

MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION
CITY COUNCIL OF CREST HILL
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
March 25, 2024

The March 25, 2024 City Council work session was called to order by Mayor Raymond R. Soliman at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 20600 City Center Blvd. Crest Hill, Will County, Illinois.

The following Council members were present: Mayor Raymond Soliman, City Clerk Christine Vershay-Hall, City Treasurer Glen Conklin, Alderman Scott Dyke, Alderman John Vershay, Alderman Darrell Jefferson, Alderwoman Claudia Gazal, Alderperson Tina Oberlin, Alderman Mark Cipiti, Alderman Joe Kubal.

Also Present were: Interim Administrator Tony Graff, Deputy Chief Jason Opiola, Finance Director Lisa Banovetz, Interim Human Resource Manager Dave Strahl, Interim Community Development Director Ron Mentzer, City Attorney Mike Stiff, Administrative Clerk Zoe Gates.

Absent were: Alderman Nate Albert, Police Chief Ed Clark, City Engineer Ron Wiedeman, Interim Public Works Director Mike Eulitz, Interim City Planner Maura Rigoni.

Mayor Soliman informed everyone that Alderman Albert is excused from the meeting tonight.

TOPIC: Cable Television

Mayor Soliman commented that there is a candidate for this position, but he is asking to table this item. The applicant had a couple of additions he would like added to the contract and our city attorney will need to go over these items.

Mayor Soliman informed everyone that at the request of the applicant this will be tabled to April 8, 2024.

TOPIC: 2024 Heritage Corridor Travel Guide

Alderman Scott Dyke commented that this is something we have done in the past and since we had advertised last year, we are able to receive the legacy advertising size and rate. He commented that we have always had an eighth of a page and were paying approximately \$1,050.00 for that size. Alderman Dyke asked the Council members if we should do a quarter page for \$850.00 for both. He also commented that this needs to be turned in by April 5, 2024.

Mayor Soliman asked if anyone had an objection. There were no objections.

TOPIC: Request to replace damaged Squad Car

Deputy Chief Jason Opiola explained to the Council that Squad #939, a Ford Explorer Hybrid, was damaged in a crash on January 13, 2024. Fortunately, the officer was not injured badly in this wreck. The insurance company declared the car a total loss. The estimated cost of a new vehicle is approximately \$65,000.00 and the insurance company appraised our loss at \$28,174.77, leaving an approximate \$37,000.00 to replace this squad.

Alderman Dyke asked can the equipment related to the squad that is totaled be taken off and put on a new unit. Deputy Chief Opiola commented that anything that can be salvaged will be taken off to help with the cost.

Alderman Vershay asked how long it would take to get another vehicle. Deputy Chief commented that he does not have the time limit of when a new car would be available but would like this placeholder so when a hybrid vehicle becomes available, we can have the availability to do so.

Alderman Gazal asked if it is a good idea to add a line item when starting the new budget. Finance Director Lisa Banovetz commented that she had already included a vehicle purchase line item for police and there is \$37,000.00 in the budget and she did this since it is not a new addition but a replacement vehicle.

Alderman Oberlin asked if this wrecked vehicle was one of the vehicles that was going to be retired. Deputy Chief Opiola commented that he does not have that answer, but Deputy Chief Dobczyk handles fleet management and would be better to ask him.

Alderman Gazal asked how long it would be before we got the vehicle back. Deputy Chief Opiola commented that he does not know the availability of a hybrid vehicle since that is what they would prefer. He also commented that he is confident that we could get a gas vehicle quickly, but they would prefer the hybrid for the gas savings.

Mayor Soliman asked for an informal vote to replace squad #939 that was wrecked for a cost of approximately \$37,000.00/

AYES: Ald. Dyke, Vershay, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Kubal.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: Ald. Albert.

Mayor Soliman stated this would be on the agenda for the meeting on April 1, 2024.

TOPIC: Approve Surplus

Deputy Chief Jason Opiola commented that this is a follow-up to the previous agenda item regarding the total loss of squad. He also commented that there is an ordinance in the packet for the disposal of surplus personal property.

