

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE AMES CITY COUNCIL

AMES, IOWA

FEBRUARY 7, 2024

The Special Meeting of the Ames City Council was called to order by Mayor John Haila at 5:13 p.m. on the 7th 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, Amber Corrieri, Tim Gartin, Rachel Junck, and Anita Rollins. Council Member Gloria Betcher was absent. *Ex officio* Jeff Clark was also absent.

CULTURE AND RECREATION PROGRAM:

Parks and Recreation: Director of Parks and Recreation Keith Abraham and Parks and Facilities Superintendent Joshua Thompson presented the proposed Parks and Recreation FY 2024/25 Operational Budget. Director Abraham highlighted grants, fundraising, scholarships, price increases, and major projects in development.

Grants and fundraising tactics were discussed to help alleviate the need for taxpayer's contributions in providing services. Scholarships and the beginning of an endowment fund were also discussed in relation to providing programming to those in the community who may not otherwise be able to afford it. Director Abraham explained that staff wanted to expand the scholarship program to serve more members of the community. He provided a brief synopsis of several major projects which had been topics of recent City Council discussion, such as Fitch Family Aquatic Center, Ontario Park Master Plan, and partnerships with the 60 Forward Center. He also detailed programming at City facilities and parks, including Furman Aquatic Center, Homewood Golf Course, and the Ames/ISU Ice Arena. Director Abraham presented proposed inclusion strategies to make programming available for all to participate. He shared updates on popular activities, such as pickleball and open gyms. Director Abraham explained the reason behind fee increases for several programs, as well as staff's efforts to keep programming affordable. He concluded Parks and Recreation by highlighting sustainability initiatives and accomplishments of the Department in the last fiscal year.

Cemetery: Director Abraham stated that contract mowing prices had increased significantly. More people are utilizing niches in the columbariums, and lot sales are slow as many community members have purchased burial plots while preplanning, reducing the "At Need" sale of lots.

TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM:

Right-of-Way Maintenance: Director Abraham stated that 101 Right-of-Way risk trees had been removed, and that staff continued with the program to address Emerald Ash Borer concerns.

UTILITIES PROGRAM:

Utilities: Director of Electric Services Donald Kom stated that a new energy peak was set at 138 megawatts, however the Power Plant still had the capacity to meet demand. He noted that communication between staff and the community kept the peak lower than what was projected. Director Kom compared the current rates for those in the Electric Services area to neighboring communities while noting that overall, the City's rates are lower. The Climate Action Plan (CAP) was listed as a key factor in future expenditure planning, as Electric Services would be involved

in many of the proposed steps. The need for greener generation of energy would come with Capital Improvement costs. He stated that staff is investigating solar energy as an alternative. However, startup costs, needed land, and approvals from varying State and Federal agencies were highlighted as areas that needed to be assessed.

Director Kom highlighted a costs of service study currently underway to help identify ways for residents to use energy in a cost-effective manner. Time of use and green rates were two areas being evaluated. To help capitalize on the results of the study and administer time of use rates, more sophisticated Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) would be utilized. AMI would also be utilized by Water and Pollution Control and Customer Services as well as provide more data to the respective engineering departments.

Rebate programs were reviewed and updated for greater utilization. The Department also conducted a geothermal pilot program. Additionally, Director Kom highlighted the electric vehicle charger plug points throughout the City and stated that the chargers were attracting traffic off of Highway 30. He noted that funds were budgeted to conduct an energy audit of all City buildings. Next, Director Kom provided an overview of the City's renewable energy portfolio, explaining that the portfolio is dependent on the amount of wind energy generated per month.

Major planned expenditures included property insurance, with costs increasing by 47%. Director Kom explained this is partially due to not having many providers willing to insure the Power Plant because of the Refuse-Derived Fuel (RDF) that the Power Plant relies on. Wind and solar investment costs will be high in the coming years once staff decides which avenue to pursue. Renovation costs for the Ash Pond, Plant Boiler life assessment, and Combustion Turbine controls projects were additional large projects. Natural gas prices have continued to increase, which impacts the budget as natural gas is necessary to burn the RDF. Director Kom stated that in order to keep costs lower for customers, less natural gas had been purchased. This led to additional burden on the Resource Recovery Plant, and although the Waste-to-Energy study is complete, staff has not decided how to move forward, and costs are high. In the meantime, expanded recycling options have been made available to residents.

Electric Distribution saw increased expenditures as well with supply chain delays and price increases presenting challenges. To address this issue, staff invested increasing on-hand inventory to negate future issues. This would also help keep maintenance times lower. Building additional lines was also a priority of this budget, as well as higher prices on capacitors, Director Kom explained.

