

Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Finance Committee
New Philadelphia City Council

February 201, 2024

Council Chambers at City Hall

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 PM by Chairman Steve Rippeth.

Mr. Rippeth Called the Roll: Members in attendance were :

Mr. Rippeth - Chairman
Mr. Dan Lanzer
Mr. Chris Kreinbihl
Mrs. Cheryl Ramos (Alternate)

Additional Meeting Participants included: City Council President, Mr. Don Kemp; At- Large Councilman, Mr. Tom Simmelink; Ward 2 Councilman, Mr. Mitch Pace; City Auditor, Mrs. Beth Gundy; Service Director, Mr. Greg Popham; Service Director, Mr. Ron McAbier; Fire Chief, Mr. Jim Parrish; Police Chief, Ms. Tessa Pohovey; Park Director, Mr. Rod Miller; and Health Commissioner, Vickie Ionno.

Representatives of the press and other non-participating city employees were in attendance as well.

Mr. Rippeth opened the meeting with a statement thanking all the Department Heads for their attendance and their dedication and hard work on the budget so far. He reminded everyone that the purpose of this meeting was to get all the experts in their respective areas together to TRY to come up with a budget that Council can pass before the March 31 deadline. He encouraged everyone to focus today's activities on solving the short term issues of obtaining a balanced budget in the General Fund and said that all options should be on the table to do so. He acknowledged that there are long term issued that must be addressed moving forward but emphasized that TODAY we are here to create a workable budget that can be passed on time while continuing to meet the needs and service expectations of the residents of the city. He called on the leaders of each department, as expert in the their areas, that they know better than this Committee or the Council where we can afford to trim our spending. (A copy of notes from the Opening Statement is Attached)

Mr. Rippeth asked the Auditor to update the gathering on where we currently stand with the General Fund and Mrs. Gundy responded that the General Fund has a shortage of just under \$400,000. Mr. Rippeth asked if the Auditor had the ability to move any additional funds from any investments or Other funds in the budget into the General Fund to help offset this deficit. Mr. McAbier echoed that question stating that there was a rumor of funds "somewhere in a sock drawer" that were no showing on the General Fund. Mrs. Gundy told the Committee that there were no such funds.

Mr. Rippeth opened the floor to members of the Committee and each member was able to ask questions about any specific line items in nearly every departmental budget area and allowed the Department Heads to explain what those budgeted amounts represented. Questions about larger than expected increases on certain line items, issues like maintenance and operations in certain areas, health insurance costs, etc were discussed with the Auditor and Department Heads explaining why those items were in the budget.

Through the process of these questions a small number of small areas of savings were identified that the Auditor was going to adjust in the proposed budget. These savings were well short of the necessary savings needed to balance the budget.

Conversation between Committee Members, Department Heads, and the Auditor continued for the balance of the meeting with no other savings identified.

It was determined that Mr. Rippeth would meet with the Mayor as soon as he was back from his illness to try to formulate a plan to reach a balanced budget on time and would schedule another Finance Committee Meeting after that discussion.

At 4:41 PM Mr. Lanzer moved for adjournment and the meeting was adjourned.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I want to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to each and every one of you for your dedication and hard work that has brought us to this crucial moment. The tasks ahead of us are significant, but I have every confidence that together, as a unified team, we can navigate the challenges before us.

Today marks a pivotal moment in our fiscal planning as we gather to address the pressing issue of rectifying shortages and striving towards a balanced budget. Our responsibility to the citizens we serve is paramount, and it's imperative that we approach this task with diligence, creativity, and a shared commitment to our collective mission.

I want to acknowledge that the work each department does is invaluable to our community. As we embark on this journey, it's essential to recognize that we face tough decisions ahead. We must distinguish between necessities and discretionary spending, understanding that our ultimate goal is to ensure that essential services are maintained and that our citizens continue to receive the quality of care and support they deserve and expect.

Our focus today is on taking the necessary steps, as difficult as that may be, to achieve a balanced budget that we can present to Council to pass by March 31. While it is incumbent upon us to address systemic issues and seek sustainable solutions that will secure our financial future. That is a much larger issue and needs to be a separate focus from today and involves long term policy issues that can not be addressed today.

I want to emphasize that this committee recognizes the unique expertise of each department. You are the experts in determining your departmental needs. While we may not fully understand the intricacies of your operations, we trust in your judgment and believe that you have unique insight to allow you to identify areas where efficiencies can be realized without compromising our core objectives.

Now more than ever, we must come together as a cohesive unit, leveraging our collective strengths and expertise to navigate these challenging times. We must be prepared to make sacrifices, to prioritize wisely, and to work collaboratively towards our shared goal of fiscal responsibility and service to our community.

In closing, I implore each of you to approach this endeavor with an open mind and a spirit of cooperation. Let us harness the power of teamwork to find innovative solutions and make the difficult choices necessary to achieve a balanced budget. Our citizens are counting on us, and together, I am confident that we can rise to the challenge before us.

Thank you.