



**BUDGET WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, May 18, 2005, for the purpose of holding a final review 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; Kenny Hall, Carolyn Clemens, Antoinette Conrad, Bill Phelan, Public Works; Chief Jim Craze, Capts. Dan O'Neil and Tom Kemp, Sgt. Jim Parker, Police Department; Celia Craze, Planning and Community Development; Hank Irving, Joe McNeal, Recreation; Liz Park, Social Services; David Moran, Assistant City Manager; and Kathleen Gallagher, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Sheldon Goldberg, Advisory Planning Board; Bob Zugby, GATE; Clement Lau, Chris Husker, Marc Siegel, Park & Recreation Advisory Board; and Tom White, Greenbelt News Review.

### **General Issues**

Mr. McLaughlin advised Council of the status of revenues and expenditures subsequent to changes that had been made after the proposal of the budget. He added one additional change that had not been previously mentioned, namely, that hiring a new staff member to replace one who had left in Recreation would save approximately \$15,000. Mayor Davis got confirmation that Councilmembers were in agreement about changes that had been accepted up to this point. Mayor Davis noted a letter that had been received from Kris White on behalf of the Greenbelt Homes, Inc., Companion Pet Committee, stressing the need for additional staffing in animal control.

Mayor Davis announced that her goal was to find a way to reduce the tax increase by at least a penny or two, which would mean reducing the budget by \$290,000. She said she also wanted to maintain the existing 85/15 split on health insurance premiums and wait until a year when the COLA was higher to change the split to 80/20.

Mr. Roberts said he, too, wished to restore existing benefits. He said in light of the structural problem with the budget, his main goal was not to create and fill new positions.

Ms. Mach said she did want to fill the positions that were approved in the FY 2005 budget but had not been filled. She added that, given the figures currently before Council, she did not think reducing the increase by two cents was realistic, but that perhaps a half-cent could be achieved.

Mr. Putens said he agreed with Ms. Mach that cutting a half-cent would be an accomplishment. He said Greenbelt is known for its high level of services and that he did not see any obvious places to cut. He said he particularly did not want to cut staff.

Mayor Davis mentioned Ms. Mach had earlier suggested she would like to put a hold on filling future vacancies. The Mayor asked if any other departures or retirements were imminent. Mr. McLaughlin said he would advise Council against setting a policy on not filling positions that come open; he said he would prefer that Council let him evaluate this on a case-by-case basis depending on the department's workload. Ms. Mach clarified that evaluating it on a case-by-case basis was what she had intended to suggest. Mr. Herling said he agreed with that approach.

Mr. Roberts commented that services had never been cut since he had been on City Council. He said if the City wants to get a handle on its structural budget problem, it cannot continue to add services without cutting, and it needs to stop adding new positions. He said, "I want to maintain services. This budget adds them."

Mayor Davis referenced a memo from Human Resource Officer Connie Harris about the living wage issue, which also was originally raised by Ms. Mach. Ms. Harris said she did not think implementing a living wage policy would impact either the City's hiring or its contracting. She asked Mr. McLaughlin what he thought. He said he was surprised the data showed so little impact and added that the City had not specifically researched the question with the contractors the City uses. He said it did not affect hiring classified employees but it would be another matter altogether if non-classified employees were included. Ms. Mach said she had raised the issue with regard to classified employees and was not suggesting it be applied to part-time or seasonal employees. Council asked the City Manager to bring back more detail on this in six months.

Mayor Davis said Ms. Harris had also forwarded a compensation review indicating the City was generally still competitive, with the exception of a few positions. Mr. McLaughlin said reclassifications would be considered in the fall for implementation in FY 2007.

The Mayor also commented that an issue involving overtime had been raised in some e-mail exchanges. Mr. McLaughlin said he was looking into this but was not aware of any abuse of overtime. Mayor Davis said she was nonetheless concerned with the apparently different policies on use of overtime in different departments. She asked when Council could have a report on this, and Mr. McLaughlin suggested by the end of the year.

Mr. McLaughlin noted that County Councilmember Peters had reported that he was still gathering support for funding for the School Resource Officer program but that results would not be known until May 25 or so.