Mayor Soliman asked for comments or questions. There were none.

Mayor Soliman asked for an informal vote for the ordinance declaring certain personal property.

AYES: Ald. Kubal, Cipiti, Oberlin, Gazal, Jefferson, Vershay, Dyke.

NAYES: None

ABSENT: Ald. Albert.

Mayor Soliman stated this would be on the agenda for the meeting on April 1, 2024.

TOPIC: Rental Property

Interim Director of Community Development Ron Mentzer commented that Tolemi's BuildingBlocks rental property registration website platform was approved by the Council at the August 7, 2023 meeting. This would allow people to register their rental properties with the city. He commented that they are ready to go live but before they go live, he recommends we revise the city code to include a registration fee. This fee would help offset the cost of the platform to the city.

Interim Director Mentzer commented that he is proposing a \$50.00 registration fee for buildings with six or less units and a building with seven or more would pay a \$75.00 registration fee.

Alderman Dyke asked if the \$50.00 registration fee is per units or building. Interim Director Mentzer commented that it is per building. Alderman Dyke commented that he does not think that is right to charge \$50.00 for a single-family rental home and charge the same for a unit with six or less units. Interim Director Mentzer commented that this would help us have accurate information and keep us up to date. Alderman Dyke commented that he feels it would be better to charge each unit \$10.00. Interim Director Mentzer commented that it would be up to the Council to decide but staff is comfortable with the way it is proposed.

Alderman Oberlin asked Alderman Dyke if he feels this is too much. Alderman Dyke commented that if a person has a single-family home for rent, they are paying the same amount as a person with multiple units. Alderman Oberlin commented that for a single family we should just charge \$25.00 and then for multiple units we charge \$50.00 and \$75.00. Alderman Oberlin also commented that this would help us recoup the money for the program costs.

Alderman Dyke asked if we could do \$20.00 for a single-family home and then \$50.00 for six or less.

Alderman Oberlin asked if we have a limit on how many units can be in a building. Administrative Clerk Zoe Gates commented that the zoning ordinance allows up to six units currently in our residential zoning and any more than that would be up to the Plan Commission and City Council.

Alderman Jefferson commented that he agrees with Alderman Dyke.

Interim Director Mentzer commented that the City of Crest Hill has almost 2,100 buildings that have six or fewer units and sixty-eight buildings with over six units.

Alderman Vershay commented that he feels it would be best to just have a price per unit.

Administrative Clerk Gates commented that the software company will be collecting the registration fee and paying the city once a month.

Mayor Soliman commented that it sounds as if no one is objecting to charging a registration fee but is against the disbursement of the costs.

Mayor Soliman asked if Interim Director Mentzer could get some numbers and come back to the Council for the next meeting.

Interim Director Mentzer thanked Clerk Gates for doing the work on this and pointing out the need for a registration fee to help offset the cost to the city. Clerk Gates commented that she has been wanting to get the rental properties in a better position for a long time.

TOPIC: Noonan Variance

Interim Director of Community Development Ron Mentzer commented that the property owner installed a large shed (12'x32') on his property without a permit and unfortunately where the shed was placed it is in the setback and in a utility easement. The Plan Commission did recommend the variation for approval to remain in its current location with conditions.

Interim Director Mentzer commented that if the Council approves this, we will document the conditions and have the owner acknowledge that the shed is in the easements and if we needed to get into the utility easements, we will have access and the city would not be responsible for any damage to the structure, if that access created damage. Also, the property owner would be responsible for restoring the area that was in those utility easements if damaged.

Aldersperson Oberlin asked if it needs to have a base placed under the shed. Interim Director Mentzer commented that it needs to be placed on a hard surface which is part of the building code requirements and right now it is sitting on bricks, stone and wood and it needs to be anchored to the hard surface.

Aldersperson Oberlin commented that she is upset after reading that the prior building inspector is still haunting us.

Mayor Soliman asked if the Council approves the variance, what will happen if the current owner sold the property. Interim Director Mentzer commented that it would go with the land and go to the new owner. There would be an 'Unconditional Agreement and Consent' form that would be attached to the special zoning ordinance and the current owner would sign and acknowledge that he has reviewed and will apply with those conditions, and this would be recorded against the property and would show up in any title search done.

