

The Budget Study Session of the Council of the City of Blue Ash, Ohio, was held on November 29, 2007. Mayor Robert J. Buckman, Jr. called the meeting to order in Council Chambers at 7:00 PM.

OPENING CEREMONIES

Mayor Buckman led those assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance.

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, Deputy Clerk of Council Sue Bennett, Treasurer/Administrative Services Director James Pfeffer, Parks & Recreation Director Chuck Funk, Service Director Dennis Albrinck, Assistant to the City Manager Kelly Osler, and interested citizens

BUDGET STUDY SESSION – REVIEW OF THE 2008 PROPOSED BUDGET

City Manager David Waltz commented that the 2008 Proposed Budget assumes a 3.8% increase in total income tax revenues, and an increase of 3% or less for operational expenses. The document also includes an updated Capital Improvements Plan, which he suggested should be used as a planning tool, not a funding tool. The Budget provides for a balance of \$2.8 million in general reserves, and \$6.6 million in capital reserves. Overall, the Budget continues Blue Ash's strong service focus, with salaries and personnel costs remaining the single largest expense, which Mr. Waltz pledged to provide continuous review. He explained that 2007 revenue projections were right on target as of the end of November.

Mr. Waltz also commented that the 2008 Proposed Budget:

- Assumes no other expense with the future airport park project except for the payment due Cincinnati towards purchase of the 130 acres. If something does unexpectedly move forward relating to this project, then the Budget as presented today would likely have to be adjusted.
- Assumes continued refinement of the plans and options for improvement at the Golf Course, such as continued study of overall course and clubhouse layout, etc. However, no start of construction would occur in 2008.

Mr. Waltz also suggested Council may want to give future consideration to the potential of mandatory tax filing. Most cities in the area already have adopted mandatory filing regulations within their tax codes, as it encourages compliance.

Councilman Sumner expressed concern with a perceived difference in formatting of the Budget as presented to Council, in particular, with an apparent lack of detail. Some discussion was had regarding this comment, and Mr. Waltz mentioned that the format of this budget, where detailed discussion was limited to new or different projects/procedures, is the same as the past several years (three or four). Treasurer Pfeffer commented that the effort was to reduce narrative in the expenditure section since it was often duplicative. Overall, the Administration's intent of the budget presentation was to show any substantial increase or decrease in personnel or change in operations. Mr. Waltz summarized that operations questions are always open to discussion, and urged Council to bring concerns to him year-round. Since he has not heard much concern from Council, there were relatively few changes made, and, hence, fewer items to be highlighted in this document. After some discussion, it was the consensus of Council members that this year's Budget format seemed similar to recent past years, and no change of direction was requested by the group.

In addressing a question from Councilman Sumner regarding the requirement for new full-time non-bargaining unit employees to pay 5% of their benefit care premiums, it was explained that Blue Ash's current practice of paying 100% of premiums was compared to other area public employers. Approximately three or four area public employers still pay 100% of coverage, with some paying close to 90% of coverage. Councilman Sumner agreed that this change appears to be a sound recommendation.

In addressing a question from Councilman Sumner, Mr. Pfeffer commented that almost all area communities have mandatory tax filing. He explained that this change may be appropriate simply because it is becoming more difficult to get people to comply, given that Blue Ash operates differently.

Councilman Sumner commented that he agreed it would be a good idea to bring in an additional full-time tax person to assure a smooth transition within this office given upcoming retirements of long-time personnel.

In addressing a question from Councilman Sumner regarding the potential of emergency controls for traffic signals (alerting traffic to oncoming emergency vehicles), it was explained that funding has not been included in the 2008 Budget for this capacity. Mr. Pfeffer commented that many communities have delayed this type of signal installation due to the relatively recent accident and fatality involving an emergency vehicle in Fairfield. It was also mentioned that Chief Brown has discussed the possibility of applying for grant funds to finance such installations in Blue Ash when appropriate.

In addressing a question from Councilman Sumner regarding the Hunt Road/Plainfield Road corridor, it was explained that the Budget includes \$40,000 towards this effort. The intent of these funds would be to continue to evaluate and refine details towards potential future recommendations to this area.

