

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE AMES CITY COUNCIL

AMES, IOWA

FEBRUARY 6, 2024

The Special Meeting of the Ames City Council was called to order by Mayor John Haila at 5:13 p.m. on the 6th day of February, 2024, in the City Council Chambers in City Hall, 515 Clark Avenue, pursuant to law. Present were Council Members Bronwyn Beatty-Hansen, Gloria Betcher, Amber Corrieri, Tim Gartin, Rachel Junck, and Anita Rollins. *Ex officio* Jeff Clark was absent.

FY 2024/25 BUDGET PROPOSALS:

Culture and Recreation Program

Library Director Sheila Schofer and Youth Services Manager Brianna Anderson presented the proposed operating budget for the Ames Public Library (Library), highlighting the impact that funding has on services provided to the Ames community. Director Schofer shared that libraries are a key component in providing critical information, resources, and spaces for learning and connecting. She noted that the Library uses its strategic plan, created with input from stakeholders and residents, to focus ongoing work in the areas of equity, inclusion, civic engagement, access, wellness, and staff development. These areas have guided the Library in executing thoughtful, challenging, and impactful work.

Staff led teams focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), accessibility, collections, and staff training, ensures that the Library's strategic goals are embedded in all work done, from more accessible spaces to intentional programming with community partners. Director Schofer noted that Library staff is in the process of developing the next strategic plan. A survey has been distributed to thousands of community members and organizations, staff is planning community engagement sessions, and staff will be providing feedback at an upcoming training session. Director Schofer gave a shoutout to all the volunteers that support the Library operations for reviewing the operating budget for each area of Library Services, with Manager Anderson providing highlights as well. These areas included Administration, Resource Services, Youth Services, Adult Services, and Customer Account Services.

Council Member Betcher shared that in the past, the City Council had heard that the Library was among the top libraries in the nation for circulation per capita and inquired about that current statistic. Director Schofer noted that the specific statistic was unknown to her; however, the Iowa Urban Public Library Association (IUPLA) compiles statistics for member libraries so that benchmarks for comparison can be made. She offered that staff could pull that data together and check into circulation per capita to have available to the City Council at a later date. Council Member Gartin wondered about attendance at Library events in comparison to pre-Covid numbers. Director Schofer noted that attendance had increased to near pre-Covid numbers; however, there was a shift in Library use and programming, highlighting that large events have decreased while small group programming has increased.

Mayor Haila asked for elaboration on the meals provided to students in the summer, highlighting that 4,486 meals were served last year. Director Schofer noted that the meal comes in the form of a Monday through Friday lunch program. Manager Anderson added that leftover lunch items are

bagged up for teens to enjoy as snacks in the afternoon. Mayor Haila then asked about how the Library is educating the public about the digital services available. Director Schofer noted that staff highlights the digital products in the Library's monthly publication Page One, on social media, and through brochures. Manager Anderson shared that many of the digital products offered at the Library are discoverable items and Library staff is constantly trying to build momentum. In regard to community connections, Mayor Haila inquired about the success of hosting Analysis of Social Services Evaluation Team (ASSET) agencies at the Library. Director Schofer shared that ASSET agencies are hosted at the Library at regular hours each week in a study room that is private but visible and added that agency staff walk the floor of the Library while they are there to make connections with individuals that may utilize the services offered. Manager Anderson stated that these agencies have also been a valuable resource for staff in connecting community members with needed services, especially since staff can share with community members days and times when the agencies will be present in the Library. Mayor Haila concluded by highlighting the IDEA Center now open at the Library. The IDEA Center was created to connect Library users to technology to digitize personal photos, slides, videos, and sound recordings.

Utilities Program

Water and Pollution Control Director John Dunn continued the budget proposal presentation with the Utilities Program. He introduced and thanked the leadership team of the Water and Pollution Control Department, reviewing the business and technical support functions of each division. He discussed the expenses for personnel support services before highlighting the performance measures observed by the Department. He reported that the Water Pollution Control facility received the National Association of Clean Water Agencies' Platinum 33 award, which showcases 33 consecutive years of perfect compliance with the numeric limits and discharge permit. Director Dunn also highlighted that the Water and Pollution Control Laboratory collected 1,600 samples last year and performed more than 11,000 individual analyte analyses.