Alderman Dyke asked if the owner agreed with moving the shed to place the proper base under it. Bill Thomas, the Chairman of the Plan Commission, commented that the owner has agreed to lift the shed up and pour the cement surface and set it back down.

Commissioner Thomas approached the podium and stated that the Plan Commission took a report under consideration from our city engineer. This report stated that there is an easement but there are no utilities under that easement, and it also stated that there is no indication of any flooding in that area. He also commented that the property owner did not get a permit because he did not build it and did not think it would need a building permit since it was built in Indiana and placed on his property.

Aldersperson Oberlin commented that the owner has worked really hard on that house and has done a lot to the house.

Alderwoman Gazal commented that it is not fair that this property owner gets to leave his shed on the easement, and it will open a can of worms.

Alderman Cipiti asked if this does not pass what does the property owner have to do. Interim Director Mentzer commented that he would have to relocate the shed and the building code violations would need to be taken care of and if he does not it will be a code enforcement administrative hearing issue.

Mayor Soliman asked for an informal vote.

AYES: Ald. Oberlin, Cipiti, Kubal, Jefferson, Dyke.

NAYES: Ald. Vershay.

ABSTAIN: Ald. Gazal.

ABSENT: Ald. Albert.

Mayor Soliman commented that this will be on the agenda for a formal vote on April 1, 2024.

TOPIC: Holland Special Use and Variation: Cozy Pawz

Interim Community Development Director Ron Mentzer commented that this would be a special use for a dog daycare/kennel with a parking variation at 2551 Theodore Street. This appeared before the Plan Commission in February and March. This is an existing four-unit metal building, and the business owner is looking to lease the north end of the building. She has operated this business in two other locations previously. The applicant plans to install a fence on the north side of the building. The Plan Commission thought this was a reasonable use of the property and recommended unanimous approval of the special use permit that would allow this business to operate in that space and subject to certain conditions. The Plan Commission also recommended approval of a parking variation that would allow the business to have fewer parking spaces that normally would be required under the city's zoning requirements.

Interim Director Mentzer commented that there were many people who came to the public hearing and testified in support of the business owner. There was one individual who did express his concern regarding the dogs barking.

Interim Director Mentzer commented that the dogs could stay overnight at this location and the way the special use recommendation is structured, it would allow someone to stay overnight in the building with the dogs.

Lisa Holland, the business owner, was in the audience and stated she is very grateful for the consideration.

Mayor Soliman asked for an informal vote.

AYES: Ald. Oberlin, Cipiti, Kubal, Dyke, Vershay, Jefferson, Gazal.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: Ald. Albert.

Mayor Soliman commented that this will be on the agenda for a formal vote on April 1, 2024.

TOPIC: Discussion of the Public Works Director Recruitment Process

Interim Human Resource Manager Dave Strahl commented that previously the Public Works Director posting was presented to the City Council, and it was decided at that time to be tabled but Interim Manager Strahl wanted direction regarding when it could be posted and what the process would be.

It was also mentioned that the Community Development Director position has closed, and Interim Director Mentzer and Interim Manager Strahl are in the process of reviewing and evaluating the applicants.

Interim Manager Strahl commented that the City Council had directed staff to present the candidates they felt had minimally qualified, and pending the direction given tonight on the process of the Public Works Director, he is asking that that same process be implied to the Community Development Director process, as well.

Interim Manager Strahl commented that he is confident that himself and Interim Director Mentzer can provide the candidates to the City Council that they feel are most qualified and this would also apply to the Public Works Director position but with Interim Director Mike Eulitz.

Interim Manager Strahl also asked the Council what the proposed salary range would be for the Public Works Director. He also noted that the draft posting that originally went out had a number that was above the compensation study that was presented to the Council in February of 2023 and this study was based on 2022 with comparable communities.

