

**City of Merrill
Committee of the Whole
Tuesday, October 29, 2013 at 6:00 P.M.
City Hall Common Council Chambers
1004 East First Street**

Committee of the Whole members present (9 of 9): Mayor Bill Bialecki, Alderman Chris Malm (First District), Alderman Steve Hass (Second District), Alderman Ryan Schwartzman (Third District), Alderwoman Kandy Peterson (Fourth District), Alderman John Burgener (Fifth District), Alderman Dave Sukow (Sixth District), Alderman Rob Norton (Seventh District) and Alderwoman Anne Caylor (Eighth District).

Other attendees included: City Administrator Dave Johnson, Utility Superintendent Kim Kriewald, Street Commissioner Richard Lupton, Airport Manager/FBO John Miller, Police Chief Ken Neff, Fire Chief Dave Savone, Library Director Stacy Stevens, Finance Director Kathy Unertl, City Hall Maintenance Supervisor Ramona Vanderkam, Park and Recreation Director Dan Wendorf, Municipal Judge Merle Sheridan, Duane Pfister, Roger Drewek, Kortney Pike, Robert Dickey, Judy Woller, Corey Bennett, Michael Caylor Jr. and City Clerk Bill Heideman.

Call to order

Mayor Bialecki called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

Consider supplemental benefits program through Advantage Group

City Administrator Johnson had requested that this item be placed on the agenda. He gave verbal information on a proposal to offer City employees the option of purchasing disability insurance through the Advantage Group. Currently, the City offers the following options to purchase disability insurance: ALFAC (short-term) and Madison National (long-term). Approximately 20 employees would need to enroll before the Advantage Group option would be offered.

Alderman Hass and Alderwoman Caylor both stated that they were in favor of offering this additional option, since it would give employees another choice.

Alderman Malm asked if offering this option would result in an increase in administrative costs to the City. He was told it would not result in additional costs.

City Administrator Johnson will proceed with determining whether there is sufficient employee interest to offer this additional option. No formal action was taken.

Review 2014 Budget Appendix A, including State Levy Limit & City Debt Service

It was reported that, if no additional changes are made to the 2014 budget, a 12.6% tax increase would result. The majority of the increase is in the Debt Service portion of the budget.

Discussion was held on the City tax base, tax rates and Tax Increment Districts.

Alderman Malm stressed that long-term planning is critical for the future of the City. Alderman Hass and Alderwoman Caylor shared their disappointment over the fact that the 2014 budget process was not started sooner. Mayor Bialecki responded by stating that both Alderman Hass and Alderwoman Caylor are members of the Personnel and Finance Committee, and as such they could have requested an earlier start for the budget process.

No formal action was taken.

Review and consider Tax Increment District 2014 budget requests

Information was included in the 2014 budget binder.

Alderman Hass stated that, contrary to what had been stated at previous meetings, Church Mutual has not requested the extension of East Sixth Street. City Administrator Johnson responded that Church Mutual is willing to cooperate with the City on land acquisition in that vicinity, if the extension project proceeds.

Alderman Malm inquired as to the status of the former Grecian Delight property on Center Avenue.

Finance Director Unertl reported that, in closed session, the Redevelopment Authority has discussed several potential land acquisitions.

Alderman Sukow expressed concern that, over time, buildings have become run down and empty buildings are not being sold. He expressed disappointment that the budget was delayed until the "last minute", and he also stated he was disappointed that the Common Council was excluded from much of the budget planning process.

Alderman Malm repeated his earlier statement that long-term planning is necessary. He also stated that it appears other Common Council members agree.

City Administrator Johnson reported that, in 2014, the budget process for the next year will start much sooner.

Review and consider revised 2014 Capital Budget

Finance Director Unertl reported on the revised 2014 capital budget. The revisions were based on changes proposed at the October 15th, 2013 Committee of the Whole meeting. No action was taken on the revised budget.

Alternate Health Savings Account option for employees

Alderman Hass requested that the rules be suspended to grant floor privileges to Kortney Pike, a Street Department employee. Without objection, it was so ordered.

Kortney Pike distributed information and then provided a verbal review of an alternative Health Savings Account option for City employees. According to him, the City would save money by offering this option rather than the one currently being proposed.

Finance Director Unertl reported that meetings with employees will be scheduled for next week. The purpose of the meetings will be to provide health insurance information and discuss the various health insurance options with employees.

Alderman Hass and Alderwoman Caylor stated that they appreciated input from an employee and complimented Kortney Pike for his efforts on providing information regarding this option.

No action was taken at this time.

Review and consider 2014 Operational Budgets

Information was in the meeting packet.

Motion (Norton/Sukow) to approve a new full-time Fire Department Administrative Assistant position. Motion was defeated 1-7 on roll call vote. Voting Yes – Alderman Norton.

Recess

At 7:40 P.M., Mayor Bialecki announced that a recess would be held. At 7:46 P.M., he called the meeting back to order.

Review and consider 2014 Operational Budgets (continued)

Motion (Norton/Peterson) to approve a new part-time Fire Department Administrative Assistant position. Motion was defeated 2-6 on roll call vote. Voting Yes – Alderwoman Peterson and Alderman Norton.