Council Member Gartin inquired about cybersecurity, wondering if a proper percent of the budget is dedicated for measures on protecting the integrity of the water systems. Director Dunn replied in the affirmative, highlighting that staff relies heavily on the Information Technology (IT) Division for assistance. He also noted that the Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) includes dollars dedicated towards various security activities. Mayor Haila inquired about the Department's use of the aronet through Iowa State University (ISU) and the longevity of that program. Director Dunn noted that the aronet is in use for remote site security and the program is expected to continue with no end date identified by ISU staff. Mayor Haila then asked about water quality and leaks in the system. Director Dunn noted that staff has never encountered a confirmed bacterial positive, highlighting the factors in cases where a presumptive positive is received. In the case of water leaks, Director Dunn explained that it is most commonly a metering error, though there are varying factors that contribute to the issue. He shared that a loss of 10-15% of production is the national standard for leaks in the system, thus staff is encouraged by an actual average loss up to 8.5% in Ames.

Director of Public Works John Joiner concluded the Utilities Program with a high-level video overview of the functions of each division of the Department, which included Sanitary Sewer Collection, Stormwater Permit Program, Stormwater System Maintenance, and Resource

Recovery. He then conducted a review of the proposed budget and projects for each aforementioned area, highlighting that Resource Recovery operations were emphasizing and expanding recycling services and other services for landfill diversion.

Transportation Program:

Director Joiner then discussed the activities and services of the Transportation Program, which included the work groups of Administration, Engineering, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Traffic Engineering, Traffic Operations, Street Lights, Street System, Parking Operations, and Airport Operations. He reviewed winter operations for the Street System, highlighting season salt usage and season snow accumulation as well as the Ames snowplow public dashboard that is available to residents during active snow events.

Council Member Rollins referenced Parking Operations, inquiring about the anticipated timeframe to replace all parking meters. Director Joiner noted that it was an estimated seven to eight years for a full conversion to replace all meters with smart meters. Council Member Gartin expressed concern over the increase in water main breaks and requested additional explanation. Director Joiner shared that as the Department continues with the Water System Improvement program, staff expects to see a decline in water main breaks. He noted that abnormally dry soil due to the drought contributed to unusual shifting activity in the soil that staff believes caused increased breaks over the last year. Council Member Gartin inquired about the issue of flooding in the community. Director Joiner noted improvements to the Ioway Creek area are estimated to lower the 100-year flood effect by two feet, sharing confidence that the community is ready to effectively deal with a flood event. Council Member Betcher then wondered about response time to requests entered in Ames On The Go. Management Analyst McKinlee Ritter noted that requests placed for Water Distribution System Maintenance are not closed until the issue has been solved. Due to the nature of those events, staff saw an increase in response time in that category. Management Analyst Ritter confirmed that Ames On The Go is an effective and efficient system, and that Department staff is seeing the shortest response time of all communities.

Airport Operations were highlighted by Council Member Beatty-Hansen. She inquired about the model for the Airport Farm. Director Joiner noted that the City works with a farm manager that handles the Airport Farm. The farm manager outlined five different scenarios on how staff can work with the tenant farmer. Director Joiner noted that the goal of staff was to increase farm revenue through a hybrid crop share; however, staff is continuing to investigate the best method to facilitate revenue.

Mayor Haila asked Municipal Engineer Tracy Peterson to discuss with the City Council about proposed legislation regarding stormwater that may have an impact on future budgets. Engineer Peterson provided a multifaceted overview of proposed legislation, including amendments to the language that could result in several unintended consequences, including potential issues with federal funding on upcoming projects. Council Member Betcher inquired about lobbying efforts. Engineer Peterson shared that some cities have direct lobbyist while others lobby through the Iowa Stormwater Education Partnership, of which the City is a member. Mayor Haila thanked Engineer Peterson for her efforts regarding this issue.