Safety issues are being addressed through a remote breaker removal system which would be going out to bid soon. An additional storage building was being added to help safely store equipment where it would be shielded from weather. Director Kom noted that much of the City's electrical system is more than 30 years old, which made replacement of equipment an essential budget item. He also highlighted that a 161 kV line was scheduled to be moved per the Iowa Department of Transportation's (IDOT) request. The IDOT would pay for the work, but City staff would find the contractor. Director Kom concluded by stating there is no requested rate increase for FY 2024/25.

PUBLIC SAFETY PROGRAM:

Storm Warning System: Director Kom stated there were no major changes or programs associated with the Storm Warning System, which was functioning well.

Fire: Fire Chief Rich Higgins, alongside Deputy Fire Chief Tom Hackett, Deputy Fire Chief Karen Tapper, and Building Official Sara Van Meeteren, presented the proposed FY 2024/25 Operating Budget for Fire Safety. He highlighted community partnerships, community outreach, and how the Department was working to lessen the costs of a new Fire Station #4 location, as well as a Fire Station #2 relocation.

Built into the budget was the addition of a Full Time Equivalent (FTE) to hire an additional firefighter. After completing this hire, the Department would have ten firefighters ready to shift to the future Fire Station #4 when it was built. This strategy would reduce the impact on residents when funds are needed to build the new fire station. Additionally, Chief Higgins highlighted that Iowa State University (ISU) has an agreement to pay for 25% of the funds needed to operate the Department.

Additionally, partnerships with ISU extend to working with student innovators to help design firefighting gloves as well as assisting ISU with developing an Artificial Intelligence program to help track how well a fire is being controlled and potential solutions to address the fire as well as get information to commanders quickly. Another way the Department is working with ISU is in evaluating the relocation of Fire Station #2. A location south of the Baker Subdivision has been identified, and funds have been allocated for a land study and conceptual design. Chief Higgins stated that those plans would come back before the City Council once staff had better costs estimates. Furthermore, the sale of the current Fire Station #2 location would go towards paying for the relocation, helping to defray costs to residents.

Chief Higgins elaborated on how preparing for an eventual Fire Station #4 was worked into the budget. He explained that staff are looking at outside the box approaches and are using Ames Plan 2040 in evaluating where the best location would be. The new Mobile Command Trailer was highlighted, along with its additional functionality and capacity to serve the community. Staff's commitment to keeping costs low for residents and sustainability was displayed through staff's initiative to recycle carpet from the IDOT office purchased by the City for use in Fire Station #1. Another line item in the budget was battery powered extrication tools to allow all frontline vehicles to contain a set.

Grants received by the Department was the next focus, as Chief Higgins highlighted the work done by Training Officer AJ Plach to secure additional funding. He also elaborated on community engagement efforts, such as Fire Department open houses, fire extinguisher training, and virtual aids for trainings where full-scale equipment may not be feasible. The Department also administered crowd management training, attended neighborhood block parties, and provided support in events such as RAGBRAI. In practicing Total City Perspective, the Department administers trainings on AEDs, CPR, and Stop the Bleed.

Chief Higgins concluded the Fire Safety portion by stating that the Department responded to 5,780 calls, 52% of which were medical calls. The Department also expanded their services and training to include grain bin rescue after grain bins were recently added to the community.

Building Safety: Chief Higgins also presented the proposed FY 2024/25 Operating Budget for Building Safety and stated that there were no Building Permit or Rental Fee increases. He noted there had been an 43% increase in commercial permits, that inspectors continued to inspect rental units for resident safety, and that staff continued to evaluate customers' experience with the Department by evaluating Development Review Committee procedures. Additionally, the Inspections Department evaluates compliance with the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) to ensure the public buildings in the City are accessible to all. Like the Fire Department, the Inspections Department prioritizes engagement and education. Chief Higgins stated that this was evident in the properties staff were able to help bring into compliance and thanked the Department for their commitment and investment in the community.

Mayor Haila added his gratitude for the partnership that the Department has with the Story County Emergency Management team and Chief Higgins echoed that sentiment for Emergency Management at ISU as well.

LAW ENFORCEMENT:

Police: Chief of Police Geoff Huff, along with Commander Jason Tuttle, Commander Dan Walters, and Support Services Manager Aaron DeLashmutt, presented the FY 2024/25 Operational Budget for the Police Department. He reviewed vacancies in the Department, partnerships and outreach in the community, and trends in crime in Ames. Extra emphasis was placed on mental health partnerships and the relationship the Department cultivated with local schools.

