

# THE GENEVA CITY COUNCIL

## JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS

### SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING

October 13, 2021 – 6:00 PM

Cornell AgriTech Campus, Jordan Hall  
630 W. North Street  
Geneva, NY 14456

Presiding – Steve Valentino, Mayor (arrived at 6:18pm)

#### 1. ROLL CALL

Present: Clr. Regan, Clr. Camera, Clr. Gaglianese, Clr. Noone, Clr. Pruetz, Clr. Burrall,  
Clr. Pealer and Clr. Salamendra

#### 2. 2022 BUDGET DISCUSSION

Clr. Regan told council that she was looking for a consensus of council to determine if there was still a goal to reduce the tax rate, noting that last year council came up with a number that they wanted staff to reduce the proposed budget by. Clr. Pruetz said he is concerned with the way council sets goals to begin with, noting that it should be a lot easier than what it has been. He said there are elements to setting a goal; it should have an end result and it should be measurable over a specific period of time. He said the City Manager sent several messages asking what council wanted to see, and only a couple councilors responded. He said that next year at the council retreat, they should come out of the retreat with an end result. He said that when we look at zero-based budgeting, and then council comes in after the fact to say what we want, it is putting the cart before the horse. He said it would be good if council could come out after the next retreat and tell the city managers what we want to see as an end result that year. He said that he would like to see a reduced tax rate, but he knows it cannot all come from tax cuts, and needs to come from increased revenues. He said that the city needs to give more back to residents and figure out how to balance it all.

Clr. Gaglianese thanked the city managers and department heads for putting forth a responsible budget. He said he feels they went by council's direction noting that their top priority needs to be revenue generation and controlling expenses. He said the city needs to find more ways to give people something to do while focusing on taxpayer needs and public safety.

Clr. Camera said he does not want a tax increase. He said he does not think this is a responsibly presented budget. He said he feels the city is focused on the marina, yet council has not seen any costs in the budget yet. He questioned the dredging of the lake saying it was a surprise to him, noting that the capital budget shows \$3 million on a sinking sea wall. He said that the city should not build more projects until we prove we can take care of them. He said we need to spend money on people, and not just rich people, and council needs to see the information all at once. City Manager Gerling told council that the sea wall and marina are not connected, and she can send council an analysis. She noted that we will need to dredge less than staff originally anticipated.

Clr. Salamendra said she does not want to raise the tax rate, and she agrees with Clr. Pruettt that council needs to set goals at the next retreat, noting that \$.45 of every dollar for public safety is too much to spend. She told everyone that housing is public safety, and she also does not support the marina.

Clr. Pealer said he thought council agreed that they wanted to freeze or lower the tax rate, but how we get there is the debate. He said that he wants a beautiful community that is safe for people and has things for them to do. He feels we need a strong DPW, very strong public safety, and to enhance our lakefront. He said we need to look at revenue generation and not at cutting services, programs, beautification, public safety, recreation, or events. He said he feels council should rely on staff to come up with a plan.

Clr. Salamendra said that she feels the city spends a lot on recreation, but there is nothing to do in the city. She said rather than throwing money at something, she said council needs to recognize there is a problem. She said she feels people want experiences.

Clr. Noone said that council has been saying that we want to grow departments and add positions, and now we are saying we don't want taxes to increase. He noted that our human infrastructure has been at bare bones for too long, and reducing taxes will bring more cuts. He said we need to invest and grow our tax base. Clr. Noone said that when he was campaigning, every person he spoke to said they did not know what they were getting for their taxes. He said we need to continually grow our city and improve services so residents can see what they are getting. He finished by saying it is unrealistic to reduce the tax rate.

Clr. Burrall thanked department heads for the work on the budget, and said that they are all valued every single day. He said he would like to see a flat rate change if it makes sense, and if possible, he would like to see a reduced rate, noting that the budget is a data driven discussion.

Clr. Salamendra said that she would like to respond to Clr. Noone's question about getting the tax rate down, and she said that council will do it by taking individual line items out that council does not agree with. She said that council can both improve services and keep the tax rate the same if we are ranking what is us as a council.

Clr. Pruettt said that council has been saying that we need to grow out of our deficits, and he referred to the new buildings going up on Lochland Road, and doesn't feel the tax revenue will be enough to help with the increases for the year. He said that even if the city were able to put up condominiums along Middle Street by the lake, that will not help us grow either. He said we need to focus more on bringing people to our city and to get the Finance Committee going.

Mayor Valentino thanked the city manager, asst. city manager, and department heads saying that council knows that staff knows how important it is to be efficient and have economic vision noting that staff has adjusted their budgets every year. He said that at different times in history, the city has struggled and been able to apply for funding to get us out of our troubled times. He said private investors have come in when they saw the need. He said the city needs to have a vision to keep the momentum moving forward and increase revenue. He said that the city has improved its housing stock and neighborhoods, noting that houses are selling quickly, and tax rates are not driving people away. He said that the city has saved money in recent years by funding equipment amortization, but he cautioned against pulling from fund balance later to help fund things cut during the budget process.

