the show we received this year. She is making it a mission to look into options to improve that for the coming year.

COUNCIL COMMENTS: Michael also noted he had received comments on the fireworks show and how it had decreased significantly. He also asked about the swimming pool. Teresa Robbins noted the staff is doing good and the pool is going well.

Amanda stated the ZOOM meeting has to be open to the public according to Kelly at ICRMP.

CITIZEN COMMENTS: Onnie Granados, Buhl, ID commented that rates for Sparklight haven't raised in 19 years. He questioned why people complain about \$1.00, the city is one person they can talk to, time to connect to citizens. Works tech support and if tells someone 50 times how to do something need to look at a different way to explain. Can't plan/budget for anything, very short timelines and feels for people in his neighborhood. Looked at job posting similar to Portland and it is paid three times more there. Buhl Chat discussions go crazy with information, but people have help when someone in a tough situation. He is fortunate he can get up and go somewhere else. Council talks a lot but going to have to risk something about it. Drags himself to listen. Don't put it on backs of other person.

Cory Santos, Buhl, ID – commented he appreciated Michael looking into budgets and questions from Amanda.

Mayor McClain stated if she has anyone questioning the “water bill” she will meet and discuss the “utility bill” with them to better inform the citizens.

Teresa Robbins, Buhl, ID – asked everyone to pray for the billing clerk if this happens and asked to please give the facts if Council is asked.

There was a recess from 9:15 PM to 9:20 PM.

EXECUTIVE SESSION - Amanda moved to enter executive session with provisions of Idaho Code 74-602, subsection 1.b and she requested a roll call vote. Marla seconded the motion. Michael asked to have the topic of the subsection read for the record. Mayor McClain also noted it is Idaho Code 74-206 for clarification. Amanda stated the subsection was to consider the evaluation, dismissal or disciplining of, or to hear complaints or charges brought against, a public officer, employee, staff member or individual agent.

Andrew Wright stated based on what he knew about this request for executive session he recommended not going into executive session because the employee has already been fired and if go into executive session and get off track then Council would be in a situation similar to a while back. Michael stated hiring and firing is not Councils responsibilities. Andrew added he does not know of anything good that could come from a discussion. Michael also questioned if a name clearing hearing came before Council all the members would have to recuse themselves. Marla stated she did not want to have a meeting to redo a problem with this. Amanda stated she talked to AIC and they stated the mayor can divulge the details of the situation. Karen clarified Amanda stated she talked to AIC but over the phone with Mayor McClain and Karen, Amanda stated she talked to ICRMP. Amanda stated she talked to both AIC and ICRMP. Mayor McClain stated herself and Karen talked to Andrew and ICRMP prior to any action taken in the termination. Kelly stated he doesn't know why Amanda needs to know; it is protected information. Amanda moved to adjourn the meeting; Karen called a point of order as there was an open motion on the floor to enter executive session. There was no further discussion. There was a roll call vote. Marla voted no, Michael voted no, Amanda voted no, and Kelly voted no. The motion failed. Kelly stated how is a personnel matter any business of Amandas.

MEETING ADJOURNED – Amanda Hawkins moved that the meeting be adjourned; Michael Higbee seconded the motion. There was a roll call vote. Marla voted yes, Michael voted yes, Amanda voted yes, and Kelly voted yes. The meeting was adjourned at 9:33 PM.

Minutes prepared by Karen Drown, City Clerk