

A budget study work session of the Council of the City of Blue Ash, Ohio, was held on November 30, 2006. Mayor Robert J. Buckman, Jr. called the meeting to order in the City Manager's Conference Room at 6:30 PM.

ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councilman Rick Bryan, Mayor Robert Buckman, Councilman Lee Czerwonka, Councilman Henry Stacey, Councilwoman Stephanie Stoller, Councilman James Sumner, and Vice Mayor Mark Weber

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager David Waltz, Clerk of Council Jamie Eifert, Deputy Clerk of Council Sue Bennett, Treasurer/ Administrative Services Director James Pfeffer, Parks & Recreation Director Chuck Funk, Service Director Dennis Albrinck, and interested citizens

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Councilwoman Stoller moved, Councilman Czerwonka seconded to convene an Executive Session to discuss matters pertaining to personnel. The Clerk called the roll. Councilpersons Stoller, Sumner, Weber, Stacey, Czerwonka, Bryan, and Mayor Buckman voted yes. Seven yeses. Motion carried. (Those in attendance at the Executive Session included only the seven Council Members and the City Manager.)

After matters pertaining to personnel were discussed, Councilman Czerwonka moved, Councilwoman Stoller seconded to convene to the regular meeting. A voice vote was taken. All Council members voted yes. Motion carried.

At this point, the meeting was relocated to the Council Chambers where some interested citizens and the remaining Administration members were also in attendance.

OPENING CEREMONIES

Mayor Buckman asked Boy Scout John Eifert to lead those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

WORK SESSION – Topic: 2007 Proposed Budget

City Manager Waltz explained that the Administration's goal with the 2007 Proposed Budget is to keep operational components comparable to the levels of calendar years 2005 and 2006. The estimated increase in overall earnings tax revenues is 1.5%, and no significant changes in operations or services are proposed.

Overall, the largest capital projects funded in the Budget involve the Recreation Center expansion (possible because of passage of Issue 15), a sidewalk/bike path along Hunt between Bluewing Terrace and the Kroger shopping area, and various street improvements.

Councilman Sumner suggested that for policy purposes, the City consider "softening" the wording in places within the Budget (particularly the introductory letter and overview) to allow more flexibility for the direction of Issue 15 revenues. Though he believes the City should remain faithful to its statements to direct the tax revenues to promised capital projects, especially in concern for future Councils, if a needed capital project arises that some of the tax monies could appropriately be directed to, then it should be allowed. City Manager Waltz commented that in the City's explanations and presentations to citizens regarding Issue 15, the City explained that though the majority of the revenues would be for the promised capital improvements (airport park, Rec Center expansion, and Golf Course improvements), part of the revenues could also be directed to "other capital improvements."

In addressing a question from Councilwoman Stoller, City Manager Waltz explained that the Charter's "60/40" provision, in his opinion, was appropriate for Blue Ash when it was a growing community; however, such a provision may not be applicable for Blue Ash now since it is a mature community. This is a potential change to the City's Charter that should be considered in the future.

Councilman Sumner commented that the \$200,000 to \$300,000 for economic development incentive purposes seems relatively small, and he suggested directing more funds to that activity if needed. City Manager Waltz commented that this is the same amount as last year. After some discussion, Councilman Sumner suggested that the Administration ask for more funding if needed if appropriate development projects present themselves.

Councilman Sumner commented that his experience at General Electric is that contractual technology assistance has proven to be more efficient and a benefit, as compared to the addition of full-time technology employees. Treasurer Jim Pfeffer explained that currently the City has one full-time Technology Officer responsible for covering the entire City's technology needs 24/7. About \$40,000 is already spent each year on contractual assistance in this area. He explained that the real issue is one of backup, as it is impossible for this individual oftentimes to take a vacation. Also, he often comes in well after working hours to address problems since the Blue Ash government is a 24-hour operation. Councilman Sumner was receptive to the explanation provided.

Councilman Sumner encouraged the Administration to broaden the scope regarding efforts to secure grant funding to other areas in addition to the airport project. He suggested that lobbyist assistance could also be used to find funds for other types of projects, such as historical preservation/restoration.

