

MINUTES

City of Concord Finance Committee Meeting
May 25, 2023 @ 5:30 PM
City Council Chambers

Present: Mayor James Bouley, City Councilors Brent Todd, Jennifer Kretovic, Erle Pierce, Stacey Brown, Karen McNamara, Byron Champlin, Fred Keach, Nathan Fennessy, Gail Matson, Amanda Grady Sexton, Keith Nyhan, Paula McLaughlin, and Candace White Bouchard.

Excused: Zandra Rice Hawkins.

The Mayor opened the meeting at 5:35 PM and noted that tonight's FY 2024 proposed budget review would cover Community Development, Library, Parks & Recreation, Human Services, and CIP/TIF. The Mayor also explained how the evening's public hearing process would occur.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from the May 18, 2023 and May 22, 2023 Finance Committee meetings. The minutes were approved unanimously with a voice vote.

With no other business to take care of, Manager Aspell began his review of the budget.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: Revenues, budget to budget, are up \$105,000 or 6.8%. Construction permits are up \$88,000; other permits are up \$9,000; licenses are down \$5,000; street damage fees are up \$5,000; review fees are up \$40,000; inspection fees are down \$31,000; timber sales are down \$13,000; and transfer in from trust is up \$11,000.

Expenses, budget to budget, are up \$624,000 or 15.3%. This increase is due to the following:

- Moved the Economic Development Marketer and the Director of Redevelopment and Downtown Services positions, and associated costs, from the City Manager's budget to the Community Development budget, \$265,000;
- Restored a Senior Engineering Technician position, \$88,000;
- Increased overtime in Engineering, \$12,000;
- Increased the labor grade for the GIS Coordinator position, \$14,000;
- Upgraded the Assistant City Planner position; \$3,000;
- Increased hours for the Trails and Open Space Ranger position, \$3,000;
- Increased funding for Professional Development, Dues and Training, \$11,000;
- Increased Professional Services, \$45,000 – mainly for increased contract services for plan reviews and construction inspections; and
- Increased the transfer-out to trust (Highway Reserve) to align with the Street Damage Fee revenue, \$5,000.

Councilor Champlin inquired about the status of the Sustainability Director position. City Manager Aspell indicated that the Director of Special Projects and Strategic Initiatives will be charged with handling many of the City's energy matters. Manager Aspell indicated that he expects that every Department will have staff considering sustainability issues; however, a resource for those Departments will be needed. The Director of Special Projects and Strategic Initiatives will have enough knowledge to be a resource for the other Departments. Manager Aspell indicated that one

position solely handling sustainability may be needed down the road, but, for now, this is how he proposes to handle it.

Councilor Brown noted the funds in the Community Development Department for Professional Development, and asked if there are classes/trainings on sustainability. Manager Aspell responded that sustainability is usually a part of most trainings. He noted that he would be willing to send staff to attend trainings that solely focus on sustainability.

The Mayor opened up a public hearing for the Community Development Department budget.

Concord resident Roy Schweiker expressed his opinion that the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) assumes all applications for variances are correct, and, as a result, approves 100% of them. He feels that every variance request should be reviewed by the Planning Board before going to the ZBA.

As there was no further public testimony, the Mayor closed the public hearing.

LIBRARY: Revenues, budget to budget, are up \$11,000 or 5%, due to increased overdue book fines and transfer-in from trust.

Expenses, budget to budget, are up \$120,000 or 5.9%, mainly due to changes in wages and benefits, library books and materials, and increased electricity costs.

Councilor Fennessy asked how the e-Bike program is going. Mat Bose, Assistant Library Director and Technical Services Manager; and Becky Kasten, Youth Services Manager, indicated that the e-Bike program was launched in October 2022 and is already off to a good start. To date, Library staff have brought it to 10-12 locations. The Library has a good working relationship with the Parks & Recreation Department and the goal is to reach every ward, visiting pools, parks, and events. The e-bikes have sparked a lot of interest, and people are inquiring about them and other librarians in the state have been asking about them.

Councilor Brown asked how citizens know where the e-Bikes are going to be. Assistant Library Director Bose indicated that it is posted on the Library's web calendar.

Councilor Champlin noted that he has heard from constituents wanting extended hours at the Penacook and Heights Branch Libraries. He asked if the City has ever looked into using volunteers to help keep the branches open longer. Assistant Library Director Bose indicated that the Library does use volunteers and that was disrupted during COVID-19. He noted that the Library currently has 7-8 volunteers, plus three high school student volunteers. Councilor Champlin requested that the Library continue to look at this.

