

Finance Committee

Wednesday, January 17, 2024

Video of meeting can be found at <https://youtu.be/18YUfeacr64?feature=shared>

Members present: Chair Patti Devine, Vice Chair Kocayne Givner, Carmen Ocasio, Kevin Jourdain

Members present on Zoom: Michael Sullivan

Other councilors present: Israel Rivera, Tessa Murphy-Romboletti

Chair Devine called the meeting to order at 6:33 PM

Motion was made and seconded to take a roll call vote that for the purposes of this meeting would be applicable to all motions to remove an item from the table, place items on the table, package items together, or suspend the rules, unless there is an objection. Motion passed on a call of the roll of the yeas and nays--Yeas 5--Nays 0--Absent 0.

Councilor Jourdain made a motion to suspend the necessary rules to take up items 7 through 11 out of order as a package. Councilor Sullivan seconded the motion.

Item 7: 8-1-23 (copy) JOURDAIN -- Ordered, That Cook and Company be invited to a future finance subcommittee meeting to review their recent health insurance analysis for the city.

--->Tabled 5-0

DISCUSSION:

Councilor Jourdain suggested that this be tabled, noting that they were asked by the Ordinance Committee to return in February with a plan on self-insurance. He noted that it appeared to be on the Council agenda the following week. He then suggested that if that item is referred to Ordinance, this item could be disposed of.

Councilor Jourdain made a motion to lay item 7 on the table. Councilor Givner seconded the motion. Motion passed on a call of the roll of the yeas and nays--Yeas 5--Nays 0--Absent 0.

(3:45)

Item 8: 12-15-20 MURPHY, SULLIVAN -- Ordered that the police and fire chiefs appear before the finance committee to document how much of the police overtime total of \$266,682 expended through the end of October was to cover for vacations, sick time, injured on duty status, and grant related detail. The same information is requested for the fire department and the expenditure of \$157,305 through October. In both cases, how many persons per shift being absent leads to use of overtime? The goal of this order is to determine if we are at our most cost effective staffing levels without jeopardizing public safety.

*Tabled 12-28-20

--->Complied with 5-0

DISCUSSION:

Chair Devine expressed her understanding that several discussions of overtime have happened since the order was filed.

Chair Devine made a motion that the order has been complied with. Councilor Givner seconded the motion.

Councilor Jourdain asked to confirm with Councilor Sullivan that he was good, noting his name was on the order.

Councilor Sullivan stated he was good.

Motion passed on a call of the roll of the yeas and nays--Yeas 5--Nays 0--Absent 0.

(5:30)

Item 9: (copy) 9-7-21 BARTLEY, LEAHY, MCGIVERIN, SULLIVAN, TALLMAN — The Law Department provide City Council with an updated legal opinion regarding the city's supervisors association and include within it, at a minimum, the following: whether the association is a union; if it is a union, when was this designation approved and by what authority; under what general law is it affiliated; and please specify the department heads who serve at the Mayor's pleasure. Further, please provide the specific department heads included within the association. Please provide any past legal opinions and relevant exhibits.

--->Complied with 5-0.

DISCUSSION:

Chair Devine expressed her understanding that the requested legal opinion was provided on October 5, 2021.

Councilor Jourdain made a motion that item 9 has been complied with. Councilor Sullivan seconded the motion. Motion passed on a call of the roll of the yeas and nays--Yeas 5--Nays 0--Absent 0.

(6:55)

Councilor Jourdain made a motion to remove item 3 from the table.

Item 3: 1-2-24 JOURDAIN — that there be and is hereby appropriated by transfer in the fiscal year 2024, NINE THOUSAND SEVEN HUNDRED SIXTY EIGHT DOLLARS AND 13/100 Dollars (\$9,768.13) as follows:

FROM:

11752-53010 OPED-CONTRACT SERVICES \$9,768.13

TOTAL: \$9,768.13

TO:

11751-51500 VACATION BUYBACK \$4,770.36

11751-51510 SICK LEAVE BUYBACK 4,997.77

TOTAL: \$9,768.13

--->Approved 5-0

DISCUSSION:

Chair Devine welcomed Aaron Vega, Director of the Office of Planning and Economic Development, into chambers.