## **Revenues**

Mr. McLaughlin said there might be a one-time accelerated windfall of income tax revenue but that this, too, would not be resolved until later in the month.

## **General Government**

Council did not endorse the suggestion made at the first public hearing on the budget to send only one Councilmember to major conferences, since those attending do not duplicate efforts, and the conferences yield useful information for the City. The Mayor said she would nonetheless like to discuss ways of saving money by reviewing travel reimbursement policies. Mr. Putens suggested this be discussed at a work session. Council also decided against a suggestion made at the first public hearing about reducing the production costs of the budget document itself by making it less elaborate and reducing the printing and staff costs to produce it..

Two proposals regarding funding for GATE were put forward: one that any surplus fees from Comcast would go to GATE, up to a defined amount; the other that \$3,000 be put back into the budget. Bob Zugby, president of the GATE board, said they would appreciate some action by the Council to restore the 20% cut they took two years ago. Mr. Putens suggested putting the full \$6,000 in that would bring them back to where they should be.

## **Planning and Community Development**

Council was supportive of the increase of the general parking violation fine from \$25 to \$40. Regarding the new inspector position that was approved but not filled for FY 05, Mayor Davis suggested that hiring by mid-year would probably be adequate. In response to a question from Mr. Herling about the specific focus of this position, Ms. Craze explained that although animal control was a major need in terms of coverage, this position would also backstop other positions for civil enforcement. Council did not agree on this item, which was already included in the budget. Mr. Herling, Ms. Mach, and Mr. Putens thought it should be fully funded; Mayor Davis thought it should be funded mid-year; Mr. Roberts said it should not be funded in FY 2006.

It was clarified that there is \$10,000 in the FY 05 budget to tear down the JayCees' Clubhouse.

Ms. Craze said staff would examine the review fees for construction projects prior to a major influx of permit applications from construction in Greenbelt West. Mr. McLaughlin added that any additional revenue from this process would not impact budget revenues because the goal would simply be not to lose money on the reviews.

## **Public Safety**

Regarding the eighth new police car in the budget, Mr. McLaughlin strongly supported Chief Craze in saying that the vehicle was needed, especially since the department had had to make do with a slower pace of replacing vehicles for the last couple of years. Mayor Davis and Councilman Herling nonetheless favored cutting it. Mr. Roberts and Mr. Putens did not want it cut. Ms. Mach said she was on the fence. It was agreed to discuss it later in the meeting.

Regarding the red light camera program, there were two issues: sticking with the decision to stay with the Howard County coalition and the change to Lasercraft versus

remaining with TrafficPax; and whether the eighth camera (southbound on Kenilworth at Cherrywood) should be replaced and put back into the budget. Mr. Roberts and Mr. Putens were both skeptical about whether Lasercraft's technology would really be an improvement, but Mr. Putens eventually said the Police Department's reports about the level of invalid tickets from TrafficPax convinced him to stay with the coalition. The other three Councilmembers all supported staying with the coalition and going with Lasercraft. Regarding the eighth camera, Mayor Davis and Councilmember Mach agreed that putting a light in the old location for this camera would be "ridiculous" since it was no longer needed there. Both were willing to consider having an eighth camera in another location. Mr. Herling agreed. Mr. McLaughlin said another appropriate location had not yet been found. The Chief agreed that to date there was not another location that met the criteria and warranted a camera, but he said the department would continue to evaluate this. Mr. Roberts and Mr. Putens continued to maintain that the camera should be reinstalled in the old location.

### **Public Works**

The Mayor thanked Mr. Hall for the report on the contractual work and said she did not think these services should be cut. The other Councilmembers agreed. Council also agreed on the proposed fee increases for trash and recycling. It was agreed to take \$1,500 out of the budget for planters in the Center.