PARKS & RECREATION: Budget to budget, revenues overall are down \$137,000 or 10.8%. This is mainly due to a reduction of \$195,000 from transfer-in that was used to offset expenses associated with the new community center. There are the following revenue changes: Camps are up \$27,000, Program Fees are up \$32,000, Other Service Charges are up \$4,000, and Rental Income is down \$7,000.

Expenses, budget to budget, are up \$407,000 or 11.4%. This is due to the addition of a new full-time employee at the cemetery, \$71,000; Tree Service, \$20,000; Seasonal Temp wage increases, \$80,000; Electricity increases, \$10,000; and the remainder is due to wage and benefit changes.

Councilor Fennessy recalled the Council passing an ordinance reducing fees, and asked what the usage has been like since that reduction. Parks and Recreation Director David Gill responded that usage has increased since the reduction.

Councilor Keach commented that there are some groups that think they should be exempt from paying to use the Citywide Community Center, and asked if there is a different rate for non-profit vs. for profit organizations. Director Gill indicated that the price is the same for both.

Councilor Bouchard asked if there are any groups that we have waived fees for. Director Gill indicated that the City Council has waived fees for Change for Concord to use the facility for four hours per month; and that fees are waived for groups like the VNA to do health checks for seniors, and the Red Cross to do blood drives; but other than that, fees have not been waived.

Councilor Grady Sexton asked if we have considered soliciting sponsors/donations to help non-profits who may have a hardship; and if any groups have come forward that want to raise money for the Department, like a Friends of Parks & Recreation. Director Gill said that they have not considered soliciting sponsors/donations, but it is something they could look into. He noted that the Department receives \$100,000 to \$150,000 per year in donations. A group like Friends of Parks & Recreation would be a group of outside individuals who decide to come together and create an entity for the purpose of supporting the Department; it wouldn't come from within the Department.

Councilor Bouchard asked if there are issues with parking at the Citywide Community Center. Director Gill responded that the parking lot is at capacity and overflowing onto the side streets on evenings and Saturdays. He noted that people have been very good about not blocking residents' driveways. Manager Aspell noted that, at the time the community center was built, we weren't sure how much parking we would need. But we are now seeing that more parking is needed. He suggested that expanding the parking lot will need to be considered in the future.

Councilor Brown noted that green space is very important and that, other than Keach Park, Ward 9 has no green space. She noted that Concord is 64 square miles and that Ward 9 is only 1 square mile, with 4,500 people. She noted that much of the population in Ward 9 has a lack of transportation and Keach Park is the only green space they have access to. She suggested that the Parks & Recreation Department allot time at Keach Park for neighborhood use, and have sports leagues use other parks in the City. Director Gill indicated that Keach Park is 11 acres in size, five of which are athletic fields. He noted that, currently, Keach Park is kept open for neighborhood use two evenings a week and all day on Sundays. Councilor Brown suggested that this be expanded. Manager Aspell suggested that funding of Kiwanis Park would provide more green space in that area of the city.

At Councilor Bouchard's request, Director Gill spoke about the various diverse groups his Department does outreach to and works with.

Councilor Brown asked if there were any vacancies on the Recreation and Parks Advisory Committee. Director Gill indicated that there are currently two public vacancies, and two for school district representatives.

The Mayor opened up a public hearing on the Leisure Services' budgets and any Capital Improvement Program (CIP) items that members of the public would like to speak about.

Concord resident Don Jewell indicated that he is very pleased with the Library and its staff. He feels the Library's outreach is very important because there are many who don't know about their services. He would like to see the Main Library be open until 8:00 PM on Thursdays and until 5:00 PM on Saturdays. He also noted that he attended an event at the Citywide Community Center the night before, which was well attended, and the parking lot was full.

Concord resident Roy Schweiker shared his concern about parking at the Citywide Community Center. He noted that many of the senior programs start at 11:00 AM and it's a struggle for many of the elderly attendees to walk to the door if there is another event happening. Mr. Schweiker stated that he would like to see the Main Branch Library and the Heights Branch Library open on Sundays. He noted that he is a Library volunteer and hasn't done anything in a few years, as the pandemic put a stop to many activities. He also stated that he doesn't think the bathrooms at the Library should be locked, which requires patrons to have to ask for a key.