Councilman Sumner asked about the funding proposed towards the Hunt House project (\$22,000), and much discussion followed. The next step in the restoration proposed for the house, based upon past Administration presentations, is restoration/preservation of the home's second floor. The cost of that phase was estimated to be \$250,000. The consulting historical architect (Jim Fearing) did express concerns with the weight load limits for the home's second floor, and it appeared even under the best of conditions that not a large number of persons could be accommodated at any one time on the second level unless serious structural changes to the home's lower levels were made. Council members agreed that stabilization of the home is important (which has been accomplished); however, whether significant funds should be invested in 2008 towards restoration of the second floor was not clear. The conclusion of the discussion was that members of the Administration would talk further with the historical architect and gather estimates and recommended options or alternatives for Council before the final budget is presented for Council approval in January.

In addressing a question from Councilwoman Stoller, it was explained by Mr. Pfeffer that even though Blue Ash is no longer the DART Administering Agency, periodically, Blue Ash receives related funding. Setting up these accounts is necessary to properly deposit, and then redirect payments, to the current administering agency (Springfield Township).

In addressing a question from Councilwoman Stoller regarding traffic lights, it was explained that the City will be receiving grant monies in the future to improve the traffic signal system in downtown Blue Ash. Much discussion was had regarding overall traffic signal efficiency in Blue Ash, including those that appear to be very efficient (such as Cornell/Reed Hartman Highway), and those seemingly less effective. Mr. Waltz suggested that the problems with perceived delay at Glendale-Milford and Kenwood Roads, a particular concern of Councilwoman Stoller's, is due to stacking issues at the I-71/Pfeiffer interchange to the east (within the City of Montgomery). He mentioned that the City is talking with ODOT and OKI about expediting improvements at this interchange. The Administration will also continue work with the engineers at CDS to assure the most effective system possible affecting all areas of the community.

In addressing a question from Councilman Stacey regarding the Fire Department staffing levels, City Manager Waltz explained that the Chief's request for additional staff is based

upon difficulty experienced by the Department in retaining part-time staff. On many occasions, part-timers at Blue Ash will find full-time employment with another Fire Department, thereby leaving Blue Ash. This suggestion for additional Fire staff by the Chief will continue to be analyzed by the Administration and will be discussed in the future with Council.

Councilman Stacey asked about the funds provided for continued gathering of information regarding the City's storm water system. He suggested that as a part of that effort that the City attempt to educate the public on the subject of private versus public storm water issues.

In addressing a question from Councilman Weber, Mr. Waltz explained that any monies put towards streetscaping improvements in downtown (related to the concept plan to be considered by Council in December) would occur in the right-of-way – not on private properties. Mr. Waltz explained that the intent of this funding towards downtown is to show that the City is making a commitment to do something for downtown. What direction these funds are invested would likely be an "either-or" scenario – i.e., the City could direct such funds totally towards public streetscaping efforts, or could direct funds towards a public-private improvement venture in downtown. However, to accomplish both at this funding level would be unlikely. Mr. Waltz estimated that such a decision or direction should be made by June or July. If streetscaping improvements would be made in 2008, an appropriate time to do so might be September or October, after the special event season.

In addressing a question from Mayor Buckman regarding the potential of a crosswalk at Floral and Hunt, Mr. Waltz commented that CDS is looking at the overall crosswalk needs throughout the community.

Mr. Waltz commented further in follow-up to sidewalk concerns brought up at the last Council meeting associated with the Hunt Road/Blue Ash Road project. He explained that the decision has been made within the past week to eliminate the sidewalks proposed on the south side of Hunt Road in conjunction with this road improvement project. Further review of this project indicated that the improvement of the sidewalk already planned for the north side of Hunt Road (between the railroad and West Avenue) would be sufficient.

ADJOURNMENT

All items on the agenda having been acted upon, Councilman Bryan moved, Councilwoman Stoller seconded to adjourn the meeting. A voice vote was taken. All members voted yes. The Council meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:22 PM.

Robert J. Buckman, Jr., Mayor

Jamie K. Eifert, Clerk of Council

MINUTES WRITTEN BY:

Susan K. Bennett, Deputy Clerk of Council