A. Vega stated that the transfer request was due a retirement of a longtime employee. He then explained that the only funds he had available were in the contract services account, going from an expense line to a personnel line. He then noted that it would be typical to use funds out of the salary line, but that would make them unable to hire someone. He then explained that the contract services line was typically used for the match in securing grants, or in using consulting or engineering services. He added that had sometimes been used for events. He noted that a significant grant was coming in from the federal government, which required a match, but was for over two years and was combined with Engineering which would allow them to match in the next year. He noted that funding in the buyback was requested in the budget process to have funds for PSA contracts, but it was zeroed out.

Councilor Jourdain asked if it was public who was retiring.

A. Vega stated that Sharon Konstantinidis was retiring. He noted that the buyback was this much as she had served for over 20 years.

Councilor Jourdain asked if they had someone lined up to fill the position.

A. Vega stated that they had interviewed a couple people, had more resumes, and additional interviews planned. He added that their Planner 1, Alex Vyce would temporarily be filling in. He then stated that he would use some of the remaining funds to keep Sharon on through the two February Planning Board meetings. He expressed a hope that there would be someone ready to be trained during that time. He suggested that it would be mid-February before someone could be brought on, given the standard two weeks' notice they'd have to give their other job.

Councilor Jourdain made a motion to approve item 3. Councilor Sullivan seconded the motion. Motion passed on a call of the roll of the yeas and nays--Yeas 5--Nays 0--Absent 0.

(12:50)

Item 4: 12-19-23 MCGIVERIN — that in accordance with M.G.L. Chapter 44 Sec. 53A, the City Council hereby accepts the provisions of the “COMMUNITY PLANNING GRANT PROGRAM, \$90,000, NO MATCH ” grant and authorizes the establishment of a Fund or other method appropriate for the accounting of the receipts and expenditures of all resources associated with the administration of said grant.

--->Approved 5-0.

DISCUSSION:

A. Vega initially expressed his understanding that this was a DPW grant from the Mass Gaming Commission mitigation fund, noting that his office had also applied for and received similar grants. He noted that that they were changing them to block grants, changing the application process so that departments within municipalities would apply together.

Councilor Jourdain stated that this was Master Plan funding. He added that the documentation showed Mr. Vega as the project manager.

Carl Rossi, DPW Director, stated that they would be putting in another grant much like this one that former City Engineer, Kris Baker, applied for.

A. Vega noted that all of the grants were calling Community Planning grants.

C. Rossi suggested that that was maybe why they were combined into one application.

A. Vega stated that Mayor Garcia proposed a new Master Plan when he came into office, noting the old one was 20 years old. He then explained that \$150,000 of cannabis impact funds were earmarked for this, as well as another \$150,000 of ARPA funding. He then explained that an RFP was put out, three companies were interviewed, and one was chosen. He then stated that this application was put in the previous spring, and went in through a One Stop portal at the state level for municipalities to submit applications through. He further explained that while those initial \$300,000 in funds would get them to a certain point, this grant would help with studies later in the process if there were additional areas that required deeper digging. He also explained that a big part of the Master Plan would look at energy use and municipal vulnerability, utilities, and infrastructure, noting that the cannabis industry had put particular stresses on some of these focuses.

Chair Devine noted that the materials described the various proposed uses for these funds.

A. Vega stated that they would be asking the City Council to appoint one of its members to be a representative on the Master Plan working group.

Councilor Jourdain noted that the documents showed an intent to procure a consultant last summer. He then asked if that had happened.

A. Vega stated that it had just happened, adding that they were just putting together the PO's and the requisitions, but the consultant group had been chosen.

Councilor Jourdain noted that there appeared to be a wide range of when it would be done, anywhere between fall of 2025 and winter of 2026. He then asked if they were roughly on track for that timeline.

