

CITY OF MILFORD
COUNCIL WORKSHOP MINUTES
May 24, 2023

The City Council of the City of Milford convened in a Workshop Session on Wednesday, May 24, 2023, beginning at 6:09 p.m. for the purpose of reviewing the proposed Fiscal Year 2024 City of Milford Budget.

PRESIDING: Vice Mayor Jason James Sr.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councilpersons Daniel Marabello, Mike Boyle, Andrew Fulton, Todd Culotta, Brian Baer, Nirmala Samaroo, Jason James Sr., and Katrina Wilson

STAFF: City Manager Mark Whitfield, Police Chief Cecelia Ashe, and City Clerk Terri Hudson

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

No one signed up or was in attendance to speak during this time. The session concluded as a result.

Review and Discussion of Proposed City of Milford FY24 Budget

Finance Director Lou Vitola provided a quick synopsis of tonight's review of departments, in addition to the City Clerks which was carved out of what was formerly combined with city administration.

He also recalled Councilmember James requesting a breakdown of the changes in all years of the CIP. He shared a detailed recap of the changes in the CIP document from April 19 through May 8, 2023. Councilman James clarified that the past three years would be beneficial.

Councilmember James will include that in the Q&A responses when completed.

He was also able to complete a personnel analysis on one consolidated slide, which he will provide after the departmental presentations by department, in addition to those employees being paid by multiple departments. Doing that on a detailed basis was tougher than the higher-level analysis he produced for tonight. He will provide that information at a later date.

In addition, the Finance Director would like direction from Council on how to shape the final CIP and operational budget.

City Administration

- Financial Highlights
 - No change in employee count
 - Personnel costs flat despite intern-driven FTE increase
 - Tuition reimbursement & temporary labor costs decreasing by \$23k (55%) vs FY23 Projection
 - Operating Expenses flat with FY23 Projection
 - Minor increase (marketing) offset by decreases (software, insurance, & one-time furniture)

- FY24 Focus Areas
 - Capital projects and property acquisition
 - Employee retention and recruitment
 - Milford Corporate Center Development
 - Marketing Milford's business opportunities
 - Implementation of Cost Allocation Study
 - Initiation of professional engagement to evaluate Milford Business Continuity Plan
 - Keeping Council and public informed on rapidly changing energy markets

City Manager Whitfield said that seven years ago, the city administration involved three people—the City Manager, City Clerk, and the Deputy City Clerk. Since that time his department has grown by adding four additional employees- the Economic Development Administrator, Executive Assistant, and the Human Resource Director. Those employees report to the City Manager who is responsible for those expenditures in his budget. The City Clerk should be responsible for the expenditures of her and the Deputy City Clerk.

Manager Whitfield said there is no change in the employee count, and with the Local Government Fellow Melody Barger leaving, he decided not to replace her. However, two University of Delaware interns are being hired this summer.

Personnel costs are flat, tuition reimbursement and temporary labor costs were decreased, operating expenses were flat, and a minor increase in marketing, offset by decreases in software, insurance, and furniture purchases.

Other items mentioned were listed above.

The 3.9 headcount was the result of his Executive Assistant projected for eight months and was hired for four months in FY23, and Ms. Barger, who was a contracted employee, left the same month. The 4.2 are the new interns being hired.

He also plans to create a new position who will oversee all purchases within the city.

City Clerks

- Financial Highlights
 - New full-time Deputy Clerk position is driving the Personnel cost vs FY23 budget and projection
 - Non-personnel cost increases are \$24,000
- o Legal and training budget increases make up about \$16,500 (67%) of the increase in OpEx
- FY24 Focus Areas
 - Completion of Strategic Plan Update
 - Improve and expand public information

City Clerk Hudson shared that when she left for a conference in the middle of May, her budget was included as part of city council's budget. When she returned to work the following Monday, she contacted the Finance Director to learn where the numbers were derived from.

Noting that there are only two employees in her department, she is again asking for a third person. She recalled that being approved three years ago, prior to the pandemic and prior to the loss of her Deputy City Clerk at the time. Handling the duties of both positions until the Planning Department released Katrina White who requested the transfer and was hired to fill that position, the department never recovered and there is still a lot of catchups needed.

