

**CITY OF NORTHFIELD COUNCIL
BUDGET WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES
FEBRUARY 23, 2023**

At 4:31pm this meeting was called to order by Deputy Municipal Clerk Shannon Campbell, who welcomed the audience. This meeting was properly advertised in the Press of Atlantic City on February 11, 2023 and in accordance with Public Law 75, Chapter 231.

FLAG SALUTE

The flag salute was led by Mayor Chau.

Present: Councilwoman Bucci; Councilwoman Carfagno; Councilman Dewees; Councilman Leeds; Councilman Notaro; Councilman Smith; Council President Polistina; Mayor Chau

Municipal Clerk/Business Administrator Canesi, Certified Financial Officer Stollenwerk, Chief VonColln and Chief Cummings were also in attendance.

2023 BUDGET DISCUSSION

Council President Polistina asked all to refer the budget packet and deferred to CFO Stollenwerk.

CFO Stollenwerk summarized the timeline; she reminded Council they needed to introduce the budget by March 31st and adopt by April 28th. We will be redoing the COLA Ordinance due to an issue with the Press. We had \$9.8 million dollars in added assessments this year. Page 6 shows we consistently lost mostly because of tax appeals; we increased \$5.3 million this year.

Mayor Chau why we had added assessments?

CFO Stollenwerk replied the Tax Assessor went back three years to do added and omitted, we should see a bit more. She explained tax appeals, available surplus history was on page 5 – we received covid money - offset with smaller projects – we have a strong surplus. We will see insurance increase; we received a \$53,000.00 dividend from the JIF that was applied to our premium. Health insurance premiums increased 13%. Pensions went up and tipping fees with ACUA increased. Our debt service was on page 7. She moved money for smaller items so we don't have to borrow money, such as the minor building repairs, Council needed to determine if that's something they wanted to do.

Councilman Notaro asked about the fire suppression system?

CFO Stollenwerk was not aware of the fire suppression system.

Councilman Dewees replied they would discuss it, there was an issue with system.

CFO Stollenwerk continued with the timeline and funded request. An increase with fire volunteer salaries was requested. She asked for questions.

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Councilwoman Bucci announced Max Slusher was here from the County Economic Development Alliance, he would like to give a presentation.

Clerk Canesi noted it was not on the agenda, was he here regarding funding?

Councilwoman Bucci replied, yes.

Council President Polistina asked if there were other questions? Seeing none, he called Mr. Slusher forward to talk about the County EDC.

Max Slusher, Atlantic County Alliance - handed out brochures, he had been working with the EDC for 40 years, he gave a background on the County EDC. Their mission was to diversify the local economy and expand tourism. They are building a research park at airport. They are a private non-profit. He was asking for \$3,000.00 from the City to become a member. They support community development; he was happy to help. He was impressed with the business community in Northfield. The County EDC helps with questions businesses have; the fee was based on housing units. Mr. Slusher provided contact information to council members.

Councilwoman Bucci asked about the website.

Mr. Slusher would send the link they did for Somers Point, the site was interactive, Northfield was next on list, he would bring it back for Council.

Councilwoman Bucci thanked Mr. Slusher, noting he had been very helpful.

Mr. Slusher referenced work done in Hammonton. He thanked Council for their time.

Council President Polistina referred to letter from the County regarding joint fund for health care, it might help with increases.

CFO Stollenwerk advised she was involved in some committees, it would be a challenge because of CBA's.

Clerk Canesi added that she didn't think it will happen this year.

Council President Polistina stated the non-aligned match other contracts, there were a few other requests.

CFO Stollenwerk announced that the OEM salary would be charged to the grant, the schedule for fire was on page 10, there was an increase for LOSAP as well.

Councilman Smith questioned that they requested over 100% increase.

Council President Polistina asked if there were any other personnel questions?

CFO Stollenwerk replied yes, the former chief retired, Chief VonColln came to see her after the budget was prepared, he asked for an additional officer that was not included in this budget, she deferred to Chief VonColln.

Chief VonColln referred to a 2nd lieutenant, he thought it was requested, there were two acting lieutenants in administration now, it was his opinion that these positions

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were crucial. Chief VonColln explained responsibilities and tasks they were completing.

Mayor Chau added that he had spoken in the past, there was more work and demand on various positions. One lieutenant can't handle it.

Chief VonColln continued, noting the department lost a lot of people for small agency, they were high earners, we can bring in lower ranking officers to the street, he was trying to rebuild the Police Department, responsibilities were growing. Supervision and training were critical.

Council President Polistina noted that CFO Stollenwerk mentioned additional training.

Chief VonColln, replied, yes, CFO Stollenwerk broke down the training for him, he was requesting an extra \$10,000.00 for training. Promotions were upcoming, that would require several officers to be trained.

