



City of Richmond

Council Budget Amendment Work Session 1 Minutes

900 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219
www.rva.gov/office-city-clerk

Wednesday, April 21, 2021

1:00 PM

Council Chamber, 2nd Floor - City Hall
Virtual Meeting

Councilmembers Present

The Honorable Cynthia Newbille, President
The Honorable Ellen Robertson, Vice President
The Honorable Andreas Addison (early departure)
The Honorable Michael Jones
The Honorable Katherine Jordan
The Honorable Ann-Frances Lambert
The Honorable Kristen Larson (late arrival and early departure)
The Honorable Stephanie Lynch (late arrival)
The Honorable Reva Trammell

Staff Present

Haskell Brown, Interim City Attorney
Joyce Davis, Interim Chief of Staff
Bill Echelberger, Council Budget Analyst
Samson Anderson, Council Budget Analyst
Candice Reid, City Clerk
Steve Taylor, Council Policy Analyst
Dominique J. Thaxton, Assistant City Clerk
RJ Warren, Deputy City Clerk

Council President Cynthia Newbille called the meeting to order at 1:07 p.m. and presided.

ELECTRONIC MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

Assistant City Clerk Dominique J. Thaxton, in accordance with Ordinance No. 2020-093, adopted April 9, 2020, as most recently amended by Ordinance No. 2020-232, adopted December 14, 2020, announced the work session would be held through electronic communication means, and stated that notice of the session was provided to the public through a public information advisory issued on February 11, 2021, and through Legistar on the city website in accordance with usual practice. She also stated there would be no opportunities for public comment and no public hearings during the session.

Discussion of Proposed Amendments

Bill Echelberger, Council Budget Analyst, provided an overview of Council's proposed amendments to the FY2021-2022 budget proposal. Mr. Echelberger provided information on the various categories of Council's proposed amendments and how the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 may potentially impact the proposed amendments.

A copy of the material provided has been filed.

Councilor Kristen Larson joined the meeting at 1:13 p.m.

Councilor Ann-Frances Lambert asked for clarification on the proposed amendment to add a one full-time equivalent (FTE) position for the Office of the City Assessor. Councilor Lambert expressed concern for the shortage of city permit and code enforcement officials in the Department of Planning and Development Review.

Mr. Echelberger provided additional information on the intended function of the FTE position proposed for the Office of the City Assessor.

Councilwoman Reva Trammell expressed concern for the shortage of permit and code enforcement officers. Councilwoman Trammell shared that delays in the permit process was resulting in residents performing unauthorized building on homes.

Mr. Echelberger shared information on the proposed Council amendment that would fund 12.5 frozen FTE's within the Department of Planning and Development Review for various staffing needs, including code enforcement and permit officials.

Councilor Andreas Addison suggested the need for a reimagining of the city's building permit process and stated that the proposed FTE for the Office of the City Assessor may cause further frustration for citizens who are trying to go through the proper process for obtaining building permits.

Vice President Ellen Robertson concurred with the idea of improving the city's building permit process to eliminate inordinate delays. Vice President Robertson shared the need for also reexamining the way that real estate revenue projections are generated from the Office of the City Assessor.

Councilor Katherine Jordan shared the need for both additional FTE positions within the Department of Planning and Development Review, and a review of the permit process.

Councilor Addison stated that an analysis of permit and code enforcement staff turnover rates in addition to a process review is imperative.

Lincoln Saunders, Acting Chief Administrative Officer, shared that the administration has been working on developing new standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the Department of Planning and Development Review. Mr. Saunders suggested that satellite imagery technology is an opportunity to streamline the services of the Office of the City Assessor.

Councilor Lambert asked if there is a timeline for when the SOP changes for the Department of Planning and Development Review will be completed.

Sharon Ebert, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer of Economic and Community Development, shared information on the current permit review process and the stated that the SOP changes are expected to be in operation by July 1, 2021.

Councilor Addison inquired if the increase in assessed real estate value is trending citywide or if this increase only applies to certain sectors of the city.

Mr. Echelberger shared that the increase in real estate value is representative of a citywide trend.

Councilor Lambert asked for a breakdown of the Council priorities as outlined at the 2021 Council Retreat.

President Cynthia Newbille asked that the appropriate staff distribute the list of priorities outlined at the 2021 Council Retreat to Councilmembers.

President Newbille inquired about the proposed budget amendment request that would increase the contract for the city lobbyist.

Bill Echelberger, Council Budget Analyst, provided information on the city lobbyist contract increase related to lobbying the federal government in Washington, D.C.

Councilor Addison requested to withdraw his proposed budget amendment to increase the city lobbyist contract.

Councilor Stephanie Lynch joined the meeting at 2:03 p.m.

Mr. Echelberger provided an overview of the proposed amendment requesting that the Office of the City Auditor conduct a fiscal review of all city departments, including Richmond Public Schools (RPS) and inquired if the city has the authority to audit RPS.