Alderman Hass requested that the rules be suspended to grant floor privileges to Judge Sheridan. Without objection, it was so ordered.

Judge Sheridan gave a verbal report on the Municipal Judge position since it was established in 1997. The annual salary for the position has always been \$12,600.

Judge Sheridan is requesting that the annual salary for the Municipal Judge be increased to \$14,600. He bases this on the fact that it appears that the City of Merrill and the City of Tomahawk are close to approving a joint municipal court.

Judge Sheridan also noted that the proposed 2014 budget allocates 45 clerical hours per week for the Municipal Court. He is strongly in favor of this increase, considering the workload increase anticipated if a joint municipal court is established. It was noted that the clerical hours would be increased to 45 only if the joint municipal court is approved.

Motion (Hass/Caylor) to increase the salary for the Municipal Judge from \$12,600 to \$16,000, effective May 20th, 2014. The increase would be contingent upon approval of a City of Merrill/City of Tomahawk joint municipal court. Carried 6-2 on roll call vote. Voting No – Alderwoman Peterson and Alderman Norton.

Motion (Hass/Caylor) to remove the step/compensation increases being proposed for the Park and Recreation Director, Utility Superintendent and Water Utility Administrative Assistant. After discussion, Alderman Hass requested that he be allowed to withdraw his motion. Without objection, it was so ordered.

Motion (Caylor/Hass) to remove the step/compensation increase being proposed for the Water Utility Administrative Assistant. Roll call vote resulted in a 4-4 tie. Voting No – Alderman Malm, Alderwoman Peterson, Alderman Burgener and Alderman Norton. Mayor Bialecki broke tie by voting No. Therefore, the motion failed.

Motion (Schwartzman/Burgener) to reduce the annual salary for the Mayor from \$18,000 to \$12,600 in the 2014 budget. The current annual salary is \$12,600. Carried 6-2 on roll call vote. Voting No – Alderman Malm and Alderman Hass.

Motion (Norton/Burgener) to reduce the Alderperson's annual salary to \$3,459.90 in the 2014 budget. The current annual salary is \$3,459.90. Carried 8-0 on roll call vote.

Motion (Hass/Caylor) to remove funding for the summer Limited Term Employee for mowing and weed control at City Hall and various City/RDA downtown properties (\$7,500) from the 2014 budget. After discussion, Alderman Hass requested that he be allowed to withdraw his motion. Without objection, it was so ordered.

Motion (Hass/Caylor) to remove funding for the new winter Limited Term Employee for snow removal (\$500) from the 2014 City Hall Maintenance budget. Carried 8-0 on roll call vote.

Motion (Caylor/Hass) to reduce the "Computer Hardware/Upgrade" line in the 2014 Information Technology budget from \$55,000 to \$45,000. Carried 8-0 on roll call vote.

Mayor Bialecki distributed information on a proposal from Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Pagel. Mr. Pagel is currently a contracted City employee. His proposal would classify him as a full-time City employee at Grade 10, Step H (\$65,334 annual salary). No action was taken on the proposal.

Motion (Hass/Caylor) to "red-circle" (freeze) the wages for the City Attorney position at the current amount. Carried 6-2 on roll call vote. Voting No – Alderman Malm and Alderman Norton.

Motion (Hass/Caylor) to "red-circle" (freeze) the wages for the City Administrator position at the current amount. City Administrator Johnson issued a reminder that his contract with the City stipulates that he receive the same cost-of-living compensation adjustments that other non-union employees receive. Motion was defeated 2-6 on roll call vote. Voting Yes – Alderman Hass and Alderwoman Caylor.

Motion (Hass/Caylor) to "red-circle" (freeze) the wages for the Finance Director position at the current amount. Finance Director Unertl stated that she expects to be paid the same as the male employees in her grade/step classification. She stated that, if she is not paid the same, the City would be hearing from her lawyer. Motion was defeated 2-6 on roll call vote. Voting Yes – Alderman Hass and Alderwoman Caylor.

Motion (Caylor/Hass) to reduce the "Financial Advisor Service" line in the 2014 Treasurer/Finance Director budget from \$3,000 to \$1,000. Carried 8-0 on roll call vote.

Motion (Hass/Caylor) to increase the 2014 funding amount for HAVEN from \$5,000 to \$6,000. Carried 8-0 on roll call vote.

Alderman Norton stated that he is in favor of a full-time Building Inspector and a full-time Geographic Information Systems (GIS) employee.

Alderman Hass stated that, in his opinion, Common Council members are not proposing sufficient budget cuts as part of the 2014 budget process.

Public Comment

Finance Director Unertl reminded everyone that the 2014 utility budgets will be considered at a Committee of the Whole meeting scheduled for November 5th.

Mayor Bialecki noted that a long-time Merrill resident, Noble Hildebrand, passed away recently.

Adjournment

Motion (Hass/Caylor) to adjourn. Carried. Adjourned at 9:28 P.M.

Minutes prepared and submitted by:

William N. Heideman, CMC, WCMC
City Clerk