Before Ms. White was transferred out of her department a few years ago, there were always three employees in the City Clerk's office. That position was never filled during this time though the workload continues to increase. One of the critical matters are the records that fill the downtown vault and need to be archived. Someone is needed to sort through the records and separate them and try to return them to each department to handle. Each department has a records officer assigned who keeps those documents records, while city hall has a room full of records that really need attention and a big priority.

She talked about the daily responsibilities and miscellaneous requests that come in and hinder and postpone the normal duties required by the clerks. Special duty events and FOIA requests have increased exponentially. Another focus is for her office to find ways for her office to reach the citizens, noting the many professional and legislative relationships. But they want to communicate with the residents and businesses in Milford.

The City Clerk reviewed the budget numbers noting that the line items are based on the head count broken out from the previous budget.

She also talked about the various methods used by finance to create the new city clerk budget.

Councilman Fulton asked how many duties the City Clerk does that is not outlined in the Charter and said that other City Managers did not have an assistant and went to the clerk for their administrative support. She explained that most city managers did their own work, and this is the normal practice since computers and emails. In addition, both City Manager Carmean and Baird both had assistants. She asked for more specific information.

Councilman Fulton said he knows the City Clerk has a lot of responsibilities and he is trying to figure out how to reduce the workload by handing it over so it falls under the City Manager so that the more important things can get done. She again explained that minutes, website updates are needed, assistance with records is needed, etc. She emphasized these are all normal clerk duties. Each duty is not spelled out in the charter nor are any of the appointed employees by Council.

Councilmember James said he was unaware that there were three employees previously in the clerk's office and she shared that this goes back to when Richard Carmean was city manager.

He also added there he believes there are quicker and more efficient ways to upload the council packet. A long conversation talked about minute transcription, and she explained that process, and informed Council that the key to saving time on the council packet is getting the documents from the sender in a timely manner.

Councilmember James also recommended the City Clerk review the wages and benefits for each of the positions in her office and to make sure those numbers are accurate.

Finance Director Vitola added that the numbers he provided in the salary line item are a final grade, though they can be adjusted, based on ten months of the year assuming recruitment would start in July. He also noted those numbers are the most accurate of all departments because there is a known set of current employees with a new employee added.

The Director then explained how the line items in the city clerk budget was created.

Councilmember James thanked the Finance Director though his word of advice is to the City Clerk to contact him to ensure accuracy of the line items, because she will be managing that budget.

Ms. Hudson asked that she be provided with the new classifications that were assigned to the new position and the updated Senior Deputy Clerk position.

City Council

Financial Highlights

- Increased support for community partnerships (existing agreements with nonprofits: DMI, Museum, Library, CFC, Chamber, Armory)
- Additional incentives for fire and emergency response
- First full year of adjusted compensation for Mayor & Council
- Provision for Business Continuity Evaluation

FY24 Focus Areas

- Continued recording and live streaming of meetings to promote engagement with citizens and stakeholders
- Restoration of committee meetings
- Integration of updated Strategic Plan
- Implementation of updated Rules of Procedure

The City Manager reported that Council's salaries and associated line items went up 119% because of the increase of Mayor and Council salaries effective May 1, 2023, noting that one of the councilmembers suggest that be reviewed on a regular basis.

Councilmember James noted that those salaries had not increased in many years, and the City Clerk confirmed that has not changed since she came over to City Hall in 1997, adding that they do not want to be a burden on our taxpayers and

simply want to be fair and comparable. Councilmember Wilson added that for many years Council was paid \$50 per month, regardless of the number of meetings.

It has been recommended that other councils be surveyed for comparison purposes.

The City Manager plans to add an escalator clause so that the Mayor and Council receive regular increases without being approved each time.

The funding provided to various organizations for community support was reviewed, though Downtown Milford was not given the additional increase requested, and it remains to be determined by their current contract, according to City Manager Whitfield.

Also noted was the Armory expense that increased from \$9,755 to \$25,000, a Bus Continuity Plan line item was again added in the amount of \$50,000, and a transfer to customer service of \$50,000.

City Hall

- Financial Highlights
 - The fractional FTE represents a reallocation of the PW facilities position
 - Public Plaza improvements to City Hall
 - Designs nearly complete and will be presented to Council
 - Construction is again included in the FY24 CIP and recommended in the Capital Budget
- FY24 Focus Areas
 - Deploy training to maximize and promote efficient use of the new technical resources available in lower-level conference room
 - Leverage improvements in Council Chamber to further promote citizen engagement

The City Manager commented that the personnel expense is related to the allocation of the building and facilities. A firm was hired to create a plan for the public plaza in front of City Hall that will be presented to Council later.

