

CITY OF BLUE ASH
Interoffice Memo - City Manager's Office

TO: City Council
FROM: City Manager and Department Directors
SUBJECT: Agenda Items for the October 8, 2009 Council Meeting
DATE: October 6, 2009
COPIES: Department Directors, Press, Clerk of Council, Solicitor

The following offers a brief description of the topics included on the October 8 Council agenda:

Student Government Day Activities

To date, eight students have signed up for Student Government Day activities on Thursday – four from Sycamore and four from Ursuline. (Moeller was invited; however, no response was received.) The students will spend the day at City hall beginning at approximately 10:15AM, and their day will include discussions, lunch, and tours of the various City facilities and areas of responsibilities. Those expected to participate include:

Sycamore:

- Elliott Butler, Village Drive (Montgomery)
- Danielle Fleming, Summit Avenue
- Kelsey Norton, Southgate Drive
- Joyce Zhang, Brasher Avenue

Ursuline:

- Lindsey Hogan, Cincinnati
- Jordan Powers, Mason
- Monica Melink, Madeira/Indian Hill
- Libby Prickel, Evendale

9.a.1.Resolution No. 2009-11 - Accepting property tax rates for 2010

As is customary this time of year, Council's consideration of this resolution is a part of the City's annual budgetary process, and involves the Hamilton County Budget Commission. The Year 2010 Tax Budget, which was considered and adopted by Council in July, was submitted to the County Budget Commission for their review of our projected financials for next year. Resolution No. 2009-11 seeks Council's acceptance of the amounts and rates of taxation that were included within the Tax Budget, as certified by the Commission and reviewed by the County Auditor's office. In accordance with our Charter provisions and with our historical practice, the inside millage as expressed in this resolution remains at 3.08 mills.

Even though the millage is small (one of the smaller municipal rates in the region), the City's overall assessed valuation contributes to a substantial source of revenue for the City (and, of course, property taxes from the Blue Ash property owners represent the majority of revenue for the Sycamore Schools). Based upon the County's estimated December 31, 2009 total assessed valuation for Blue Ash, including all real, utility and personal property, the 2010 estimated property tax revenue to the General Fund and the General Bond Retirement Fund to the City of Blue Ash should be approximately \$2,842,254, including Homestead, Rollback,

10K exemption, the State of Ohio's reimbursement for lost Tangible Personal Property tax, and public utility reimbursement.

Please direct questions regarding this ordinance to the Treasurer.

9.a.2. Ordinance No. 2009-56 - Authorizing contracts for employee insurance benefits

Historically, the City of Blue Ash has provided its employees a superb array of benefits including health, vision, dental, and life coverages. Although in recent years, language has been incorporated into a number of the collective bargaining agreements that would provide for some payment of the premium by employees (the City has continued its long-standing policy of absorbing all costs related to these benefits), several years ago, an analysis was performed which clearly indicated the need for cost containment in the benefit area, particularly as it related to medical or health insurance coverage. The City Manager requested the formation of an employee-based health insurance advisory committee to not only review the City's significant cost escalation in this area, but also to help with employee education and to examine alternatives which might provide for continuing excellent coverage at a lower cost.

That committee was formed drawing upon representatives from each department, and a cooperative education/information effort was initiated by the Human Resources Officer and the City's insurance broker, Horan Associates. This effort, initiated in early 2008, resulted in the City's shift this time last year from a traditional plan with Humana to a qualified high-deductible health insurance plan. The implementation of that change was done within the guidelines provided in Ordinance No. 2008-52, involving employee education, the implementation of deductibles, the beginning of the use of health reimbursement and flexible spending accounts, greater focus on "consumer education" for medical benefits, and a new approach to managing the City's health insurance costs while still providing excellent coverage for the staff.

Although these efforts in late 2008 did create an environment whereby the City's costs for health insurance were moderated significantly, the health insurance advisory committee continued to meet throughout all of 2009 to evaluate progress and to plan ahead for the "renewal" that would be forthcoming on November 1, 2009. Throughout the initial eight months of the "new high deductible plan" instituted on November 1, 2008, the committee examined claims, frequency, and cost, and found that the City's usage of the plan had not significantly moderated following the shift to a high-deductible plan. The City's renewal rates in past years had seemingly been driven by the level of usage of the plan, and had not been significantly impacted by the "pool" or overall claims experience of the insurance provider. Thus, it was clear to members of the committee, and to employees themselves, that the key to moderating the escalating costs of health insurance rested within better utilization, comparison shopping, wellness planning, and awareness of the expense associated with various procedures.

