

Village of Hiram

Finance/Safety Committee Meeting Minutes

February 22, 2022

Call to Order: Chris Szell called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm

Committee Members Present: Lou Bertrand, Mayor
Chris Szell, Chairman
David Smith, Councilman
Paul Spencer, Councilman at 6:04 pm
Susan Skrovan, Fiscal Officer

Committee Members Absent: Beth Greenwood, Councilperson

Hiram Officials Present: Frank Hemphill, Councilman
Brian Gregory, Police Chief
Bill Byers, Fire Chief
James McGee, Village Administrator
Steven Schuller, Asst. Village Administrator

Others: None

Agenda: A motion to approve the proposed agenda for Finance/Safety as presented was made by Mayor Bertrand with a second from Mr. Smith. Motion passed unanimously.

Minutes: A motion to approve the meeting minutes of January 25, 2022 as presented was made by Mayor Bertrand with a second from Mr. Szell. Motion passed unanimously.

Guests/Public: None

Department Updates:

Police Department: Police Chief Brian Gregory provided his report.

All personal body cameras (10) and software have been purchased. Brian will apply in June for a grant to reimburse the expenses incurred.

Our Police Department has received reimbursement from the Ohio Attorney General's office for our Critical Incident Training (CIT) in the amount of \$1,860.00. The reimbursement covers 50% of their 8-hour training course up to four officers. These funds are restricted and can only be used for training.

Substitute House Bill 51 has been put into law; providing temporary authority for members of a public body to meet by means of teleconference or video conference. It expires July 1, 2022.

A date for the pancake breakfast/car show fundraiser should be set by the end of this week.

Chief Gregory plans to meet Friday with the Sheriff's office over an incident at the College and the amount of time it took them to respond. They never contacted us, Garrettsville as a backup and never requested EMS for a squad! Protocol was not followed. More discussion followed.

Fire Department: Chief Bill Byers reported that our Solicitor Tom Reitz has been provided Exhibit A on the squad purchase for him to review prior to legislation coming before Council. Purchase will be through Pfund. Pfund Superior Sales is on the state bid program. They will be meeting with him soon.

Regarding the Village siren, there has been problems with it in the past; he wants to have it serviced. The service fee cost will be \$500.00 and asks Finance for approval of the service.

A motion to approve the \$500.00 for the Village Siren service fee was made by Mr. Spencer and seconded by Mayor Bertrand. Motion passed unanimously.

Chief Byers brought up VASU Communications; they will be coming out Thursday to discuss the MARCS grant. The MARCS grant deadline is July; however, getting radios by that time may be very difficult. Chief Byers may ask for an extension of the deadline given recent supply chain issues and other events that have occurred. Chief is moving forward but cautiously. He does not want any issues with not getting all the radios and having to return the \$38,000!

Village Adm/Utilities: VA James McGee reported on the phone system. The phones have almost all been installed and programmed. The project is 90-95% complete. Spectrum has three more phones to provide and install.

The gas line has been installed; Dominion still has a mess to clean up.

Nothing new on the water meter replacement project or the water tower project at this time.

Nothing new on the water plant generator.

Mayor: The Mayor conducted a wedding ceremony on February 14th; the funds were turned over to the Fiscal Officer's office.

The Mayor had a meeting today with College President Hancy and their Vice-President Mrs. Welch. He noted that two students will be coming through ROTC at Hiram College! The Mayor discussed with them the idea of a police district and brought up the need to increase the fire and police contract with the College. They are going to meet again next month.

Paul Spencer mentioned an option should we be unable to increase the stipend from the College; we can always increase the income tax. A blanket increase for the entire Village. It would be painful for the residents but would benefit the residents; we could kick it up to 3.0%. The Mayor felt a good test would be to see what happens in Mantua Village. They have an increase on the ballot for May. Susan said this would be their second attempt; it failed in November. Chris asked, increasing the income tax rate is different than addressing the tax credit? Paul said yes, we could still give residents a tax credit, so the 700 people that live here would not pay. The majority of the people working in the Village would pay. Steve said we will go over this more in detail with his PowerPoint presentation on the General Fund revenue.

Fiscal Officer/Admin: Susan Skrovan reported that she was out of the office last week; tested positive for COVID. She did take work home during that time. She is not quite closed out of the 2021-year end.

Susan asked Finance/Safety members how long the Village wants to pay for ZOOM. We currently pay monthly for this service. The Governor extended the ability to have remote meetings through June. It is about \$16.00 per month. Members said for six months to July 1st.

Susan brought up the I-Pad that was provided to Rob Dempsey during COVID; he has not returned it. When asked, Rob thought that maybe Council would let him keep the unit. Susan wanted feedback from the members since it is Village property and has a value of over \$1,000. Finance/Safety members felt that the I-Pad should be returned and offered to a new member of Council. Susan said she would follow up with Rob Dempsey. His keys were all turned in.

Bills List: Bills list was reviewed. A motion to pay the bills was made by Mayor Bertrand with a second from Mr. Spencer. Motion passed unanimously.