Concord resident Bodhi Bhattarai, who is nine years old and uses a wheelchair for mobility, shared how much he loves White Park, but that he can't play at the playground. The current playground has wood chips, which aren't handicap accessible. He would like to see a handicap accessible playground built at White Park so that everyone is able to play there.

Concord resident Deodonne Bhattarai, mother of Bodhi, thanked the City Council for its support of inclusive playgrounds and hopes that the project goes forward. She also spoke about parking at the Citywide Community Center, noting that finding handicap parking at the facility is very difficult and that there is a lack of curb cuts.

Jennifer Goodman, former member of Concord Crew, stated that the Board of Concord Crew appreciates the Council's first stage of planning for the Kiwanis Park.

Concord resident and teacher, Mike Pelletier, spoke about the quality of Concord's athletic fields. He has two child athletes and they often visit athletic fields in other communities that are of much higher quality. He feels that Concord's fields are subpar and that we need multiple turf fields. He suggested that we put a field in at Terrill Park, even if it can't be turf.

Chris Harrington spoke in favor of building a new skatepark.

Rick McPartlin, Treasurer of Friends of White Park, spoke in favor of revamping the Monkey Around Playground and making it an all-inclusive playground.

Martin Toe, Steven Kidder, and Fisto Ndayishimiye, spoke on behalf of Change for Concord, and thanked the City Council for considering the funding to install lights at Keach Park. Fisto provided a copy of a petition in support of lights at Keach Park, which was signed by 126 Concord residents and 35 out-of-town supporters.

Councilor Bouchard asked if the field at Keach Park will be for soccer only. She said she expects that once its lit, we might see other users playing other sports at Keach Park. Mr. Kidder said he feels it will be a good thing to share the park because it will bring residents from different neighborhoods and cultures together.

Concord resident Ravani (sp.) lives near West Street Park but goes to Keach Park to see friends. He said Keach Park is not just about soccer; its about people from diverse backgrounds coming together to play, whether it be basketball, soccer or other games.

Concord resident Catherine Corkery, who works for the NH Sierra Club, spoke in support of lighting just one field at Keach Park, not the whole park. She also shared information about an event being held on June 9th at NH Motor Speedway called “Green Your Fleet”, which is being put on by the NH Department of Environmental Services. Councilor Kretovic asked about the Sierra Club’s light policy and asked if the proposed lights at Keach Park would be an issue. Ms. Corkery indicated that there would not be any issues, as these lights will be pointing down.

Loudon resident Curtis Hagan spoke in support of building a new skatepark.

Ted Rice spoke in support of building a new skate park.

Meredith Cooley, Concord resident and member of Concord Greenspace, spoke in support of installing lights at Keach Park.

Concord resident Roy Schweiker spoke in opposition to spending \$75,000 for two electric vehicle (EV) charging stations. He feels gas is cheaper. He noted that Fire vehicles used to be good for 10 years; and shared his concern that now it’s only 8 years. He feels the City should apply for grants for the lighting of Keach Park, and suggested that solar would be a better option. He would like to see the Police Officers have body cameras.

Craig Tufts, Concord resident and member of the Transportation Policy Advisory Committee (TPAC), indicated that he is happy to see the Merrimack River Greenway Trail in the CIP. He concurred with the City that the best time to build/repair sidewalks is when a road is being paved. He talked about the list that TPAC created, which prioritizes the sidewalks that need to be built or repaired in the city. He noted that Airport Road is #5 on the list; Pembroke Road is in the top 10; and Chennell Drive has a lot of lunchtime walkers. He feels that adding sidewalks to these three roads is very important and said he is happy to see it in the budget. Councilor Kretovic asked if TPAC is considering accessibility when ranking sidewalks. Mr. Tufts indicated that accessibility is always considered. Mayor Bouley asked Mr. Tufts if he feels that there is an expectation that a sidewalk will be maintained in the winter, and if Mr. Tufts would support the need for additional staff and equipment in order to do so if new sidewalks are built. Mr. Tufts indicated that he would be fully in support of that.

Penacook resident Wendy Follansbee thanked the City Council for funding for the Penacook Branch Library. She would like to see increased weekend hours at the Penacook Branch Library. She also spoke in support of adding more money to the General Services Department to maintain the City's buildings. And she would like to see a Police sub-station in Penacook.

As there was no further testimony, the Mayor closed the public hearing on the Leisure Services' budgets.

HUMAN SERVICES: Revenues, budget to budget, are flat.

Expenses, budget to budget, are up \$41,000 due to wage and benefit changes, including adding hours to the Administrative Specialist position.

