

INFORMAL MEETING OF FEBRUARY 5, 2018

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Informal Meeting of the City Council was held in the City Council Chamber, Room 219, City Hall, on Monday evening, February 5, 2018.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Council President Scott J. Graves called the meeting to order at 6:00 o'clock p.m.

**ATTENDANCE**

Nine (9) Councillors were present\* including President Scott Graves and Councillors James Boone, Craig Cormier, Ronald Cormier, Edward Gravel, Karen Hardern, Christine Johnson, James Johnson, and Elizabeth Kazinskas. \*Councillor Nathan Boudreau arrived at 6:08 p.m. Councillor James Walsh was absent.

Others participating were Mayor Mark Hawke, Fire Chief Richard Areas, and Assistant Director of Community Development & Planning Joshua Cormier

President Graves introduced Assistant Director of Community Development & Planning Joshua Cormier to address the Council concerning Calendar No. 9893, *A Resolution Relative to the FY2018 Community Development Block Grant Mini-Entitlement Plan*.

Assistant Director Cormier presented the proposed CDBG Mini-Entitlement Plan, as follows:

- **Demolition** – Demolish select parcels in the Target areas. CDBG Funding \$106,250.00.
- **Downtown Phase I** – Design and construction of crosswalks, sidewalks, and lighting repairs and upgrades. CDBG Funding \$548,750.00.
- **Small Business Technical Assistance Program** – Small business assistance services for 15 LMI Gardner residents. CDBG Funding \$7,500.00.
- **Domestic Violence Services** – Provide counseling for 40 LMI at-risk men, women, and children. CDBG Funding \$12,000.00.
- **Veterans Community Integration Initiative** – Provide health and well-being courses for 150 LMI veterans and civilians. CDBG Funding \$16,750.00.
- **Gardner Public School Athletics** – Provide financial assistance for LMI student athletes at Gardner High School and Gardner Middle School. CDBG Funding \$10,000.00.
- **Administrative and Delivery Costs** - \$123,750.00.

Mr. Cormier informed the Council that every year, from September to October, the Department issues Requests for Proposals and offered the following overview:

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Mr. Cormier stated that Gardner Public School Athletics would pay \$100 for athletic user fees (per sport) for LMI students (under LMI Guidelines).

The Veterans Community Integration Initiative is a joint effort with MVOC, with each paying half the cost of the first year of the program. He said that the initiative would offer health and well-being courses (yoga, meditation) for 150 LMI veterans and civilians. He said that the plan would be to contract with local businesses for these services.

The Domestic Violence Services Initiative would be provided by *Voices of Truth* and would provide counseling for 40 LMI at-risk men, women, and children.

The Downtown Phase I Initiative includes design and construction of crosswalks, sidewalks, and lighting repairs and upgrades. He said that many of the crosswalks and sidewalks in the Downtown are not ADA-compliant and that lighting in certain areas is insufficient.

The Demolition Initiative would find the demolition of select parcels in the Target areas. He said that the Department would evaluate the conditions of various buildings that pose danger. He cited the building located at 20 Rock Street as a City-owned blighted building which, he noted, was taken under Tax Title.

Administrative and Delivery Costs provide salaries for the Assistant Director and Financial Administrator.

Councillor Edward Gravel cited Monument Park as having lack of accessibility for handicapped individuals and noted limited lighting.

Mr. Cormier said that the plan is in 9 phases and that lighting is not in the first phase, adding that it is a planning document and other issues can be looked into.

Councillor James Johnson cited lack of lighting at the Sullivan-Minns stairs between Pine Street and Rear Main Street.

Mr. Cormier said that he would investigate whether lighting is included in the Rear Main Street Project and would respond to the Council.

Councillor Gravel added that lighting is a safety concern.

Assistant Director Cormier departed at 6:16 p.m.

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President Graves introduced the Mayor and Fire Chief Richard Ares to address the Council concerning Calendar No. 9873, *An Order Appropriating \$255,000.00 from Free Cash to Fire/EMT Department - New Vehicle Account.*

Councillor Christine Johnson mentioned that Free Cash could be used as a loan to buy the Ambulance and then have it repaid later from an Enterprise Fund. She said that the City can recoup expenses for only the prior two years.

Councillor James Johnson reminded Councillors that the Public Safety Committee voted to recommend adoption of the Order.

Councillor James Boone stated that he spoke with the Fire Chief about researching vehicles “off the lot,” and found that some can be purchased that are already equipped, but that they’re not four-wheel drive vehicles. He added that he spoke with a salesman and was informed that Gardner is ordering a good vehicle at a good price. He then questioned how the City will fund the vehicle, suggesting that it work to reduce overtime.

Councillor Ronald Cormier informed the Council that the Finance Committee discussed the issue informally, and then agreed to refer discussion to the Council as Committee of the Whole.

Councillor Gravel stated that he supports purchasing the ambulance from Free Cash at this time and then to pay it back later.

President Graves reminded Councillors to focus its discussion on the Order before the Council, which is to purchase an ambulance from Free Cash.

Councillor Christine Johnson remarked that the Mayor said that if borrowed, the Tax Levy would be raised to the 2½% limit, but that she wants to see “a zero percent increase” in the levy. She added that borrowing is not beneficial to the City.

Councillor Ronald Cormier stated that the City does not have a full year’s experience with revenues and expenses, so perhaps it should wait for at least a year or one and a half years of experience before pursuing an Enterprise Fund.

President Scott Graves commented that the Mayor must also approve the creation of an Enterprise Fund.

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Mayor Hawke stated that an Enterprise Fund is strictly an accounting format, separately set-up in MUNIS that tracks revenues and expenses.

President Graves explained that two separate overtime accounts are set up within the Fire Department, one for Fire and the second for EMS/Ambulance. He asked the Chief if the Department had hired the planned 8 new Firefighters/EMTs.

Chief Ares responded, saying that the last 5 of the 8 hired resigned unexpectedly. He added that new FF/EMT's were hired to replace a few, but that the Department had several FF recently retire. He said that each shift should have 9 personnel, but that the Department has been at least one FF short. He noted that as of that day, the cost for vacation coverage alone is about \$100,000.

Councillor James Johnson asked the Chief for his plan for the used Ambulance.

Chief Ares stated that he would repair the current unit by replacing the chassis, since the box is in good shape, and keep it as a back-up.

On questioning, the Chief said that MedStar and Wood's Ambulance serve as back-up if the FD unit is unavailable. If neither is available, then the City contacts the Town of Westminster. If the City's Ambulance is out of town for longer than 1½ hours, another FF is called in on OT.

Mayor Hawke stated that the plan has been to find a way to add Firefighters to the Department at little to no cost to the taxpayers, adding that FF/EMT's "are Firefighters first."

President Scott Graves solicited the Mayor's comments concerning using Free Cash for capital items.

Mayor Hawke stated that for the past 8 years, the City has used Free Cash for capital items, adding that small items and Police cruisers are included in the operating budget. He noted that funding for larger capital purchases or projects are either borrowed or from Free Cash.

The meeting was concluded at 6:34 p.m.

Accepted by the City Council: *February 20, 2018*