Chief Huff detailed the open positions in the Department, as well as recruiting efforts and trends nationwide. He also discussed how the Department values relationship building and problem solving as a priority in all interactions with the community. One highlighted event that demonstrated this value was the annual National Night Out. Chief Huff shared that the 2023 event was the largest attendance so far and the department was able to distribute over 800 backpacks to those in need in the community.

Chief Huff also highlighted the organizations the Department partners with to provide services in the community. The Boys and Girls Club, Coffee with a Cop, Donuts in the Park, Special Olympics, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Freedom Fund Banquet, and scam education with local entities were all a part of the community engagement the Department seeks to provide. He furthered that the Department also works with Cyclone Welcome Weekend to meet students right away and build relationships and special events such as RAGBRAI to ensure the wellbeing of the community.

To further elaborate on the outreach with local schools, Chief Huff explained the P3 Campus app, which allows students to make anonymous tips and has been utilized over 60 times this year. He then reviewed how the Department was putting the goal of transparency and accountability into practice, and shared that online messages are more compliments than complaints. The work of the Ames Resident Police Advisory Committee (ARPAC) was also highlighted, along with the Department's support for ARPAC's goals for the next year.

Grants received were detailed, as well as the use of those funds for equipment such as bulletproof vests. Efforts to procure more hybrid vehicles for the Department's fleet were also discussed. Supply chain issues have stalled the Department's efforts to fully replace the fleet with hybrid vehicles, but staff are optimistic that the next production year will offer a chance to secure more hybrid vehicles. Chief Huff detailed savings on gas, oil changes, and brake replacements with hybrid vehicles.

Next, Chief Huff explained trends the Department was tracking in calls for service. He stated that there continued to be an increase in mental health calls for service and recognized Mental Health Advocate Julie Saxton for all the work she does to bridge the gap between services. Chief Huff also noted that this volume of calls does include calls for the Alternative Response for Community Health (ARCH). He stated that the Department is looking forward to seeing the impact of the ARCH program in the future. Other partnerships that were included in support for mental health included Mobile Crisis, Mental Health Criminal Justice Task Force, Alternatives, Mental Health Court, Peer Support, and Community Conversations.

Chief Huff further noted that accidents are trending up, and so are citations. He stated that grants from the Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau were used to focus on distracted driving. He further detailed that personal crimes are trending down, and so are domestic cases. Noise complaints, trespassing, nuisance parties and fireworks calls were trending up. He explained that trespassing calls are usually related to homeless individuals and officers work with community partners to help individuals gain access to resources. Theft cases, specifically retail theft, were on the rise.

He detailed the number of non-emergency calls as being over 100,000 for the year, and an additional over 30,000 911 calls. He expressed pride in staff maintaining fast response times with vacant positions. He highlighted awards presented to the Department, notably the Award of Valor to Commander Jason Tuttle and the Crisis Negotiation Team placing second at the IACNA training event. Five rescue awards, four commendation awards, and three letters of achievement were awarded as an effort to recognize staff for their hard work.

TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM:

Animal Shelter: Chief Huff stated that prioritizing a new Animal Shelter started by evaluating what the needs were. He thanked the staff for their commitment, highlighting the great work that had been done in adverse conditions. Chief Huff commended Animal Control Supervisor Ron Edwards for the work he did with community involvement and education. He detailed the length of stay for animals at the shelter, noting that cats average 14 days, kittens four days, and three days for dogs and rabbits. With the hoarding cases that the Animal Shelter had, he noted that the average length of stay had increased. He also highlighted the high live release rates of the Animal Shelter.

Parking Lot Enforcement: Regarding Parking Lot Enforcement, Chief Huff stated that 24,152 citations were written, and 3,964 parking tickets remained unpaid. The Department was hopeful to see a decrease in the number of unpaid tickets with the new partnership with Story County for collection.

Council Member Gartin requested an update on drug offense data points. Chief Huff affirmed that the data could be included in the future.

Chief Huff responded to Mayor Haila's inquiry of what the Department's engagement with the school system looked like in the wake of tragic school shooting by explaining that the Department provides ongoing active shooter/violent intruder training, as well as keeping lines of communication open, facilitating the P3 Campus app, and training staff on how to utilize emergency radios. He encouraged community members to share information early on so that the Department could help connect individuals to resources.

DISPOSITION OF COMMUNICATIONS TO COUNCIL: None.

COUNCIL COMMENTS: Council Member Rollins reminded everyone that registration for the NAACP Freedom Fund Banquet ended that night.

ADJORNMENT: Moved by Beatty-Hansen, seconded by Junck, to adjourn at 7:55 p.m.
Vote on Motion: 5-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.



Grace Bandstra, Deputy City Clerk



John A. Haila, Mayor