In late summer and early fall, Horan Associates, the City's broker, sought competitive proposals from a variety of providers in an effort to develop a strategy for the renewal on November 1, 2009. Given our claims experience, Humana was reluctant to provide a renewal of our plan at anything less than a 12% increase, necessitating a consideration of alternative proposals. Although both employees and the Administration dread the issues associated with a change of insurance carriers, it was clear that a shift away from Humana's high-deductible plan would be a necessity for the upcoming plan year.

Although a wide number of plans were examined by the committee and the broker, the final recommendation called for a shift in carriers to UnitedHealthCare, and several modifications to the qualified high-deductible health insurance plan offered under their Option #2. This plan, which does provide for an overall savings to the City of Blue Ash, similarly matched

Humana's network and coverages, but reflected an increase in deductibles, as well as a requirement for prescription co-pays once the deductible had been met. It is hoped that the post deductible prescription-only co-pays would help impact utilization, with those efforts supplemented through educational seminars provided by the City.

The City of Blue Ash anticipates providing 25% of the deductible cost upon implementation of the plan, and the employees may earn an additional 25% of the deductible through attendance at educational seminars during the first half of 2010. Those educational efforts will include wellness planning, mechanisms for shopping for insurance procedures and pharmacy usage, as well as providing a broader understanding of how essential it is that plan utilization be moderated over the upcoming year.

It was understood that any savings that the City might achieve through the shift to UnitedHealthCare would be available to help moderate the impact upon the staff at the renewal on November 1, 2010.

It would be a superb outcome indeed if these efforts were successful and the City would be able to continue with UnitedHealthCare without significant changes in the upcoming year.

Additionally, as noted in the ordinance, several of the City's negotiated collective bargaining agreements call for the City to provide a "low-cost/no-cost secondary plan" should an employee not wish to participate in the UnitedHealthCare high-deductible plan. Provisions exist in the ordinance for the creation of that "catastrophic" plan which carries a very high deductible. As a supplement to that secondary coverage, the City does offer a \$2,000 payment to any employee who chooses to secure their insurance elsewhere (perhaps on a spouse's plan) and opt out of the City's health care plan. The UnitedHealthCare option includes the potential for employees to utilize the pre-tax payment mechanisms for medical care through a flexible spending account or a portable health savings account, again, hopefully providing incentive for cautious usage of the medical plan benefits.

The Human Resource team has already provided a series of information/enrollment meetings at different times and locations so that all employees and their spouses could attend, and the components of the changes expressed in this plan change are now widely known by the employee group. Although this change does impose a greater financial burden upon many of our staff, such a change is necessary given the economic times and the superb level of benefit historically provided by the City's medical plan.

The ordinance authorizes medical insurance premium for plan year 11/1/09 through 10/31/10 with UnitedHealthCare for the group health insurance for eligible employees is \$1,014.67 per month per family, \$710.27 for employee + spouse, \$642.62 for employee + dependent children, and \$338.22 per month per single contract.

The ordinance also addresses renewals for the vision and dental plans which have been negotiated to continue forward with no change in the rate structures.

Please address questions regarding this ordinance to the Treasurer at the meeting or by contacting Human Resources Officer Margaret Main at 745-8530.

9.b.1. Ordinance No. 2009-57 - Authorizing the application for financial assistance from the State Capital Improvement Program (SCIP) for funding a capital infrastructure improvement (Carver Road rehabilitation)

The State Capital Improvement Program (SCIP) is managed by the Ohio Public Works Commission to provide state funding for local infrastructure construction and rehabilitation projects. The program is administered locally by the Hamilton County Engineer's Office and is very competitive. Grants and loans are available, depending on the competitiveness of a project. For example, the Blue Ash/Hunt Roads Reconstruction project was partially funded with a 10-year, no interest SCIP loan.