Regarding the playground maintenance position proposed in the FY 2006 budget, the Mayor noted that there would apparently be no more than six playgrounds coming into the agreement for Windsor Green, for a total of seven from Greenbelt East. She asked what the impact of this would be. Mr. Moran said if the position was not funded, it would have to be recognized that other work in the department would slow down. He said Public Works does many things, but not much of it is under contract to others, and that the contract work would have to take priority. Mr. Phelan added that there would be a lot of "up front" work to be done because there are many Category I violations to be eliminated. He commented that there is also ongoing inspection work. Mr. Roberts opposed adding this position, as did Mayor Davis. After some discussion, Mr. Putens, Ms. Mach, and Mr. Herling agreed to keep it in, but this straw vote changed later in the meeting.

### **Social Services**

Mayor Davis, Ms. Mach, and Mr. Herling agreed not to support the requested addition of a half-time counselor this year. These three Councilmembers also agreed that if the county support was not forthcoming this year, the City should not pick up the costs of the Strengthening Families program. Mr. Roberts said he would be willing to support both of these items.

### **Recreation**

Council agreed to the proposed increase in Aquatic and Fitness Center pass fees.

Regarding the center leader position that was approved but not funded in the current year's budget, Mayor Davis said she could not favor funding it while the department's self-study and review of programs was still pending. Ms. Mach agreed it should be

considered at a later time if it seemed warranted. Mr. Roberts said it should not be funded. Mr. Putens suggested including funding in the budget to start the position mid-year. There was agreement 3-2 to do this and remove \$20,000 from the budget.

### **Contribution Groups**

There was consensus among Councilmembers not to provide any increases for Contribution Groups this year.

#### Other Issues and Funds

Capital Projects: There was discussion of using Program Open Space (POS) money in lieu of the money found by County Councilmember Peters for the skateboard park, but Councilmember thought that would not be appropriate.

The Mayor said she thought the City's resurfacing projects should be reduced if highway user fee revenues were being cut. She suggested cutting out the Megan Lane resurfacing project for that purpose. She also suggested cutting out the bus shelters for this year and \$25,000 of the playground improvement funding.

Mayor Davis asked about the Wall of Honor. Mr. Moran said it was unlikely that it could have been done in FY 2005 but that he was hoping for FY 2006.

Mr. White asked if there were other projects in Capital Projects that would qualify for POS funding. After some discussion of specific items, Mr. McLaughlin said he did not think so.

Mr. Roberts objected to cutting street projects. The Mayor replied it is the state that is making the cut, not the City, and that the City cannot assume all the costs being dropped by the county and the state. Ms. Mach agreed, saying there should be a clear link in the public's mind that these items are being eliminated because of state cuts. Mr. Herling agreed. The three of them agreed to cut \$50,000 from street resurfacing, \$1,000 from bus shelters (keeping Greenway Center), and \$25,000 from playgrounds. Mr. Putens objected to cutting only Megan Lane in Greenbelt East and suggested that the Greenhill Road money also be removed and be applied to "Citywide" drainage issues, removing the "Boxwood" designation. There was then considerable discussion of drainage issues in different parts of town. Mayor Davis said she thought the main problem in Greenbelt East was sink holes. Ms. Craze said she thought it would evolve that the City's role should primarily be to coordinate, since the actual City issues and responsibilities in most of these cases will prove to be limited since they involve private property and occasionally the county. She said there are some City issues with the Boxwood area and that some money should be budgeted there. Mr. Putens said he still wanted to call it "Citywide" and suggested adding the \$10,000 differential between the Megan Lane costs and the highway user fee cuts to that category. The amount cut from capital projects was \$66,000.

Playground Maintenance Position: Mr. Putens said he had changed his mind and did not support funding this position, which left only Ms. Mach and Mr. Herling in favor of it.

Health Insurance Premiums: It was agreed to maintain the 85/15 split for this year.

Eighth Police Car: Ms. Mach agreed with the other two who wished to keep it in the budget.

GATE: The Mayor suggested keeping the proposition that GATE would get any overages from Comcast up to the prior formula for their funding.

Pending further information from the county and state, about \$0.006 was cut from the tax increase.

Council thanked staff, and the City Manager thanked Council.

Mr. Lau and Mr. Siegel both addressed citizens' dissatisfaction with the proposed tax increase.

The meeting was adjourned at midnight.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Gallagher  
City Clerk