



## City of Freeport

### BUDGET WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES

August 17, 2022, 3:00 PM  
Freeport Blount House

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, Planning Director Latilda Hughes-Neel and Parks and Recreation Director Travis Digges

*City Clerk Note: City Attorney Adkinson attended via telephone.*

#### 1. Meeting Called to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m. by Mayor Barley in the Freeport Blount House.

#### 2. Budget Workshop Discussion

City Manager Martin asked the council for direction regarding an invoice the city received from Emerald Coast Regional Council. He said he believed the bill was approximately two-thousand dollars for a year membership. He noted that Councilwoman Brannon was our representative for the council meetings. He spoke with Planning Director Hughes-Neel and asked her for details of what this membership entails. Planning Director Hughes-Neel told the council she asked the Emerald Coast Regional Council director for an analysis of what their membership provides, to which he said they obtained a large project grant recently and they grant access to their staff. Planning Director Hughes-Neel stated while that large grant was great, the City of Freeport did not benefit from it and the staff access offered to the city is already granted from other avenues. She noted that the director also quoted a few other projects that were over five years old and that she has more staff now and is no longer reliant on their services. She said she felt the fee wouldn't help or hurt us and that the money could be better spent elsewhere for the city. Councilwoman Brannon said she was attending the meetings but because of COVID-19 the meetings went to sporadic zoom meetings, then they changed names and are now very few. All Council Member agreed that the money would be better spent somewhere else, and Councilwoman Brannon said the city could rejoin if need be.

(Continued on next page)

Finance Officer Bowers began the discussion of employee salaries with the council. She mentioned the addition of a Human Resources Generalist with a pay range of \$45,000-\$65,000. She also mentioned the student intern program has been working well for the Planning Department; however, it has not been as successful in other departments, so she was removing the monies from all departments save for the Planning Department. She said the Planning Technician promotion to Senior Planner as well as the new Parks Department employee are also in the budget. She said for the Water Department there is an addition of a Maintenance Worker and in Wastewater an additional Maintenance Technician. For the Construction Inspector, that position salary will be split between water and wastewater.

Finance Officer Bowers asked if there were any questions about the salaries portion of the package. Councilwoman Haffner asked how she calculated the salary for the Planning Technician promotion to Senior Planner and if that was from the spreadsheet previously provided because it was a fourteen-thousand dollar pay increase. City Manager Martin said that was based on where that employee would be on October 1 and there was a small increase after that. He said this was to ensure the city would not have a Senior Planner making less than the Planner I position so they could establish a hierarchy. Councilwoman Haffner told City Manager Martin she wanted to see the salary study for surrounding areas for the position and it was not presented at this meeting. Councilman Farris commented that he wanted what was best for Freeport and he listens to the recommendations because the city has a good staff that deserves our backing. He said he doesn't necessarily want to compare the city to Destin, Defuniak Springs or Crestview that is his preference. City Manager Martin agreed and noted how long the employee has been with the city and she could easily go to the Walton County Planning Department and get a job there. Councilwoman Haffner said she had no issue with the pay increase but that it was a thirty percent pay increase and was asking for the data to support the increase. She commended the employee for her years of work, quality of work and said she was wonderful. Councilman Hope reminded the other Council Members that the city must remain competitive to retain employees. Councilwoman Haffner asked Planning Director Hughes-Neel if she was training the employee being discussed to take her place should she retire, to which she said yes.

Finance Officer Bowers brought up the season pool employee hourly pay. Parks and Recreation Director Digges told the Council he barely had enough applications this season to staff the pool. He said he would like to increase the pay to attract more applications for next year. He wanted to increase the Lifeguard position to fifteen dollars an hour from thirteen and for the Pool Attendant increase the pay from eleven dollars an hour to thirteen. He said in years past that there has always been someone helping the Parks and Recreation Director with scheduling or anything else needed when he was unavailable. He is asking in this budget to formalize that part-time position at an hourly rate of seventeen dollars. Councilwoman Haffner said many residents love the pool and it adds to the community, and she has no issue increasing the pay to keep it staffed properly.

Finance Officer Bowers discussed the city employee health insurance and city liability

(Continued on next page)

insurance which she said would be added to the next regular council meeting for a motion. She said for the health insurance, staying with the same plan, that there is an 8.6-percent increase over last year, the dental insurance has a six percent increase, and the life insurance is holding at the same rate.

Finance Officer Bowers noted she added \$3,500.00 for employee incentives for either hiring for employee appreciation.

Councilwoman Haffner asked about the Lobbying Services from Liberty Partners which increased a substantial amount to which Finance Officer Bowers confirmed the increase and mentioned the services include a grant writer.

Councilwoman Haffner asked Finance Officer Bowers to discuss the Community Center entry for 1.4 million dollars. She inquired about the county Community Center being opened and it was learned that it was temporary until the Freeport Community Center is complete and open. City Manager Martin said the status of the new Freeport Community Center is that Tony Vallee from Walton County is drawing up the architectural plans. Councilwoman Haffner asked if the new Community Center would be in the same place behind City Hall to which City Manager Martin confirmed it would be.

City Manager Martin brought up the budget entry for streets. He reminded the Council Members that the city does not have a department for streets although they have accepted responsibility for numerous streets. He used Hammock Bay as an example stating the City Clerk receives one or two complaints a month about roads. He currently said the Water Department repairs the issues. He said the city can continue having the Water Department repairs the issues or buy a truck and hire a person and create a road department to do it or involve the county. He said he asked the county to take over the roads and they declined to. He requested that the county be a contractor for the city for minor road repairs. Councilwoman Haffner asked if these would be separate from the existing interlocal agreement to which City Manager Martin said yes. Councilwoman Brannon said in previous years they had looked at the roads situation and considered an independent contractor to do the repairs and their nominal contract started at two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000.00). She said if we can have the county do this work for less and take the Water Department out of the equation that would be a good thing.

Finance Director Bowers went over the budget additions for the Parks and Recreation Department based on the last budget meeting discussions. The discussion turns towards the expense of a skate park and Parks Director Digges said in the future the park lights will cost as much as the skate park estimate (five hundred thousand dollars). The Council agreed to put the allotted skate park monies (one hundred thousand dollars) into the light fund for future use.

Councilwoman Haffner asked who the Construction Inspector would report to, which City Manager Martin said would be Wastewater Supervisor Paul Johnson.

(Continued on next page)

Mayor Barley brought up safety from State Road 20 to U.S. 331 and proposed using solar powered lights to help with sidewalk visibility and beautification. There was a discussion regarding possibilities and the Council directed fifty thousand dollars to be used for the project.

Councilman Hope mentioned that Mayor Barley had a good idea to help with lighting around the USPS on U.S. 331. He proposed having Chelco install two light poles at a cost of twenty dollars each per month and it would help with safety concerns in that area.

**3. Adjournment**

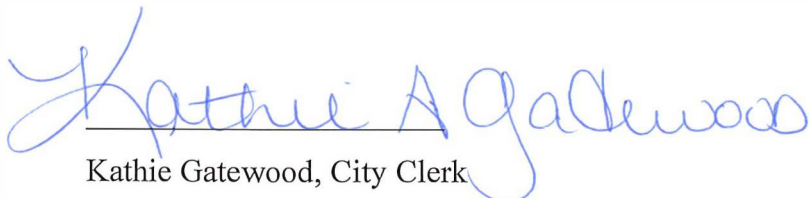
Mayor Barley motioned to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 4:12 p.m.

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



Russ Barley, Mayor

ATTEST:



Kathie Gatewood, City Clerk