Due to our solid Economic Health rating, the City of Blue Ash is less competitive than many other communities for grants; however, we are potentially competitive for attractive SCIP loans that carry a very low or zero percentage interest rate.

The attached ordinance authorizes the City Manager to submit an application for SCIP loan funds for the Rehabilitation of Carver Road. The estimated construction costs of the rehabilitation are approximately \$ 825,550 and the City will request loan funds for \$780,000 (95%) repayable over 10 years at zero percent interest. If the SCIP loan is awarded, the project will be completed in 2010 .The City's "local share" will be included in the 2010 Proposed Budget.

9.b.2. Ordinance No. 2009-58 – Awarding a bid for the Reed Hartman Highway Channels project

The Reed Hartman Highway Channel is the storm drainage channel that starts just north of Malsbary Road and runs between Carver Road and Reed Hartman Highway. This storm water channel is one of the major flood control waterways in the City of Blue Ash, and has been called the "CIC Channel" in past correspondence.

Over the years, the concrete-lined bottom of the channel has deteriorated and various sections are cracked or completely broken. These deficiencies allow water to infiltrate under the channel lining, thus causing further deterioration and erosion. Repairs are necessary to correct these deficiencies and to ensure this channel continues to provide a high level of flood protection for this important commercial area.

This project was bid with a base bid and two alternates with two different types of repair (A and B). The base bid is to repair the most severely damaged areas for the channel section from Malsbary Road to the bridge over Carver Road. Alternate 1 is to construct a new concrete liner under this bridge. Alternate 2 is to repair damaged areas to the channel north of the bridge. Completing the work items in the Base Bid and both Alternate 1 and Alternate 2 provides a comprehensive repair strategy for the entire channel on the west side of Reed Hartman Highway and is the recommended award strategy. Bid Item B was a complete removal/replacement of the old channel concrete and is not recommended for award due to the additional costs.

The Fred A. Nemann Company is the low bidder for Base Bid A with Alternate A1 and Alternate A2. Their total bid for these three items is \$180,315.10, which was within 4% of the engineer's estimate. The contract is recommended for award to the Fred A. Nemann Company for the unit prices listed in their bid proposal.

Please direct questions regarding this ordinance to the Public Works Director.

9.c.1. Ordinance No. 2009-59 - Authorizing purchase of turn-out gear for the Fire Department

Ordinance No. 2009-59 authorizes the purchase of replacement turn-out gear for the Fire Department from Morning Pride Manufacturing (DBA Honeywell First Responder Products) for a total amount not to exceed \$56,000. The ordinance also requests Council approval to waive bidding procedures since the department is receiving special pricing due to our involvement with the North East Fire Collaborative (the unit pricing is below State bid).

The department generally purchases about ten sets of turn-out gear each year. The gear protects firefighters from excessive heat, sharp objects, water and blood-borne diseases. The proposed turn-out gear represents new type with increased protection as it has a higher flash protection, and future purchases will be of this type of product. Funds to be received from the sale of the Fire Department's used SCBA gear (around \$30,000) will be used toward this purchase.

Please direct questions regarding this ordinance to the Fire Chief.

9.c.2. Ordinance No. 2009-60 - Authorizing purchases of materials and services associated with fire hydrants in 2009

Ordinance No. 2009-60 authorizes the purchase of materials and services associated with fire hydrants (including parts) for an amount not to exceed \$45,000 in 2009. As Council may recall, the City entered into an agreement in May 2008 to have Hamilton County Public Works (HCPW) provide services of hydrant repair for the 900+ hydrants in Blue Ash. This agreement also allows the City to purchase hydrants and hydrant parts from HCPW. In the past, we have been able to purchase fire hydrants from Greater Cincinnati Water Works (GCWW) for waterline replacement. However, the director at GCWW will no longer allow this, and we are in need of new hydrants for a water main replacement on Hunt Road (these hydrants alone are estimated to cost \$25,000 to \$30,000). This ordinance would allow us to spend up to \$45,000 this year for purchase of these hydrants, along with others needed, hydrant parts, and repair services.

Generally, when a significant water line/main project is installed by the GCWW, the City in which the project is done is responsible to pay for the new hydrants almost always required.

Please direct questions regarding this ordinance to the Fire Chief.