



BUDGET WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, April 27, 2005, for the purpose of reviewing the Public Safety sections of the proposed FY 2006 budget.

Mayor Davis called the meeting to order at 8:05 p.m. in the Multipurpose Room of the Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Konrad E. Herling, Leta M. Mach, Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts, and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael McLaughlin, City Manager; Jeffrey Williams, City Treasurer; Deirdre Allen, City Accountant; David Moran, Assistant City Manager; Chief James Craze, Thomas Kemp, Michael Craddock, James Parker, Maria Parker, Gerald Potts, Police Department; and Kathleen Gallagher, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Chief Brian Rudy, Chris Fleshman, Jay Remenick, Greenbelt Volunteer Fire Department & Rescue Squad; Craig Rich, F.O.P.; Courtney Burns, the Gazette; James Giese, Greenbelt News Review.

Informational Items: Mr. McLaughlin announced that rather than mailing copies of the budget document to everyone on the standing list, as a cost-sharing measure, staff had sent a letter telling people the budget was available on the Web site; the letter asked if they needed their own copy and, if so, whether they wanted the hard-copy document or a copy on CD. Mayor Davis said it had been reported in the Windsor Green newsletter that five of their playgrounds would be closed, leaving only five to be covered under the agreement with the City.

Fire Department & Rescue Squad

Chief Rudy presented information on anticipated apparatus replacement costs for the next five years.

In response to queries from Mr. Putens, Chief Rudy said the station still has two career fire staff working from 3-5 p.m. every day and that he does not expect the situation to change. He also said the county does provide some maintenance assistance. Mr. Fleshman added that unless a major repair is needed, they take care of maintenance themselves. Mr. Putens also asked if the City was doing its part. Mr. Fleshman said it was, though they would like to see some motion on their request to add parking at the front of the station. Mr. McLaughlin confirmed that they had submitted a plan for this a year or so ago and that Terri Hruby, Assistant Director, Planning, was looking for a way to rationalize not getting a permit for the project because of the stream channel on the property. He said he assumed that Ms. Hruby and Chief Rudy were working together on this. He said this would not need to come to Council for approval.

The Mayor asked if the station was aware of the Assistance for Firefighters grant program. The Chief said they had been awarded \$27,000 under this program a year ago but had never received the funds. Council suggested getting in touch with Steny Hoyer's office.

Mr. Herling asked how many volunteers there were now and whether they had any problem keeping their numbers up. Chief Rudy said they have about 100 on the roster, with about 30 active, and that this number tends to hold steady.

Council thanked them for coming.

Police Department

The department showed a slide presentation illustrating the accomplishments and issues presented in the text of the budget book. Chief Craze agreed to send Council copies of several reporting forms that were displayed.

Fire Arms Range: There was brief discussion of the fact that BARC wants the City to turn control of its new modular building for the fire arms range over to them if it is to be on their property. That had never been an issue with the old structure. The Chief said he would bring it to Council later if he could not resolve it.

MDTs: Mayor Davis asked about the mobile data terminals (MDTs), which were such a big issue last year. The Chief confirmed that they are installed and working, though there are some maintenance issues. He said everything was going as well as could be expected, given the size of the information technology staff.

Gang Activity: Following mention of the first Gang Resistance Program having been offered in the schools by the SRO, the Mayor asked about gang activity in the City. Chief Craze said gang members are all around this area and continually passing through. In terms of "presence," he cited the use of vacant units by gang members for "skip parties."

Regional Communications and Data Center Project: The Chief said the state was funding \$295,000 toward the \$2 million eventually needed for this cooperative project involving Hyattsville, Mt. Rainier, Riverdale Park, Bladensburg, and Greenbelt.

Community-Oriented Policing: The Chief said that although the City does not intend to change its philosophy about the importance of this type of police work, \$1.5 billion is being cut out of the federal budget for law enforcement, and the emphasis is shifting entirely to Homeland Security, which has entirely different issues and approaches.

Restructuring: The department is proposing to convert a corporal position to a sergeant to be assigned to work for the patrol commander.

With the end of the slide presentation, Council started its review of the budget document. Mayor Davis noted that arrests are now about half Greenbelt residents, so it is no longer the case that most of the crime is committed by outsiders.

In response to a question from Mr. Putens, Chief Craze said there is not any planned difference in coverage by sector and that since the initiation of the special detail units, there is less imbalance toward Springhill Lake than used to be the case. Ms. Mach asked if coverage was based on population, to which the Chief responded that it was more related to geography and reflected the ease of moving around and gaining access.