Council President Polistina asked what type of training?

Chief VonColln responded, supervision and leadership training would be most of the funds, he explained current trainings that were required. Next year officers would be required to be licensed and additional trainings and PT tests would be required. Classes would need to be funded by the department. He spoke with Council President Polistina and CFO Stollenwerk regarding manpower, we saved a bit on new hires.

Councilman Smith asked if there were training programs or grants?

Chief VonColln stated they utilize free trainings when they can, more training and more hours takes personnel off the street.

Councilman Smith asked for clarification, was he asking for more patrol to move someone to lieutenant?

Chief VonColln replied no, he was asking for traffic enforcement, the department lost 2 top earners – he was trying to be responsible – an entry level officer would be a cost savings. He explained traffic enforcement and details.

Council President Polistina asked how many officers will this bring us to?

Chief VonColln replied 24 plus a Class II.

Councilmen Notaro and Leeds discussed the number of officers the town needed.

Councilman Leeds added our ordinance called for 2 lieutenants, we should change the ordinance or follow it.

Chief VonColln reiterated the 2nd lieutenant was imperative to the department, he further explained the traffic officer.

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Councilman Leeds referred to the police department flow chart, he asked was the captain in charge of the detective bureau and detective sergeant who oversees two detectives? He felt there was lot of supervision for two officers.

Chief VonColln felt you should have supervisor for each department, the captain oversees police operations, OPRA, special events training, fleet, payroll, he has a lot on his plate, as well as internal affairs. Chief VonColln was in the in process of having a lieutenant back up the captain, there were many acting positions until promotions. The department was trying to expedite process.

CFO Stollenwerk explained the bigger increase in police overhead and expenses, we had to reimburse two agencies for new officers, training and cost of ammo had increased.

Councilman Leeds asked about the cameras.

Chief VonColln noted the cost and explained cameras were invaluable, officers wear on body camera and have dash cameras.

CFO Stollenwerk added we try to replace a couple each year and include in new car lease.

Chief VonColln thanked council for their time.

Councilman Smith, regarding the traffic enforcement officer, how much would that cost?

CFO Stollenwerk advised \$40,000.00 plus \$20,000.00 for insurance and benefits, we could put in this year with Safe and Secure money, funding from last year was still there.

Council President Polistina referred to fire salary and wages, the increase was due to the new officer. He asked if Council agreed on what's in the budget?

CFO Stollenwerk advised we were at a 1.5 cent tax increase not including unfunded, it may take us to 2, once Council made decisions, she would have a final number.

CFO Stollenwerk added that money for FAN, \$11,000.00, was not in there, what was the decision?

Councilman Dewees stated we discussed that last year, last year was the final year.

Councilman Notaro recalled council would discuss this year and take a straw poll.

Councilwoman Carfagno asked what was that money used for?

Councilman Notaro replied for programs and operations, people come here for their programs.

Councilwoman Carfagno asked do they use all of it?

Councilman Smith asked about Northfield Little League, do they get money?

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Councilwoman Bucci asked if we could cut that number?

Councilman Smith recalled the discussion about them moving forward, they created a group and were supposed to be self-sufficient.

Councilman Notaro said they were doing very well but have a lot of cost.

Councilwoman Carfagno noted they have fundraisers and fees, what does this offset? They have the snack bar and merchandise.

Councilwoman Bucci added that she gave them advice on how to decrease their premium.

Mayor Chau asked Councilman Notaro if FAN pays for insurance.

Clerk Canesi reminded Council we don't have a relationship with the sports groups, they complete a field use request, it's a donation made to FAN, they can use for whatever they want.

Councilman Dewees was certain these fees started when the City "paid their insurance".

Clerk Canesi reminded council there was a decision made years ago that prohibited them from being covered under our insurance, changes to the law forced Council to move to field use model, they are not conducting sports on behalf of council.

Council President Polistina advised that Northfield Little League was not looking for a contribution.

Discussion ensued amongst Council about number of players and the impact of the donation.

Councilman Dewees felt if giving to FAN give to NLL, he was a supporter of sports in town, but we need to start chipping away, it leaves bad taste that giving to one and not the other.

All continued to discuss FAN and NLL donations, split or share?

Councilwoman Bucci was opposed to a donation.

At 5:47pm Mayor Chau excused himself from the meeting.

Councilman Smith suggested \$2,500 per sport, \$7,500 to FAN.

Council President Polistina suggested \$2,500 to NLL and \$7,500 to FAN.

Clerk Canesi confirmed with Councilman Notaro that he would contact FAN.

Councilwoman Carfagno felt a donation wasn't needed, they have fundraisers and snack bar, she's a no.