Manager Aspell noted that the projected expenses for the Special Programs line is \$177,000 for FY 2023. This is a significant increase over FY 2022 actual of \$67,000. These additional expenditures are expected and are due to the ending of the Emergency Rental Assistance Program in December 2022; and the end of State COVID-19 Public Health Emergency programs, including the end of additional Food Stamp benefits in March 2023; the end of Medicaid coverage for many clients for medication assistance in April 2023; the end of Singles and Couples Hotel Assistance in April 2023; and the end of Family Hotel Assistance in June 2023. We did not expect the outside funding to last forever and now we are seeing the increased expenses.

Mayor Bouley asked if we are meeting our obligation if someone goes to Human Services requesting assistance, Human Services provides that person with an option, and that person chooses not to take it. Human Services Director Karen Emis-Williams responded that, in such a case, the City has met its requirements. We can't obligate anyone to accept our resources.

Mayor Bouley commended Ms. Williams for her good work and her coordination with other social service organizations within the community.

The Mayor opened up a public hearing on the Human Services budget. As there was no public testimony, the Mayor closed the public hearing.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCE (TIF) DISTRICTS:

Matt Walsh, Deputy City Manager - Development, provided an overview of the Tax Increment Finance Districts.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN:

Deputy City Manager Walsh provided an overview of the projects recommended for funding in the FY 2024 Capital Improvement Program. Projects that spurred discussion are as follows:

- **Street Tree Planting (CIP #644):** Councilor Brown asked, if the amount of funding were to be doubled from \$5,000 to \$10,000, would the General Services Department be able to plant all the trees. Mr. Walsh indicated that if additional funds were provided, the trees would be planted.

- **Fire Department Vehicle Replacement (CIP #4):** Councilor Fennessy commented that most calls are not related to fires, but rather emergency medical services (EMS). He also noted that the City uses its larger, million-dollar fire vehicles (such as the ladder truck) to respond to EMS calls. He asked if there were any alternative vehicles that could be used. Fire Chief John Chisholm responded that, with our current staffing, there are no alternatives. Many calls require more than the two EMT's on an ambulance.

Councilor Pierce asked what the Fire Department does with old ambulances/trucks when they come out of reserve. Chief Chisholm indicated that sometimes we trade them and sometimes we sell them.

Mayor Bouley questioned whether now is the right time to be buying staff vehicles.

Councilor Keach asked if the staff vehicles go home with the employee. Chief Chisholm responded that they all do. Councilor Keach asked how many of the staff vehicles leave Concord to go home with the employee. Chief Chisholm responded that they all do.

- **Golf Course Grounds Improvements (CIP #235):** Councilor Brown noted that \$150,000 is budgeted in FY 2024 for debt service. She asked how many years the City would be paying on the debt service for the irrigation project, to which Deputy City Manager Brian LeBrun responded 20 years. Councilor Brown noted that the golf course is 169 acres in size and asked how many of those acres are irrigated. Deputy City Manager LeBrun responded that all areas where golf is played are irrigated, this includes all holes, greens, and fairways. He noted that the irrigation project is about two-thirds done. Councilor Brown commented that if the City were to irrigate all of its Little League fields it would be less than 169 acres.

Mayor Bouley asked if the current pump house is the same pump house that would be used for snowmaking, if we decided to do so. Deputy City Manager LeBrun responded that it is.

- **Vehicle & Equipment Replacement (CIP #121):** Councilor Nyhan asked what the lead time is for General Services vehicles. Mr. Walsh responded that it may not be two years, as it used to be; but it is going to take a while.
- **McKee Square Intersection Improvements (CIP #31):** Councilor Fennessy asked if we have a design concept yet. Mr. Walsh responded that, as of yet, we do not. However, a previous concept was prepared in 2012, which was recently included in the Mayor and City Manager's State of the City Presentation. Mr. Walsh emphasized that the 2012 concept is just a concept, and that the current schematic design process will generate additional options for the community to consider.

Councilor Nyhan asked why there is a delay in construction until 2026. Mr. Walsh responded that we need time to have community dialogue, complete the design and permitting process, as well as time construction with potential grant funds to support the project.

- **State Street Parking Garage (CIP #432):** Councilor Champlin asked if the \$12 million budgeted in the 2026 CIP is the cost to repair the garage or to replace it. Mr. Walsh responded that the \$12 million is to repair and renovate the garage. He explained that the other two options would be to demolish it and build a surface lot at \$5.2 million, or demolish and replace it at a cost of \$28 million.

