



City of Freeport

BUDGET WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES

August 8, 2022, 9:00 AM

Council Chambers, Freeport City Hall

Council Members Present: Mayor Russ Barley, Councilman Eddie Farris, Councilwoman Elizabeth Brannon, Councilman Bud Day, Councilwoman Elizabeth Haffner and Councilman Tripp Hope

Staff Members Present: City Manager Mark Martin, City Attorney Clay Adkinson, Finance Officer Sara Bowers, City Clerk Kathie Gatewood, and Planning Director Latilda Hughes-Neel, Parks Director Travis Digges, Water Supervisor Larry Tuggle, Wastewater Supervisor Paul Johnson, Billing Supervisor Lourdes Johnson

1. Meeting Called to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Mayor Barley in the Council Chambers of Freeport City Hall.

2. Budget Workshop Discussion

Finance Officer Bowers introduced Bill Imfeld, Executive Director of the Walton County Economic Development Alliance (WCEDA) to the meeting. Mr. Imfeld told the Council he has been working with City Attorney Adkinson to update the Memorandum of Understanding and wanted to let them know his organization is seeking a ten percent increase which is four hundred fifty-six dollars. He said they would be implementing an extensive marketing program once they start to go vertical with the defense contractor American Metal Bearing moving to Freeport. He explained the plan is to lure other defense contractors and subcontractors and to bring high-tech good-paying jobs not only to Freeport but all of Walton County. He expressed that they know a ten percent increase is significant but that their costs have gone up. He said they are asking Walton County for a twenty-five percent increase. He thanked the Council for their consideration of the increase while making the budget. Councilman Farris and Councilwoman Haffner thanked Mr. Imfeld for the great job his organization provides.

Finance Officer Bowers thanked the Council for the recent employee pay raises and noted that this now leaves the pay scales out of date. She presented the Council with the current pay scale and a new one she has been gathering information for. She explained that when the city hires someone as entry level that the starting pay is fifteen dollars per hour starting on October 1, 2022, but if someone is hired who has certifications or experience, she must adhere to the current pay scale which is inadequate.

City Manager Martin said an improved pay scale will help with merit raises. Councilwoman Haffner asked about the city and county comparisons as they did not seem comparable to Freeport. Finance Officer Bowers replied that former City Manager Simmons told her to look at city's where an employee could realistically go and get a job. She directed the Council to the spreadsheet area that showed the average pay for each position. Councilman Farris said he was all for taking care of the city employees and recognized how hard-hit people have been with inflation. He said he wants to focus on Freeport and not what other cities are doing because retaining employees is important to him. Finance Officer Bowers told the Council the meeting package also included updated job descriptions and that she would be bringing them along with the pay scales back in front of them in a future regularly schedule council meeting for a vote.

City Manager Martin told the Council if the city had a dedicated Human Resources person they would work on benefits, recruiting, salary and all the things we need as we grow. Councilman Hope said a good Human Resources person is worth their weight in gold. City Attorney Adkinson highly recommended that the city starts the process of bringing on a full time Human Resources employee. Councilman Farris asked Finance Officer Bowers if she would be able to add to the budget a Human Resources salary, to which she said yes. The Council discussed the Human Resources person and agreed they would report to the City Manager. Councilwoman Haffner discussed having the City Manager being the final say on firing employees, to which City Attorney Adkinson said the City Manager ordinance takes care of that scenario. Finance Officer Bowers said she would get together a Human Resources person job description and pay range.

Finance Officer Bowers discussed with the City Manager and Council the position of Construction Inspector. City Manager Martin shared the importance of each project going through an inspection to ensure the developers are doing things correctly. Planning Director Hughes-Neel told the Council of the benefits of a Construction Inspector and how it will help the city save money in the long run. Councilwoman Brannon said she loved the new positions that are being proposed but wants to be sure the city doesn't become top heavy with employees. Councilwoman Haffner asked Finance Officer Bowers if she could add a Construction Inspector job description and pay range to the budget, to which she replied yes.

City Clerk Gatewood discussed the possibility of city events with the Council. She showed concern regarding the lack of community events considering how fast the city is growing. She presented the Council with a tentative city event calendar and requested four thousand dollars for the fiscal year. She stated that she has trimmed about twenty thousand dollars from the budget and believes the monies she is asking for will help the city residents with family friendly events. Councilman Farris commended City Clerk Gatewood for the events calendar presented.

Parks Director Digges told the Council that the Park Department needs another full-time employee. He explained that as the city grows with more people, that more people are using the parks and it is getting harder for his department to keep up with everything. Councilman Farris agreed that the Park Department needed an additional person.

Parks Director Digges also discussed the soft surface for playground stating it was a want not necessarily a need. City Manager Martin brought up a skate park, to which Parks Director Digges said research showed a skate park would be incredibly expensive and any monies in the budget for the project would be a down payment for a future year to build one. There was a discussion surrounding other skate parks in the county. City Manager Martin told the Council that he inquired about building a park in phases and it was not a possibility with the current construction market as they are only contracting large scale projects. He said a skate park would be very expensive and potentially fine hundred thousand dollars or more. Councilwoman Haffner asked if there was anything that the city could do in lieu of a skate park that would not be as expensive. Councilwoman Brannon said the city events is a good start. Councilman Farris said pickleball was the most asked question of him. Parks Director Digges said he also fields many calls for pickleball. He discussed a few locations where pickleball could be implemented. Councilman Farris asked Parks Director Digges to come back to the Council and add information about getting pickleball courts for the city.

Parks Director Digges discussed his other big ticket items in detail conveying to the Council the need for new safety nets, public announcement system, composite decking, etc.

Planning Director Hughes-Neel asked the Council for an additional Planning Technician who would also carry out receptionist duties. She said in addition to hiring an additional Planning Technician that she would like to promote her current Planning Technician Samantha Graves to Senior Planner. She also asked for an increase in the building maintenance and planning furniture fund from twenty thousand to thirty thousand. She has a project she would like to put in place at the front of the Planning Department which will prevent semi-trucks and maintenance vehicles from parking on the side of US Business 331.

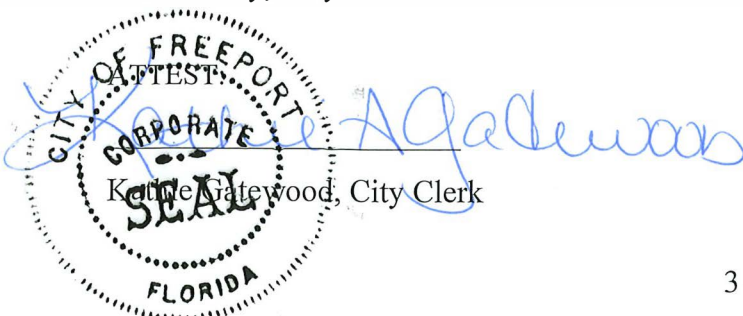
3. Adjournment

Mayor Barley motioned to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 10:32 a.m.

Minutes were prepared by City Clerk Gatewood and approved by the City Council on November 8, 2022.



Russ Barley, Mayor



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Kathie Gatewood, City Clerk
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