Clerk Canesi called for a straw poll vote:

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Councilman Leeds – yes; Councilwoman Bucci – no; Councilman Dewees – no; Council President Polistina - yes; Councilman Smith – yes; Councilwoman Carfagno – no; Councilman Notaro – yes.

CFO Stollenwerk moved to LOSAP and volunteer fire requests while Chief Cummings was here.

Councilman Notaro, regarding the fire suppression upgrade, it was emailed to Kathi Smith.

Chief Cummings, referred to LOSAP and salaries, he asked for an increase due to additional training and more being asked of them. Other departments were getting the same or what was requested.

Council President Polistina asked for LOSAP requirements.

Chief Cummings explained the program, there were not a lot members who meet the requirements, but it helps to recruit volunteers.

CFO Stollenwerk noted it's \$750 a year now, the max was \$1,150 for 2023, per person who meets the requirements.

Councilman Smith asked about administrative volunteers increase, they asked for 100% increase, was 4%.

Chief Cummings stated they had not had an increase in several years, deputies in other departments were making more money, volunteers do a lot for very little, a neighboring town started a pay to call program.

Councilman Leeds, from an OEM standpoint, felt Chief Cummings hardest working volunteer Chief, there's a lot of work involved, it would cost more to pay a full time chief.

CFO Stollenwerk asked if all were in favor of 3 part time in the paid fire department?

Chief Cummings clarified that he wanted to replace the one that went full time and add 2 more.

CFO Stollenwerk noted she would revise the part time employee request for fire department.

Council President Polistina asked Superintendent Vitale if he wanted to speak.

Superintendent Vitale reported he had two employees with the tanker endorsement, and an acting position to be filled (supervisor).

Clerk Canesi confirmed the position was vacant, it was not an addition to staff.

Councilman Notaro asked if he had requests not in the budget?

Superintendent Vitale replied the sewer stipend was underpaid by about 70%, he requests it every year, he did request it but it was not on the timeline.

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CFO Stollenwerk referred to sheet 10, the stipend was there with a 4% increase.

Councilman Notaro asked Superintendent Vitale if he asked for it in writing?

Superintendent Vitale verbally spoke with Councilman Notaro about it. He explained the certification and courses associated with the certification.

Councilman Dewees asked did the supervisor need a public works certification?

Superintendent Vitale, relied no.

Councilwoman Carfagno asked for clarification of job titles.

CFO Stollenwerk talked about money to facilities improvements for smaller items, requests for football tower and little league field renovations.

Councilman Dewees added that fences need to be repaired, he estimated \$30,000.00 for the fields and \$25,000.00 for the fence behind City Hall.

Superintendent Vitale reviewed bids from last year, were around \$15,000.00; they may have gone up.

Clerk Canesi asked if he got three quotes, we may be able to get something better?

CFO Stollenwerk advised if over \$44,000.00 we would need to bid and would be a capital project, will prepare a capital plan for next meeting.

Clerk Canesi reminded all that the next meeting was a Planning Board night; we need to be done by 6:30.

CFO Stollenwerk asked was a 1.5 increase palatable to everyone? She noted that page 6 had the local tax increases.

Council President Polistina asked Councilman Dewees about the fences at the fields, how long ago was it?

Councilman Dewees advised he padded number a little, there were other areas that need to be repaired as well, several gates too, it would add up.

Councilman Smith inquired about the library tax.

CFO Stollenwerk explained it was set by the State, it was based on our assessment, that was the minimum tax amount.

Councilwoman Carfagno asked would it be different if we went to the county?

CFO Stollenwerk replied, it would be the same, there's no surplus, she explained the reserves.

Council President Polistina moved to operating expenses, the concessions RFP.

Clerk Canesi felt we may have to invest in a kitchen, we may need cooking facilities if vendor wanted to come in.

Councilman Leeds asked could we rent space to a food truck?

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Clerk Canesi discussed amending our ordinance to permit soliciting on city property, we need to be ready when approached.

Councilman Notaro felt we may get someone who would do the renovations.

Clerk Canesi suggested perhaps Mr. Slusher could point us in the right direction.

Councilwoman Bucci would inquire with Mr. Slusher.

PUBLIC SESSION/FIVE MINUTES PER SPEAKER

Council President Polistina opened the public portion of the meeting for any person to comment on any subject, he asked that they state their name and address for the record and observe the five-minute limit per speaker.

Seeing no one wishing to speak, Council President Polistina closed the public comment portion of this meeting.

MEETING NOTICES

Council President Polistina read the meeting notices.

At approximately 6:25pm, on motions properly made and seconded, this meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon Campbell, RMC, Deputy Municipal Clerk