A. Vega stated that they were on track. He then stated that once the contract was signed, there would be public input meetings being planned and surveys going out, emphasizing that this public input part would be the first 6-8 months. He then explained that the Mass Gaming group had been very flexible to work with, allowing extensions if needed. He noted that this had been the second of third time applying with them for this.

Councilor Sullivan asked if some of the other funding would be able to be reprogrammed given this grant funding coming in.

A. Vega stated that it was a possibility but that they would wait to evaluate that in 6-8 months. He then reiterated that often in the Master Plan process, there may be tasks they suggest doing and those funds would allow those to be done without a gap.

Councilor Sullivan expressed that this could leave funds unavailable that could be used for something else, emphasizing that those funds have to be used within a certain amount of time or they would be lost.

A. Vega stated that he wasn't sure how much of the other ARPA applications were not fully utilized.

Councilor Sullivan reiterated that there was a timeline requiring them to be used by a certain date or they are lost. He then emphasized that he would support this grant but that concern should be kept in mind.

A. Vega stated that he understood that concern. He then noted that many other master plans in the commonwealth were around \$400,000. He then stated that when they see the scope of work come in and see the difference in price, they would have to determine if there were something they would not be able to fulfill. He then expressed his intent to put a quicker timeline on the decision to see if they need the funds of if they find there is an opportunity for better ARPA funding reallocation.

Councilor Sullivan suggested looking into the timeline for use of the ARPA funds.

Chair Devine asked him about a letter in the committee jacket regarding preparing an RFP for the Edna Williams property.

A. Vega stated that it was suggested that the Conservation Director work with OPED on this. He then explained that there was a pause on this and it wasn't even put up for surplus.

Chair Devine noted that the city owned the property and nobody had interest in it.

A. Vega stated there was also interest in letting the new Council come in because it was a big decision, particularly with a new Ward 7 councilor. He then expressed an expectation there would be a future discussion about that.

Chair Devine stated that it was just in the Finance folder so she was curious about it.

Councilor Jourdain made a motion to approve item 4. Councilor Sullivan seconded the motion. Motion passed on a call of the roll of the yeas and nays--Yeas 5--Nays 0--Absent 0.

A. Vega noted that with some related orders expected to come, he explained that information on cannabis businesses could be found on the city website under his department's page, including master lists of host community agreements, special permits, noting that those businesses that come to fruition would be a smaller number.

(28:15)

Councilor Jourdain made a motion to remove item 2 from the table

Item 2: 1-2-24 JOURDAIN — that there be and is hereby appropriated by transfer in the fiscal year 2024, TWENTY THOUSAND SEVENTY EIGHT AND 00/100 Dollars (\$20,078) as follows:

FROM:

16101-51111 LIBRARY ASSISTANT (NIGHT) \$20,078

TOTAL: \$20,078

TO:

16101-51102 REFERENCE LIBRARY ASSISTANCE \$20,078

TOTAL: \$20,078

--->Approved 5-0.

DISCUSSION:

Chair Devine invited Library Director, Maria Pagan, into chambers.

M. Pagan stated that their full time reference library assistant had to go to part time due to health issues. She then explained that she took the nighttime library assistant and moved her to reference library assistant position full time, and now needed to move the funding.

Chair Devine asked if the library assistant at night was now part time.

M. Pagan stated that they now didn't have one because the one that was full time was now part time and the one that was part time at night was now full time, including covering the night time. She then explained that the schedule did not allow them to differentiate moneywise between the library assistant or the reference library assistant, it did not matter where they were. She then explained that the nighttime assistant was still working at night, but was now full time because she was also working as reference library assistant.

Councilor Jourdain asked to confirm this was budget-neutral, just shifting money from one pot to another.

M. Pagan confirmed that was correct.

Councilor Jourdain made a motion to approve item 2. Chair Devine seconded the motion.
Motion passed on a call of the roll of the yeas and nays--Yeas 5--Nays 0--Absent 0.

(31:40)

Councilor Jourdain made a motion to remove item 5 from the table. Councilor Givner seconded the motion.