Director of Fleet Services Corey Mellies shifted to items in General Government/Internal Services, which included Fleet Services and Facilities. He noted rate increases in the shop rate and administrative fees. He then reviewed projected fuel costs, which staff expected to remain flat, before discussing the estimated decrease in the number of gallons of fuel needed due to green initiatives.

Council Member Beatty-Hansen inquired about the presence of bicycles in the City's Fleet. Director Mellies noted that the City did not currently have bicycles in the fleet, as the Police Department was the only City Department that utilized bicycles for transportation. Discussion ensued about the practicality of introducing bicycles into the fleet. Council Member Betcher then inquired about the performance of the electric vehicles in the winter weather. Director Mellies reported positive remarks, noting that cities that experienced issues did not have the necessary infrastructure to support the changing needs in harsh temperatures. He added that staff will monitor performance of the new electric trucks that are being added to the Fleet as the trucks will be first electric vehicle utilized as a daily driver.

Director Mellies concluded with the presentation of facilities projects. He shared updates on ongoing projects and provided timelines for upcoming projects. Mayor Haila inquired about the gap in timeline for the City Hall improvements project. Director Mellies noted that many of the contractors bidding on the project primarily work on schools, and staff staged the project in two phases to avoid cost premiums in the summer. He also highlighted the presence of asbestos under the carpeting in City Hall, discussing the measures that must be taken to encapsulate the asbestos. City Manager Steve Schainker added that Director Mellies was assisting in the area of construction management for the Steven L. Schainker Plaza as well as the new Animal Control facility and relocation of Fire Station #2.

Finance Director Corey Goodenow rounded out the meeting with the proposed budget for the Finance Department. The various programs covered included Utility Customer Service, Parking Violation Collection, Economic Development, FEMA/Disaster Relief, Financial Services, Information Technology, Print Shop Services, and Messenger Services. He highlighted the allocation of funds for efficiency improvements such as text messaging services to replace outbound calls made by staff, the transition of paper utilities applications to an electronic process, the acceptance of onsite credit card payments, and the implementation of a reporting and budgeting system. A significant change to the Department's budget included transitioning the operation of the Print Shop to the rebranded Communications and Outreach Division led by Public Relations Officer Susan Gwiasda at the end of the current fiscal year.

Closing the fiber ring and implementing Positive Pay were mentioned by Director Goodenow as methods to improve the City's security. Council Member Gartin shared his favorable experience with Positive Pay and thanked staff for being diligent. Director Goodenow shared an experience in which Positive Pay helped protect the City in the instance of an intercepted check. Mayor Haila then discussed the annual audit and Council Member Gartin inquired about the process of selecting an auditor. Director Goodenow shared that the City issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a three-year contract for auditing services. He noted the additional value that the firm that was awarded the contract was large enough that a different partner was assigned to review the audit each year.

Council Member Betcher shared that she attended a symposium on wellbeing at Iowa State University. She noted that the session was dedicated to discussing suicide prevention, and the different factors effecting the mental load of students. She added that not knowing how to contact the City regarding utilities and utility payment plans was discussed as a stressor for students. She advertised that the number to call for utilities was 515-239-5120. Director Goodenow shared that customer service staff are present to help residents maneuver difficult situations and set up payment plans when needed. He noted that the goal of staff is to come to an arrangement so utilities do not have to be disconnected, adding that in most cases utilities are disconnected because residents do not reach out for help or staff receives a nonresponse when making outbound calls.

Council Member Beatty-Hansen concluded questions with an inquiry about the line item regarding Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Disaster Relief. Budget Manager Nancy Masteller clarified that there were no expenses this budget year.

DISPOSITION OF COMMUNICATIONS TO COUNCIL: None.

COUNCIL COMMENTS: The Mayor and Council Members thanked staff for the time and efforts dedicated to preparing the proposed budget.

ADJOURNMENT: Moved by Betcher, seconded by Corrieri, to adjourn the meeting at 7:23 p.m.

Vote on Motion: 6-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

Carly M. Watson, Deputy City Clerk

John A. Haila, Mayor

Renee Hall, City Clerk