Haskell Brown, Interim City Attorney, stated that the city has the authority to audit RPS but with a limited scope.

Councilor Kristen Larson asked for clarification on the proposed amendment to audit all city departments and RPS.

Councilor Addison provided further information on the proposed amendment for a citywide audit and stated that he will provide supplemental documents to Councilmembers for further clarification.

Councilor Michael Jones asked for clarification as to why the proposed Council budget amendments for affordable housing in the current scenario are displayed as being unfunded.

Mr. Echelberger shared that the current Council budget scenario depicts an unfunded affordable housing section due to the forthcoming American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP) funds. Mr. Echelberger stated that due to the limitations for how the ARP funds can be spent, he chose to employ a scenario that separates Council amendments that can be funded through ARP funds from the amendments for basic city services that must be funded through the general fund budget.

Councilwoman Reva Trammell expressed support for fully funding the public safety budget requests and shared the importance of prioritizing city services that cannot be funded through the expected ARP funds.

Vice President Robertson requested an analysis of all federal relief funds received during the COVID-19 pandemic that were reserved for affordable housing and how the funds were actually used.

President Cynthia Newbille asked that the appropriate staff provide Councilmembers with an analysis of how federal relief funds have been expended during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to provide clarification on the permitted use of the ARP funds when guidelines become available.

Councilor Lambert asked for further information on a proposed alternative public safety pay plan increase, and if there is time to vet the proposal before the FY2022 budget is adopted.

Mr. Echelberger stated that the review of the proposed alternative public safety pay plan increase may take several months and will not be ready before the adoption of the FY2022 budget.

President Cynthia Newbille provided information on the proposed amendment to conduct a study to evaluate the alternative public safety pay plan increase.

Lincoln Saunders, Acting Chief Administrative Officer, shared that the pay and compensation adjustment as recommended by the Gallagher study of 2018 was previously implemented for public safety employees but not for general employees.

Councilor Kristen Larson expressed support for adequately compensating public safety officials and underscored the need for a third party review of the proposed pay plan increase.

Mr. Echelberger provided analysis of the proposed budget amendments that would provide supplemental salary increases to the Office of the Public Defender.

Mr. Saunders shared information on the potential implications for providing supplemental salary increases to the Office of the Public Defender.

Councilor Stephanie Lynch provided examples of localities across the Commonwealth of Virginia that have funded pay parity between the Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney and the Office of the Public Defender. Councilor Lynch discussed that the Office of the Public Defender provides essential services to citizens who cannot afford to hire private representation.

Councilor Andreas Addison left the meeting at 2:57 p.m.

Colette McEachin, Commonwealth's Attorney for the City of Richmond, expressed support for pay parity for the Office of the Public Defender, but urged that parity not be achieved by removing funds from the Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney's budget. Ms. McEachin provided information on the essential duties of the Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney.

Councilor Lynch shared that the proposed Council budget amendment to provide supplemental salary increases to the Office of the Public Defender is not suggesting that funding be removed from the Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney.

Mr. Echelberger shared that the only budget cuts presented in the current Council budget scenario is to cut optional funding to charitable organizations by ten percent.

Councilor Lynch provided information on the proposed budget amendments for the Civilian Review Board.

Vice President Ellen Robertson requested a list of the charitable organizations projected to have a ten percent decrease in funding and information on how said decrease would impact the organizations.

Vice President Robertson expressed concern that the presented Council budget amendment scenario did not take funding affordable housing into consideration.

Councilor Michael Jones expressed concern that affordable housing was not at the forefront of Council's budget discussion.

President Newbille shared that the chosen format of the budget amendment work session was intended to be a way to initiate conversation on priorities and consensus.

Councilor Lynch shared that Council committed support for affordable housing through RES. 2020-053, adopted September 28, 2020. Councilor Lynch stated that the forthcoming ARP funds offer a unique opportunity to make progress in funding affordable housing and urged that a dedicated source of revenue be identified for future budgets to fund the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF).

Councilwoman Trammell expressed support for funding the AHTF and reiterated the need for adequately funding the public safety pay plan increase. Councilwoman Trammell requested to discuss the proposed reduction in the Richmond Ambulance Authority (RAA) budget at a future budget work session.

Councilor Katherine Jordan stated the need for better guidelines and regulation for the use of the AHTF.

Councilor Larson left the meeting at 3:14 p.m.

Vice President Robertson underscored that the ARP funds are a one-time relief payment and the city should be strategic in determining the best use of the funds.

Bill Echelberger, Council Budget Analyst, provided information on the upcoming budget amendment work sessions.

President Cynthia Newbille requested that the appropriate staff distribute the Council budget amendment spreadsheet and other working documents to Councilmembers ahead of the upcoming budget work sessions.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:24 p.m.

CITY CLERK