Item 5: 1-2-24 JOURDAIN — that there be and is hereby appropriated by transfer in the fiscal year 2024, THIRTY THOUSAND AND 00/100 Dollars (\$30,000) as follows:

FROM:

14101-51101 ENGINEER/ASST DPW SUPERINTENDENT \$15,000

14101-51105 SR CIVIL ENGINEER 15,000

TOTAL: \$30,000

TO:

14102-53010 PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERING SERVICES \$30,000

TOTAL: \$30,000

--->Approved 5-0.

DISCUSSION:

C. Rossi stated that this was for the continuation of a contractor as their interim city engineer, noting that they did not have engineering staff at that point. He then explained that they were actively seeking a City Engineer as well as a Senior Civil Engineer.

Councilor Jourdain asked how if everything was running smoothly with the currently situation, recognizing they would prefer to have filled positions.

C. Rossi stated that Victoria Houle, filling in as Interim City Engineer, was keeping their heads above water. He emphasized that she was only there for about 20 hours a week but was always available if they needed her a little extra.

Councilor I. Rivera noted that a lot of traffic matters had been put on hold since Mr. Baker's departure. He then asked if there was a plan to get those items taken up in the meantime, noting that Kelly School had been asking to have some issues addressed with regard to their buses getting signage and the need for some traffic signage.

C. Rossi stated that they were trying to look at some of those things but since Ms. Houle was not full time, they had to prioritize what they could do, especially with upcoming roadwork and grants coming in, as well as with the sewer lines and other projects. He then expressed a hope they could get an Engineer within the next couple of months.

Chair Devine recalled seeing an order going to Public Safety.

Councilor I. Rivera stated that was his understanding as well.

Councilor Jourdain made a motion to approve item 2. Councilor Givner seconded the motion. Motion passed on a call of the roll of the yeas and nays--Yeas 5--Nays 0--Absent 0.

Chair Devine asked Mr. Rossi about an item she would be planning to take up at an upcoming Finance meeting regarding funding coming from the state from the Fair Share Amendment.

Councilor Givner noted that he had already left.

(37:20)

Chair Devine asked for a motion to remove this item from the table.

Councilor Givner asked which item she was referring to.

Councilor Jourdain expressed his understanding that it was not on the agenda.

Chair Devine suggested that while she was going to suggest giving it a leave to withdraw, she received a letter from Jaime Morrow, Chief Procurement Officer, regarding this topic, explaining that the mayor was committed to buying “green” vehicles whenever possible, but noting that the outfitting required by all departments was not supported by an all-electric or hybrid model.

Councilor Jourdain expressed concern with discussing items that were not on the agenda and therefore could not be taken up for final disposition.

*Admin’s note: it was clarified following the meeting that this item had been on the agenda properly and would be reported out at the following full Council meeting.

Item 11: 3-2-21 MURPHY -- Ordered, that as the city considers purchasing any replacement vehicles it reach out to the state to see if the city could be eligible for significant rebates off the purchase price of electric vehicles. The MOR-EV program offers rebates to private as well as public entities for purchasing electric vehicles now including trucks. In addition, that the city look into the Massachusetts Green Communities grant program which provides funding to assist with the installation of EV charging infrastructure.

*Tabled 5-10-21, 6-7-21

--->Tabled

(40:15)

Item 6: 12-19-23 MCGIVERIN — that there be and is hereby appropriated by transfer in the fiscal year 2024, THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND AND 00/100 Dollars (\$300,000) as follows:

FROM:
8810-10400 CITY STABILIZATION \$300,000
TOTAL: \$300,000
TO:
19412-57630 CLAIMS & DAMAGES \$300,000
TOTAL: \$300,000

--->Tabled

DISCUSSION:

Chair Devine expressed her understanding that this topic would be discussed during an executive session the upcoming Monday, and suggested that this be held until then.

Councilor Jourdain made a motion to lay item 6 on the table. Councilor Givner seconded the motion. Motion passed on a call of the roll of the yeas and nays--Yeas 5--Nays 0--Absent 0.

Meeting adjourned at 7:14 PM