The focus area is to deploy training to maximize and promote efficient use of new technical resources. particularly in the lower-level training room and leverage improvements in the council chambers to further promote citizen engagement.

City Manager Whitfield believes the maintenance involves a contract and the Public Works Department said it is a mix of lower-level items including painting, bathroom upgrades, alarm update, and some cleaning issues. Most of the time the smaller repairs are handled by in-house staff.

It was also recommended that Council be reissued (or issued) key fobs for entrance into city hall.

Parks and Recreation

- FY24 Operating Budget totals \$1.5 million
 - \$390k increase (35%) vs FY23 Projection (19% over FY23 Budget)
 - Increase driven equally by Personnel & OpEx (\$180k each)
 - Fuel, utilities, and rec program costs constitute remaining \$30k
 - FTE increase attributable to horticulturalist
 - Horticulturalist recommended end of summer (0.75 FTE)
 - Seasonal employment count reduction but *temp wage inflation pushes dollar variance*
 - \$180k OpEx increase driven by contract services, cleaning, and maintenance of parks / buildings
- FY24 Focus Areas
 - Realization of downtown amenities

- Enhanced city-wide beautification
- Enhanced recreational opportunities, both active and passive

Parks and Recreation Director Brad Dennehy explained that his department is different from the other departments and use seasonal employees. Any beautification citywide falls within his budget. To maintain higher levels of maintenance, this increase has a large increase due to personnel. His goal is to increase the seasonal workers hourly rates (contract services) and add a new position of horticulturalist.

His biggest challenge is to attract and retain seasonal help and in the past, have used a temp service who provided a total of 25 individuals. The employment agency is paid about \$17 an hour and explained the many duties performed by those workers.

The recommendation is to move this level of seasonal workers to the first step on the approved City of Milford payscale which is \$16.34 and will increase on July 1st to \$16.75 and is reflected in the large increase in contract services. That equates to about \$24 an hour paid to the temp agency.

Director Dennehy explained the benefits of using a temp agency, any part-time employee that works up to six months must be offered health insurance at a cost of \$24,000 per individual per year. The other reason is to shift any liability to the temp agency, as well as workman comp claims.

He is requesting the new horticulturalist with the goal of having a full-time employee with a green thumb and a passion for plants and garden management. That will aid greatly with the gateway plans by having someone that will take pride in those projects, in addition to seeing the seasonal employees and volunteers.

When asked what the plan is to hire better temps, Director Dennehy said the better starting wage will hopefully attract a better caliber employee. Presently, they are struggling to get quality employees as can be reflected in last year's attrition rate.

The Director pointed out that he is very easy going to work for, and RJ Skinner is extremely easy to work for, so that is not the problem.

A long discussion followed regarding temp services and the turnover within the department.

It was agreed there is a need to further discuss the matter, particularly considering there is sufficient work for 12-month employees.

Director Dennehy emphasized that Parks and Recreation does a lot more than cutting grass, and that is why he wanted to spend more time on the budget request this evening though he is happy to consider alternatives moving forward, though his goal is to get these hourly pay increases this year.

Milford Police Department

- FY24 Police Operating Budget totals \$6.9 million
- Increase of \$1 million (17%) vs FY23 Projection
 - Excluding Capital, new Debt Service and HQ OpEx overlap, increase is <12%
 - Increased legal budget entering final year of Teamsters contract for Sworn Officers
 - Increased ammunition budget to meet training requirements in volatile market

Chief Ashe referenced the \$1 million increase from FY23 tied into the building and related items.

She asked Council to exclude items such as the capital debt services, which leaves the remaining budget increasing less than 12%. Also noted is the inflation value which nationally is 4.5 to 4.9%.

As she moves the department into the 21st Century, technology costs have increased due to inflation.

She talked about the organization of the department and the personnel breakdown:

- Authorized Strength – 37 officers
- Actual Strength -34 Officers
- Operational Strength- 34 Officers
- Total Number of Employees- 50
- 1 Chief of Police
- 1 Captain
- 3 Lieutenants
- Criminal Investigations – (1) Sgt. (2) Detectives (1) Civilian
- Operations – (4) Sgt. (23) Officers (3 vacancies)
- Civilian Staff - (8) Dispatcher (1 vacancy), (5) Civilian Staff

Chief Ashe talked about a recent presentation that was provided to Senator Coons by the Delaware Police Chiefs, adding that she is proud to only have three vacancies, as it has become a very serious issue within the law enforcement community. She also reviewed the application/hiring process noting there were 64 applicants, and a demographic breakdown will be included in the next monthly police report.