In addressing questions from Councilwoman Stoller and Councilman Bryan regarding the plan to fill the currently vacant Assistant City Manager position, Mr. Waltz explained that it is his intention to make this position more of an "Assistant to the City Manager" position, rather than Assistant City Manager. The thought is to have this person work on special projects, analysis, etc., and for this position in the City's organizational structure to be a "sidebar," reporting to the City Manager, similar to the Public Information Officer position. It is not his intention to find a "#2 in command" nor to have this person oversee the current five department directors.

Councilwoman Stoller commented favorably on the proposed complaint tracking system, which Mr. Waltz explained briefly in concept.

In addressing a question from Councilwoman Stoller regarding the Kenwood/Pfeiffer traffic signal, Service Director Denny Albrinck explained that what is proposed is similar to what is now in operation at the four major intersections along Reed Hartman Highway. The improvement consists of a video sensor system to sequence and control the lights, involving placement of a video vehicle sensor on top of the bar holding the traffic signals. Though this system is more expensive than the closed loop system once used, it more than pays for itself over time as it is much less expensive to maintain and to repair.

In addressing a question from Councilwoman Stoller regarding the \$12,000 planned for the historic Hunt House, Parks & Recreation Director Chuck Funk commented that the intention is to use these funds for some aspects of the project on the home's second level, as well as to address some minor repairs and painting issues on the home's first level.

In addressing a question from Councilman Weber regarding the change in the Cincinnati radio market, Mr. Funk explained that he does not yet know fully how this will affect the Department's sponsorship revenues. Though the changes in the market will necessitate changes in how the Department handles this source of revenue (which benefit especially the three major special events), it will not affect the quality of the events. At this point, Mr.

Funk is not overly concerned with these changes, and is hopeful that in some ways, the City may benefit. He has already been contacted by at least one major area network television affiliate to be associated with the July 4th event.

Councilman Bryan commented that the employee health care committee is a good idea which, in his experience, has encouraged creativity with this major expense of an employer. Regarding the \$300,000 proposed for a "land bank," Councilman Bryan suggested that the City develop a list of land that it would consider including, understanding that such future discussions would be held under Executive Sessions.

Councilman Stacey commented favorably on the plan to improve the bikepath/sidewalk on Hunt Road between Bluewing and the Kroger area. In addressing a question from Councilman Stacey regarding the Hunt/Blue Ash Roads project, Mr. Waltz explained that the City did receive an interest-free loan for a ten-year period from Hamilton County (as a part of the SCIP process), and that he expects the Blue Ash Road improvements to begin later in 2007 after the Cincinnati Water Works completes its water transmission line project planned for the area.

In addressing a question from Councilman Czerwonka regarding downtown streetscaping funds, Mr. Waltz explained that it is the Administration's suggestion to work with a consultant to develop a theme for the downtown. Once a new theme is defined, then engineering, architectural, and other work would be needed to see it through. Such a theme to be developed in 2007 would be reviewed by the Planning Commission and Council.

Mayor Buckman asked, regarding the potential of improved pedestrian access west of Bluewing towards the Fox Run Apartments and the City's western corporate limit, if such a path or access on the south side of Hunt Road farther south from the road has been considered, i.e., connecting the apartment area with the area now containing the Chabad Jewish Center, County's Geier House, etc. Mr. Albrinck commented that though it has been determined that a bikepath adjacent to the roadway would be extremely difficult from an engineering standpoint, such a path as described by Mayor Buckman has not been considered.

Mayor Buckman asked that the traffic signal at Malsbary and Reed Hartman be looked at as oftentimes traffic heading west on Malsbary wanting to turn left onto southbound Reed Hartman Highway is often backed up beyond the water tower.

Council complimented this year's downtown holiday decorations.

ADJOURNMENT

All items on the agenda having been acted upon, Councilman Stacey moved, Councilman Bryan seconded to adjourn the meeting. A voice vote was taken. All members voted yes. The Council meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:02 PM.

Robert J. Buckman, Jr., Mayor

Jamie K. Eifert, Clerk of Council

MINUTES WRITTEN BY:

Susan K. Bennett, Deputy Clerk of Council