Unfinished Business: None

New Business: a. **General Fund Discussion:** Assistant VA Steve Schuller presented the Finance/Safety members with a spreadsheet and PowerPoint presentation to review our General Fund. Steve went slide by slide explaining his findings. Moving the capital funds back to the General Fund was a band aid along with a large lump sum received from Bureau of Workers Compensation. The General Fund continues to drop revenue and a solution will need to be found. Steve met with our County Auditor to review every piece of property the College owns; 77 properties. Steve wanted to find out what properties they do not pay property taxes on. \$194,580.00 they are not paying! Steve knows they are non-profit; however, they are asking for services from the Village that they receive. Steve's idea is to follow a program that has been used along the eastern seaboard where a small Village with a College is provided a stipend for Village services in lieu of property taxes they do not pay. Steve said \$100,000 would solve our problem. The services are not only from fire and police; they also receive services from the whole Village, administrative and streets. Dave Smith asked if the \$195,000 was based on outside millage? Steve said it is based on their tax evaluation. That would be just the Village's portion which would go directly into the General Fund. Susan said she believes this would be inside millage; not outside millage which are any levies. Paul said don't do away with the credit. Steve added the numbers he received from RITA, reducing the tax credit to 50% would bring in \$50,000; remove the tax credit and you would bring in \$94,000 more annually. It will be a hard sell to the College to tell them while you do not pay the income taxes, you want them to pay more. More discussion. The Mayor said we have some choices; we go to the College and discuss the police & fire contract and discuss a stipend from them in lieu of property taxes we do not get. More discussion on the timeline to place an additional levy on the ballot versus reducing our credit.

Steve discussed the shortages in the General Fund due to other things besides salaries/wages. Steve said when you take a close look at these numbers and see where the cost and expenses are, you will be shocked! Paul said employees will want a cost of living increase every year; the Village will keep pushing out more and more money without revenue increasing. Steve said the entire budget for the Police Department was \$326,000 last year; police have raised \$64,000 in the last five years. The Street Department has dropped \$25,000, Council has gone up by \$12,000, legal went up \$13,000, Administration has remained the same. In the last five years, we have only raised expenses out of the General Fund by \$68,000. We are trying to run the Village and do not have enough revenue to do what we are supposed to be doing. The answer is not to cut more with only two in the streets and only two in the office.

Paul said the Village cannot run in the red; we can do one of two things, bring up the revenue or cut costs. Until you get the money coming in, you have to cut. Steve said we should not even be talking about cuts until we cut the tax credit! Steve said many of the residents feel the same way, because what are you going to cut? Paul said let's see if we can increase the revenue; lets go to the College first. More discussion on ways to bring in revenue with parking tickets, driving violations, parking meters and a bed tax.

Susan said taking a look at the surrounding Villages, Garrettsville, Mantua, Windham; none of them offer a 100% tax credit and all have more businesses than we do, besides the College. Their businesses and residents all help support their services. That is why Garrettsville can pay their police more than we can. Paul felt we could increase our income tax rate to 3.0% and give a 50% credit back to the people. More discussion on what to do first, reduce the credit or ask for an increase first and then ask to reduce the credit. Members reviewed the documents provided.

A motion to have Chris Szell, Mayor Bertrand and Asst. VA Steve Schuller meet with Hiram College to see if they would be willing to give the Village an operating stipend and start negotiations at \$195,000 was made by Mayor Bertrand with a second from Mr. Szell. Motion passed unanimously.

A motion to recommend legislation to come before Council to increase the Income Tax by .25% for a total of 2.5% and consider reducing the credit to 1.0% of the new total income tax of 2.5% was made by Mayor Bertrand with a second from Mr. Szell. Motion passed unanimously.

b. Township Property-Ryder Road Garage and Garfield Road Township Hall: The Mayor said he spoke with Jack Groselle regarding their properties. Finance discussed their options; they are not interested in the Township Hall. They would be open to discussing the Township Garage once they know the asking price. James could find many uses for that building and then the street garage could be utilized by both police and fire. The Mayor will contact Jack.

c. Blighted/Nuisance Properties: Chris Szell invited Dominic, he could not attend tonight. Paul Spencer said we did get a letter from the owners of the Plum Ridge property; they are struggling to obtain funds to make the necessary repairs. The other two properties Paul has been in conversations with are the house on the Couch farm and a house with a partial roof caved in. The last place is the house next to the old gas station; that house is non-conforming and vacant. Members discussed how far to push and which property to address first.

A motion to advise our Solicitor to take action with the blighted property on Plum Ridge was made by Mr. Spencer with a second from Mr. Smith. Motion passed unanimously.

EMS Collections: None

Any Other Business:

The next Finance/Safety Committee meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 29, 2022.

Adjournment: A Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mr. Szell with a second from Mayor Bertrand. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 7:57 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Attest:


Susan J. Skrovan, Fiscal Officer


Chris Szell, Finance Chairman