She spoke about the importance of funding for the upcoming year and include funding for all 37 officers at the full rate and provided scenarios why this is important. The Chief would like this to be considered for FY25 versus prorating any vacancy.

It is anticipated those vacancies will be filled by August; there is also one vacancy in the Communications Division that has not yet been advertised because of ongoing negotiations and any change in the starting salary.

She also discussed the Strategic Plan and Council's priorities.

- National Citizen Survey Pillar #1 –Safety
- Priority Areas - #2 Public Safety and Preparedness
 - (4) Goals
 - (9) Objectives
 - (21) Strategies
- Establish and Maintain Strong and Beneficial Police Community Relations
- Utilize Effective, Proactive Emergency Preparedness and Public Safety Strategies
- Efficiently Utilize All Police Resources
- Reduce Crime

She spoke about the new vehicles and the excitement surrounding them, noting that each will be equipped with GPS equipment. They will be used as a strategy of how to deploy the vehicles, efficiently and effectively, but also about getting the officers out of the vehicles and talking and communicating with the public. With that, she anticipates a natural decline in crime.

Councilman Boyle asked if there is a need to grow the Behavioral Health Unit that currently employs one full-time and two part-time clinicians as demands increase. Chief Ashe talked about the number of times the Behavioral Health Unit Director is asked to speak publicly. Milford has one of the best examples across the country on how police effectively integrate a Behavioral Health Unit into their staff and ways to win over the police officers.

She agrees there is always a need for additional staffing, and she wants to evaluate how the city will be using the opioid funds coming in and hopes to enhance that unit. However, that will need to be rolled into the operational costs to ensure sustainability of the program into the future.

The difficulty in obtaining ammunition was also discussed and the impact on those costs.

She said there was an attempt to put a depreciation value system in place, but if not transparent about the number of cars, the depreciation value is inaccurate. That program should be put together this year and though aggressive, the request is for six new vehicles this year that will be needed for spares, as the program moves forward.

Also explained was the increase in legal expenses that are related to upcoming negotiations with the sworn officers.

Finance Director Vitola shared information on the police enhancement fund in which almost \$900,000 was collected in in enhancement funding. Approximately \$850,000 has been spent and the plan was to utilize \$1 million from the city's reserve funding to prevent financing that amount in the total project cost.

Of that, 100% of that \$1 million was expected to come from PD enhancement funds. The projection was that \$1 million would be reached by the end of the building construction and with the construction turn down, that pace was threatened. However, that has recovered some and in the last finance report, there was a decent increase in April alone.

He wanted to provide an update that the \$1 million is in play and should be met.

Personnel Update

Director Vitola also noted that this personnel summary is one step in providing council a more detailed breakdown of full-time employees and provided the comparison from FY23 to FY24.

FY24 Budget Draft –Personnel Change Summary

- \$1.37 million total personnel cost increase from FY23 to FY24
 - FTE Growth = \$662k
 - Wage and Benefits cost increases = \$629k
 - Combination of FTE Growth & Inflation = \$77k
- FY24 Proposed Positions total \$252k of personnel cost increases
 - \$210k of \$252k total is attributable to general fund

He emphasized the change from FY23 to FY24 to 23 is not exorbitant. The FY24 proposed positions that are not yet approved total \$252,000 in wages and benefits. A decent portion of that is attributable to the general fund. For the most part, he stated that most are in line with the 10% increase in health insurance benefits, which are a large portion of employee costs.

More details on an extended time frame will be provided at a later time.

Conclusion

City Manager Whitfield said that as has been done previously, all questions will be compiled, and any new questions should be forwarded to ensure Council sees all inquiries and responses.

He is asking the budget to be finalized on June 5th including any items Council wants amended or updated.

The City Manager concluded by saying he met with the department heads and directed them to cut, or he was going to cut, and it was handled as a result.

There being no further business, the Budget Workshop concluded at 8:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Terri K. Hudson, MMC
City Clerk/Recorder