Interim Manager Strahl commented that he knows the City Council wanted to wait on these positions until a permanent city administrator was hired so the new administrator could decide. He also commented that if these positions were already filled and whoever the city administrator would be coming in, is going to be collaborating with those people anyways and it would not matter if that city administrator had a weigh-in on these positions at this point. He also stated that if we choose the right people for these positions, they will be able to work with whomever the city administrator will be, especially since they have been reviewed by other professionals within the organization.

Interim Manager Strahl commented with all that said he is asking for direction from the Council on how the Council would like the staff to review the applicants, whether we can proceed with the posting, and what that salary range would be for posting purposes.

Alderperson Oberlin commented that she feels that if Interim Manager Strahl and Interim Director Eulitz present the top applicants to the Council for the Public Work Director position, and as long as all the resumes are available to the Council, if there are any questions, she personally would not have a problem with that, and same with the Community Development Director position but with Interim Manager Strahl and Interim Director Mentzer.

Alderwoman Gazal questioned the groupings in the salary study. Interim Manager Strahl commented that there is a grouping for the various positions, and he believed the Public Works Director, Police Chief, Finance Director, and Community Development Director are all in the same grouping which is category six. He also commented that unfortunately that was provided in his attachments, but it did not make it into the material for the Council

to review and offered to forward the material. Alderwoman Gazal asked if he knew why that happened and if the attachments were not pulled. He responded that yes unfortunately his attachments were not pulled and attached. Alderwoman Gazal commented that it looks like we play games here and it is funny how certain papers can be pulled but the rest is not. She then thanked Interim Manager Strahl for everything he does.

Treasurer Conklin asked if he had any thoughts on the timeline of when to do this. Interim Manager Strahl commented that we can post the Public Work Director this week and then recommend leaving open for approximately thirty days and posting it to the APWA, ILCMA.

Treasurer Conklin asked if the salary range would be with the COLA adjustments. Interim Manager Strahl commented that he recommended \$129,000.00 to \$169,000.00 and this was the amount recommended in the study for the actuals plus a two percent COLA for 2023. Treasurer Conklin asked if the Council is inclined to move this forward and is this something that would need a formal Council vote. Interim Manager Strahl commented that normally it would not but since he originally proposed a process and was directed to not post it by the Council, he did not move forward, so the question would be if they are wanting to direct him to proceed with the posting or continue to wait.

Alderwoman Gazal asked if the Council could have the rest of the missing paperwork in the next agenda and do we need to go into executive session for this. Interim Manager Strahl commented that he can include the missing paperwork and he feels it is fine to go to a public meeting since it is a study that has already been presented and is public information of salary ranges.

Attorney Stiff commented that you then can have an agenda item for Council direction, and you do not need an ordinance or a formal vote. Alderwoman Gazal asked if he could email the rest of the missing packet so the Council would have time to review it prior to the meeting. Interim Manager Strahl commented that he would email it and he is not sure why it was not included with the memo since it was one package, and it is strange that his packet/file was broken apart.

Alderman Cipiti asked if Interim Manager Strahl presented all the documents that you wanted to discuss tonight but they all did not appear on the agenda. Interim Manager Strahl commented that there were back-up items that were referenced in the memo that were not included in the agenda and he just realized that this evening when he was checking the items.

TOPIC: Revised Fiscal Year 2024-25 Budget

Treasurer Conklin commented that we still have a little more time, we are currently in the red ink on the budget, and we are needing to know if Council is willing to pass a budget in the red ink or whether there should be direction in regarding where to trim some expenses. He commented that the major concern for us is the General Fund, and the revenue projections are reasonable, but our expenses are outside of that. This is a matter of our wishes being greater than our projected income.

Alderwoman Gazal commented that she noticed there were some cuts from the engineer side and wondered what exactly was cut.

Finance Director Banovetz commented that the current projection for the current deficit is (\$6,747,127.00) and we were able to reduce that deficit by \$660,467.00. She then answered Alderwoman Gazal's question commenting that most of that was Engineer Wiedeman who cut some capital expenditure projects. She stated that he removed Phase II of the entrance signs for \$125,000.00, removal of the Theodore retaining wall project for \$475,000.00 and removal of city park improvements which was going to be offset by the DCEO grant but there is concern we could be waiting for the reimbursement a long time.