Mr. Roberts said everyone had noticed the conspicuous increase in coverage at Roosevelt Center and asked if it would continue. Capt. Kemp said not at that level, since they were consciously making a "springtime push" at the beginning of the season at the Center but had drawn officers from other assignments, including bike patrol, to do so. The Mayor asked what the current complement of bike officers was. Capt. Kemp said three, with four being full-staff.

Chief Craze said the City will host the U.S. canine competition at Schrom Hills Park on Greenbelt Day weekend.

Mayor Davis commented on the aging of the department. Chief Craze said recruitment had become very difficult and that this was a national problem.

Ms. Mach suggested that prior to allotment of specific funds for annual physicals for officers there should be an analysis of what is already covered for those on the City's health insurance.

Regarding red light cameras, the Mayor clarified that the proposed budget covers cameras #6 and #7, when a location for #7 is established. Installing camera #8 would require adding \$20,000 to the budget. Mr. McLaughlin said camera #8, located southbound on Kenilworth at Cherrywood, does not pay for itself and results in a net cost. Mayor Davis said she would like to review the accident statistics for that camera for the last couple of years it was active

Cpl. Parker did a quick comparison of the vendors. She said Traffipax puts loops in the road, which the City must pay to replace when the roads are milled. They have offered to replace their cameras with digital cameras, but the technology would still depend on the buried loops. Lasercraft is the company Howard County has been negotiating with. There are concerns about Transol, a company more recently on the scene, since its technology is not well tested, and they have no presence in this area. There is also a concern that their method could be challenged under state law because it takes a frontal view that could allow the driver to be identified.

Mr. Putens asked about Lasercraft's apparent lowering of its price to install the cameras. Cpl. Parker said it was not Lasercraft's doing but rather the engineering company doing the installation, which discovered the costs were lower than anticipated. Lasercraft had also offered to front the installation costs, with repayment to come from revenues.

Cpl. Parker spoke about the advantages to Greenbelt in staying with the Howard County partnership, which provides "back office" processing, staff, and political clout, as well as undertaking negotiations with the State Highway Administration. She said the City simply could not undertake this work with existing staff.

Mayor Davis said that since Mr. Roberts had suggested he might want to stay with Traffipax, Council should have an estimate of what that would cost, including increased functions to be provided by the City if it left the partnership. Ms. Mach asked that there be a clear comparison of services to be provided.

Mr. McLaughlin noted a revision to the increase in rate for LEOPS retirement from 32.1% to 32.7%. He said the City also hopes to reduce prescription drugs costs, which would more than compensate for the retirement increase.

Mayor Davis asked if it was necessary to get all eight police cars. Chief Craze replied, "We need ten; eight is a compromise." Mr. McLaughlin said he had restricted the number of replacement vehicles in the department for several years now, and he encouraged funding for the eight vehicles this year. The Mayor pointed out that the eighth car was nonetheless on the list of optional budget items for reconsideration and would remain there. She said the eighth red light camera should also be added to the list. Mr. McLaughlin also mentioned that the department was looking into Chevrolet vehicles rather than Crown Victorias, since Chevy is producing police vehicles again, which are slightly cheaper and get better gas mileage.

Miscellaneous Budget Items

Mayor Davis asked about the following: the Justice Assistance grant the department had applied for - the Chief said they were not optimistic about getting it; the Police Building Expansion Study - the Chief said it was in review in the Planning Department; whether it was possible for the department to resume providing Council with quarterly statistical reports - the Chief said they would do it; a recommendation from the Public Safety Advisory Committee in 2003 that representatives of police and fire go to Green Ridge House for a walk-through inspection and education effort - the Chief said it had happened.

Mr. Putens said it had originally been agreed that there would be a red light camera report every six months, and he would like that schedule to be maintained.

Mayor Davis asked for a report on the cost of keeping the armored personnel vehicle, this topic having come up at the public hearing. Cpl. Parker already had that information at the ready.

Mayor Davis asked if the citizen suggestions that had been made at the public hearing had been added to the list of budget items to be reconsidered. She said she thought they should be.

Mayor Davis asked if inspection fees were recommended for an increase. Mr. McLaughlin said they were not, since the City is still in the middle of the range, but the planning department is looking at review fees for permits.

Informational Items

Ms. Mach provided information for distribution on a workshop for residents on codes, licenses, and permits; she had attended the one for elected officials and thought it might be useful for members of HOAs and similar organizations.

Mr. Putens raised an issue of several disturbances that had taken place the previous Friday at Greenbelt Middle School and expressed concern that more information was not forthcoming from the City on such incidents.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Gallagher

City Clerk