Councilor Fennnessy asked if the City, as part of the study, will be exploring if there's options to privatize the garage. Mr. Walsh indicated that it could be explored if so desired by the full Council. Mayor Bouley commented that when he first became Mayor, there was a study done which explored the potential of selling / privatizing the City's municipal parking garages. He suggested we pull the report from that study.

- **Penacook Riverfront Parks (CIP #567):** Councilor Nyhan asked if the Town of Boscawen has made any improvements to their small portion along the river. Mr. Walsh indicated that Boscawen has been working to clean up that portion of the former Allied Leather Tannery located in their community. He noted that Boscawen has received some EPA funds to demolish some structures located on Commercial Street.
- **Keach Park (CIP #52):** Councilor Kretovic asked if we have a budget estimate and design for lighting a youth soccer field at Keach Park. Mr. Walsh responded that a preliminary concept plan was prepared to provide budget estimates included in the CIP. However, a formal design will need to be prepared. Said design will need to consider input gathered during community meetings, which will occur during the planning and design process as described in the FY 2024 CIP detail narrative for this project. Councilor Kretovic asked if it will be possible to have designs completed and the project ready for construction by July 2024. Mr. Walsh said it might be possible if the community, user groups, and stakeholders can quickly reach consensus concerning preferred design, as well as policies and procedures for using the proposed lit field.

Councilor Brown asked why the City needs to do so much public outreach for Keach Park, as its really a neighborhood issue. Mr. Walsh responded that it will be the only lit soccer field in the community and that there are several entities interested in using this unique public facility. He also noted that it is customary for the City to conduct community meetings to gather public input on proposed park projects during the planning and design stages. In response, Councilor Brown stated that we have six parks in the city and perhaps we should ask the users of those parks what their needs are. She is concerned that the community has done all the leg work for this and that the majority of the users will be leagues.

Councilor Bouchard commented that once the lights became public, many groups came out and declared their interest. She is concerned that once we light up Keach Park, it will become a secondary sports facility, similar to Memorial Field. She also commented that other users will want to use it, and that Keach Park is not just for one neighborhood. She stated that this is why there needs to be public meetings.

Mayor Bouley commented that he feels we need to take a step back. He noted that we have a field problem overall. He said he is thrilled that Concord School District is coming forward to help with Memorial Field. He noted, however, that there are issues with Terrill Park, what's going to happen with the fields at Rundlett Middle School, etc. He feels that all fields in general need to be looked at. He also noted that the City has a long history of conducting public input sessions for park improvement projects, as well as new park facilities.

- **Unmanned Aerial System (CIP #618):** Councilor Fennessy asked if the unmanned aerial system will be able to be armed. Deputy Police Chief Steve Smagula responded that it will not.
- **Hall Street Wastewater Treatment Plant Improvements (CIP #104):** Councilor Nyhan noted that there is a lot of dollars in the outyears of this category and asked why. He wanted to know if there are many projects needed to maintain the infrastructure. Manager Aspell responded that the facility is 40 years old, and different parts of the facility need to be replaced or repaired over time.

Councilor Matson asked if the Wastewater Treatment Plant is adequate in size. Manager Aspell responded that it is more than adequate in size.

- **Sidewalk, Bikeway & Streetscape Improvements (CIP #17):** Councilor Fennessy asked if there are any residential properties on Chenell Drive, to which Mr. Walsh responded there is not.

Discussion ensued about Pembroke Road and whether there was any dialogue between the Planning Board and the developer of the new housing development going in about the developer paying for a portion of the sidewalk. Mr. Walsh indicated that discussion did take place during the Planning Board permitting process; however, the developer was not required to.

Mayor Bouley opened up a public hearing on the Tax Increment Finance District budgets, as well as the Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

Concord resident Roy Schweiker suggested the City terminate the North End Opportunity Corridor Tax Increment Finance District, as, in his opinion, the purposes for which the District was established have been fulfilled. He also criticized use of Sears Block Tax Increment Finance District captured revenues to support repayment of the Parking Fund and feels the City is taking property tax dollars and using them to subsidize parking.

As there was no further public testimony, the Mayor closed the public hearing.

Mayor Bouley noted that the next Finance Committee would be held on Thursday, June 1st, at 5:30 PM, at which time Special Revenue Funds and Enterprise Funds will be discussed, followed by a public hearing.

With no other discussion, a motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed with a unanimous voice vote and the meeting was adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Sue Stevens, Executive Assistant