Director Banovetz commented that the biggest concern is the General Fund, which is rolling up a deficit of \$150,000.00, which may not sound like a material amount but if you think about increases in salaries and benefits and general cost for inflation and your expenses are out passing your revenue, there is a problem.

Director Banovetz commented that she had talked to the Interim City Administrator Graff regarding the new position that is budgeted in the Police Department for an Administrative Clerk position, and this would be a total with benefits approximately \$80,000.00. Alderwoman Gazal commented that she thought they already hired an administrative clerk. Director Banovetz commented that they did add a Clerk to replace the clerk that left, and they hired an additional person for their FOIA specialist, but they are looking to hire an additional full-time employee. Director Banovetz also stated from a conservative standpoint she feels since our budget is in deficit, we should not add another full-time employee. Alderwoman Gazal asked Deputy Chief Opiola who needed this position and why. Deputy Chief Opiola commented that he did not speak to Chief Clark regarding this position. He stated that we have the Records Supervisor, full-time clerk and a part-time clerk and he believes this would be for a second full-time clerk. He also commented that he does not want to speak on this since he does not have all the information and does not know what Chief Clark's reasoning would be. He then stated that the Records Division would be managed more under Deputy Chief Dobczyk since he manages more of the day-to-day operations. Alderwoman Gazal commented that the part-time person wanted the full-time position and wondered if we could just increase her to the full-time position.

Alderwoman Gazal commented that she read the article in the newspaper regarding El Guerro Grocery Store that they are opening another location in Joliet. She also commented that she remembered that they had wanted to increase their storage and their bakery section and when she saw the article she reached out to Sammy from El Guerro and Sammy told her there is a big possibility they would be closing the Crest Hill location. She also commented that Sammy stated they were upset they could not do the expansion at the Crest Hill location, and this is why they went to the Joliet location. Alderwoman Gazal commented to keep in mind that Walgreens is closing and now possibly El Guerro which is another six percent.

Treasurer Conklin commented that we are looking at approximately \$30,000.00 in sales tax gone and he would have thought Walgreens to be a big producer of sales tax, but they have never brought in more than the gas stations.

Treasurer Conklin commented that we picked up approximately \$8,000.00 from the Property Tax Rebate since we budgeted \$250,000.00. He commented that our big challenge is to cut some costs here because Director Banovetz has pushed the revenue to the point where we are comfortable but also uncomfortable.

Alderwoman Gazal also commented that we have been talking about cutting the property tax rebate program and she wanted to remind everyone that this was promised to the residents, even though I agree that we should have that money go towards fixing the streets. She also commented that the residents voted for this rebate, and we need to do a survey and ask them if they would rather have the check or put the money towards fixing the streets before the program is cut all together.

Treasurer Conklin commented that there needs to be some direction to see if you are looking to pass a deficit budget or looking to have \$150,000.00 in expenses trimmed.

Director Banovetz commented that the capital projects besides from the streets are a one-time project and the nice thing about the water/sewer projects is that those were factored into our rate study and the rates overtime will absorb that amount of money.

Interim Administrator Graff commented that we are in a good position, we know what the problem is and will address it. He also commented that he agreed with the treasurer regarding the sale of the old city hall helping but then we would need to put that into reserve or a restricted fund. As of right now, we have a fund balance that is unrestricted, and a policy can be created to start restricting that fund balance which will give more assurance that our bond rating stays healthy, and our auditors see that we are taking a responsible look and not just spending the reserves. He also commented that Director Banovetz has done a really good job with the department heads trying to find the few thousand dollars but getting to the \$150,000.00 mark is going to be hard. He also wanted to mention that if the part-time employee in the Police Department would want to become a full-time employee that would be a savings.

Treasurer Conklin commented that if we could find \$150,000.00 worth of cuts and pass the budget and as time goes on, we find our revenue projections were short, we could amend our budget. Alderperson Oberlin commented that if you think you can find cuts that is great, but she does not feel we should try and pass a balanced budget that is not going to be balanced throughout the year and this would not be a good idea.