When Clr. Regan asked about the funding for the Innovation Kitchen, City Manager Gerling said that Real Eats will be there until March, and staff is looking for a new business to come in. She clarified that the city does receive revenues from the Innovation Kitchen which are shown on a different line and cover the costs. She reminded council that the city is launching the Geneva Made Brand to try and cultivate more food and beverage businesses here. When asked about the fire department agreements providing an accounting of the money spent, Mrs. Gerling said that the request was put into the 2021 agreement, so she planned to have it for council in March of next year for 2021. Clr. Regan said it would be helpful to have that information now so council can see where the money is being spent.

Clr. Camera asked about the large increase in the fire department equipment line on page 37, item 2029. The city manager said that an audit of the current equipment was performed, and we are deficient which is causing a safety hazard. She noted that purchases have been deferred for a while, and staff put in the items that are absolutely necessary. Asst. City Manager Blowers told council that some of the money for equipment is coming from equipment amortization. Next, he asked about the revenues for the former American Legion property, and Mrs. Gerling explained that the city was always going to receive taxes, but the formula for taxes on the apartments/condominiums has yet to be determined. Clr. Camera cautioned against spending the money for those buildings before they are complete. As another way to reduce the budget, Clr. Camera suggested waiting on the purchase of the new pumper or reducing the number of new hires or hiring contractors. He said he would also hold off on the appointment of the Deputy Fire Chief position until we have the money. He said he would like to revisit his idea of a housing court and get one set up in Geneva to get rid of the worst properties. He said he feels code enforcement needs to be more creative and go after the bad guys.

Clr. Salamendra said with regard to the firefighter agreement, council requested an accounting last year with the understanding that the funding would be cut if not provided. Mayor Valentino told her that without

the volunteer fire department, the city would have more expenses. Clr. Noone asked council members to visit the departments in order to be educated on the deficiencies and to see where the money goes to. Clr. Gaglianese said that it isn't council's job to see where every penny is spent, but rather to see that our residents are safe. Mrs. Gerling said that staff did hear council's request for an accounting, and that was put in the 2021 agreement which is not over yet. She told council that staff will work to get this year's numbers noting that the amount of money in these agreements has not increased in the number of years she has been with the city.

**ACTION TAKEN by Clr. Salamendra; seconded by Clr. Regan  
MOVED THAT the firefighter agreements be removed from the budget**

Clr. Burrall said he is not in favor of eliminating this line item without the data to support it. He said that not getting the report is not a reason to take it away. He said that a quarterly or semiannual report would be helpful. He said that everyone agrees we have an unbelievable fire department, and council just wants to see the accounting. Clr. Regan said she has no problem with tabling this motion, but she remembers years ago that the Smith Opera House had to provide an accounting of where they spent their money. She said she did go to the fire department to speak to the members. Clr. Salamendra said she will not support an extension next year if council does not receive the information.

**ACTION TAKEN by Clr. Regan; seconded by Clr. Camera  
MOVED THAT this request be TABLED until next week when council will receive an  
accounting of the money spent by each department**

**ROLL CALL VOTE: Aye – Clr. Pruetz, Clr. Burrall, Clr. Gaglianese, Clr. Noone, Clr. Regan, and  
Clr. Camera**

**Nay – Mayor Valentino, Clr. Salamendra, and Clr. Pealer**

**MOTION CARRIED**

Next, Clr. Salamendra said she would like to remove the Deputy Fire Chief position from the budget. She said she supports code enforcement and not another fire position. Clr. Noone said that the majority of the country is in favor of public safety. Clr. Regan said she would like to see what the position does and why it is needed. City Manager Gerling said that this position will assist with inspections and provide more training and oversight to the firefighters doing the inspections. She noted that the firefighters doing code inspections need to hand off their work to a code officer or the city attorney for court appearances. When Clr. Salamendra asked about the assistant chiefs, Fire Chief Combs explained that they do not oversee the career firefighters. Clr. Burrall asked why the city couldn't hire two code enforcement officers in place of one Deputy Fire Chief.

**ACTION TAKEN by Clr. Salamendra; seconded by Clr. Camera**

**MOVED THAT the Deputy Fire Chief position be removed from the budget**

**ROLL CALL VOTE: Aye –Clr. Burrall, Clr. Regan, Clr. Salamendra, and Clr. Camera**

**Nay – Clr. Pruett, Clr. Gaglianese, Clr. Noone, Mayor Valentino, and  
Clr. Pealer**

**MOTION DEFEATED**

Mayor Valentino asked councilors to take a night to think about what questions they would like to present to staff tomorrow when they will continue the budget discussion.

3. ADJOURNMENT

**ACTION TAKEN by Clr. Pealer; seconded by Clr. Noone**

**MOVED THAT the meeting be adjourned at 8:03pm**

**ROLL CALL VOTE: Aye – Clr. Pruett, Clr. Burrall, Clr. Gaglianese, Clr. Noone, Clr. Regan,**

**Mayor Valentino, Clr. Salamendra, and Clr. Pealer**

**Nay – Clr. Camera**

**MOTION CARRIED**

*Lori Guinan*

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City Clerk