



City of Freeport

BUDGET WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES

July 29 ,2021 5:30 PM

Council Chambers, Freeport City Hall

Council Members Present: Mayor Russ Barley, Councilman Eddie Farris, Councilman Tripp Hope, Councilman Mark Martin

Staff Members Present: City Manager Charlie Simmons, City Clerk Malani Robinson, Finance Officer Sara Bowers, Parks Director Travis Digges, Billing Manager Debbie Roberts, Sewer Supervisor Robert Fawcett, Water Supervisor Larry Tuggle, Planning Director Latilda Hughes-Neel

1. Meeting Called to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM by Mayor Barley in the Council Chambers of Freeport City Hall.

2. Budget Workshop

Finance Officer Bowers opened the discussion by noting Mayor Barley received an email for renewal of the Walton County Economic Development Alliance. Councilmembers discussed the practicality of renew the contract being that the City was out of industrial space. Councilmembers noted that they would like for the Mayor to invite the director of the organization to the following meeting to discuss the matter.

Salary Studies

Finance Officer Bowers presented Council the proposed pay scale increases based on the increase in minimum wage on all positions. Councilman Hope noted that he wanted to ensure that City staff were being given livable wages alongside the increase in costs of living. Finance Officer Bowers noted that staff members could receive merit increases

based on their evaluations, also giving reference to the benefit package included. Mayor Barley informed Council that City Clerk Robinson had started under the salary range for the City Clerk, had the highest qualifications of previous City Clerks, continued her education for the City Clerk certifications, and had not received a salary increase. Finance Officer Bowers noted that she needed direction to apply a salary increase. Councilman Hope noted that employee salaries should reflect education alongside merit increases. City Manager Simmons noted that he would discuss the matter with Mayor Barley privately. Councilmembers asked for clarity on how the merit raises were administered based on hourly and salary employees. Councilmembers added that the salaries for previous City Clerks was on a case-by-case basis, therefore they would like to table the matter to discuss later. Councilman Hope noted that would like for the City to look into the matter and to administer a raise.

Budget Highlight

- The budget included the hiring of 4 student interns
- Christmas décor
- Fourth of July festivities
- Storage facility usage
- Soft Service playground updates

Councilmembers discussed each category individually for clarity.

Planning

- The planning department budget would include funds to give Planning Director Hughes-Neel private office space.

Billing

- City Manager Simmons noted that the billing department was now sufficiently staffed

Streets

- City Manager Simmons noted that the City would use CARES Act Funds to work on sewer and water projects and use other funds to assist with road maintenance.

Parks

- The parks department was slowly getting parts to update the sound system
- The parks director would be working on getting an agreement for score boards, possibly working with Pepsi or Coke (Councilman Hope gave direction as to how to secure sponsorship).

Water

Councilwoman Haffner asked for clarity on the budget giving one employee the opportunity to get credentials for growth, City Manager Simmons gave clarity.

- The budget included funds to try to alleviate some of the water pressure issues.

Planning

- Planning Director Hughes-Neel noted that she would like to allocate 40,000 in the planning budget towards hiring a planning intern, saving \$10,000 on a salary.
- Planning Director Hughes-Neel noted that she would like to allocate \$10,000 towards her student aide to work throughout the summer.

Planning Director Hughes-Neel noted the importance of the planning department staying proactive in order to address the needs of the City. Councilman Tripp Hope added that forward thinking would assist with employee retainment.

Councilmembers discussed the chain of command for the planning department if Planning Director Hughes-Neel were absent. Planning Director Hughes-Neel noted that having an individual who were AICP certified would be best. Councilwoman Brannon noted the Florida Regional Planning Council could assist in the absence of Planning Director Hughes-Neel. Councilman Hope queried on the salary of a deputy planner, Planning Director Hughes-Neel noted that it would be \$55, 000-\$65, 000.

Adjournment

Mayor Barley motioned to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 6:27PM.



Mayor

ATTEST:



City Clerk