Director Banovetz commented that possibly what the treasurer is talking about is holding off on the full-time position in the Police Department which would save \$80,000.00 and if things improve next year, then amend the budget to put that back in.

Duputy Chief Opiola commented that the Police Department position that we are speaking of is a Civil Service position and there is already a current list and if you do not go by the list there would be some legal issues and you would have to contact the union Attorney John Kelly. Director Banovetz commented that this position would have to be offered to the internal employees before going to the civil service list.

Director Banovetz commented that our insurance rate is increasing which will increase our premiums. She also commented that every time there is a claim brought against the city for whatever reason that goes to our experience rate and when our insurance carrier estimates what our premiums will be they look at that rate and our rate has increased by thirty percent.

Alderman Cipiti asked what that thirty percent would be in a dollar amount. Director Banovetz commented that it is about \$300,000.00.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Stuart Soifer, a resident, commented that he wanted to make sure they are aware of the precedence that the Council is setting regarding the shed on Noonan Street. He stated that you are allowing residents to do something without getting the city's approval and then years later when they are caught, they will say that 'Adam Smith' employed by the city told me it was okay. He also stated that there have been past residents who had to take things down because they did not have a permit.

MAYOR UPDATES:

Mayor Soliman commented that on March 15, 2024 Interim City Administrator Graff, Interim Community Development Director Ron Mentzer, City Engineer Ron Wiedeman, and the Mayor met with Representative Natalie Manley and her Chief of Staff. Mayor Soliman stated that she is going to be issuing a \$250,000.00 grant to Crest Hill. He also commented that Representative Manley would like to distribute the \$250,000.00 grant into twenty-five \$10,000.00 grants to non-profit organizations within the City of Crest Hill or non-profit organizations within the regional area that the city deals with. Representative Manley would like each Council member to produce a list of twenty-five non-profit organizations that they would like to support. Mayor Soliman commented that we will combine the lists together and see who we have.

COMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES:

There were no Committee/Liaison updates.

CITY ADMINISTRATOR UPDATES:

Interim City Administrator Graff commented that he has a memo in the packet and if anyone has questions, they can give him a call.

Aldерwoman Gazal asked when they will be discussing the non-union salary raises. Treasurer Conklin commented that there is a placeholder for these salary raises, and we are waiting for one more and then we will have this on the agenda.

Aldерwoman Gazal also asked when the deadline for the budget is for the record. Treasurer Conklin stated for the record, the budget could pass without individual salaries being discussed. Aldерwoman Gazal commented that it is not going to pass without the salaries being discussed. Treasurer Conklin commented that would be one person's decisions on behalf of eight and if it is the Councils will to get those passed with a name then that is not on the Treasury Department. He also stated that from a budget standpoint it is not necessary to have that done prior.

Aldерperson Oberlin commented that she would like to have this discussion as well and if we can put a deadline on when people turn things in for the packet, then we can put a deadline on this.

Mayor Soliman asked for a motion to go into executive session on Personnel 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1).

(#1) Motion by Alderperson Oberlin seconded by Alderwoman Gazal, to go into an executive session on Personnel 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1).

On roll call, the vote was:

AYES: Ald. Cipiti, Kubal, Dyke, Vershay, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: Ald. Albert.

There being seven (7) affirmative votes, the MOTION CARRIED.

Executive Session 8:37 p.m.

(#2) Motion by Alderperson Oberlin seconded by Alderman Jefferson to reconvene from the executive session on Personnel 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1).

On roll call, the vote was:

AYES: Ald. Dyke, Vershay, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Kubal.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: Ald. Albert.

There being seven (7) affirmative votes, the MOTION CARRIED.

Reconvened at 10:45 p.m.

There being no further business before the Council, and no action needed from the executive session, the meeting is adjourned.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:45 pm.

Approved this _____ day of _____, 2024

As presented _____

As amended _____

CHRISTINE VERSHAY-HALL, CITY CLERK

RAYMOND R. SOLIMAN, MAYOR