

**SNOW HILL MAYOR AND COUNCIL**

**WORK SESSION**

**Tuesday, April 11, 2023**

**Old Fire Hall, 212 W. Green Street, Snow Hill**

**Minutes**

**Masks are optional.**

**6:00 P.M. – Budget Work Session**

A Work Session of the Mayor and Town Council of Snow Hill, Maryland was held at The Old Fire Hall on Green Street on Tuesday, April 11, 2023 with Mayor Pruitt presiding.

**STAFF IN ATTENDANCE**

**PUBLIC OFFICIALS PRESENT**

Mayor Michael Pruitt

Councilmember Janet Simpson

Councilmember Regina Blake

Councilmember Jenny Hall

Rick Pollitt, Jr., Town Manager

Carol L Sullivan, Executive Administrator

Jerry Jeffra, Communication Officer

Lounell Hamstead, Finance Manager

Chief Andy McGee

1. **Mayor called meeting to order 5:57 PM**
2. Councilmember Simpson thanked the Mayor and staff for allowing them to participate in the early-budget process. She noted the council recently met with Jean Scott Holloway regarding a no cost audit of water and sewer rates**.** It was through her audit and study that Ms. Holloway was able to construct a new base charge and rate system to reverse the ever-increasing deficit in the water and sewer department. She provided the Town with three options to choose from, with each a different amount of gallon allowance and pay structure.

**Police department:**

Councilperson Simpson wanted to talk about the Law Enforcement Officers Pension System (LEOPS) program, and asked Police Chief McGee to describe its importance to his department. Chief McGee explained that currently police officers participate in the Maryland State Retirement program and after 30 years, they would retire with 35% of their salary. State troopers currently receive 65% of their salary however, and to compete with this, the LEOPS program was suggested to increase the retirement pay of Snow Hill’s police officers. We are the last regional municipality to begin participating in LEOPS and the Chief is concerned that we will lose officers or fail to attract new ones if we do not adopt the LEOPS retirement program. If the LEOPS retirement was implemented today, currently four officers would be eligible for LEOPS, while any new hires moving forward would be enrolled. A competitive retirement program is one of the key motivations for the recruitment and retention of police officers.

Councilperson Simpson asked if there is currently a position open for an officer, with Chief McGee replying that there is a current vacancy to be filled. Councilperson Simpson asked if there was any 401k plan discussed, with Chief McGee responding in the negative. Councilperson Simpson thanked the chief on the good news of crime going down. She then asked how much LEOPS would cost the Town. Financial Manager Hamstead took the question and explained that joining LEOPS would cost 36.2% for LEOPS, whereas it is currently at 10.9%. In the calculations of the budget, adopting the LEOPS program would increase the budget to $173,000, versus the current cost of $52,000. Councilperson Hall asked about the Police Department’s part-time position and if they were going to become full-time. Chief McGee replied that right now they hired a person for the Fire Marshal’s office to work during the weekends. If the budget is adopted as presented with the requested full-time position, the police department will be looking into terminating that current part-time position. Ms. Hall asked about the amount of requested new police vehicles, with Chief McGee saying he is requesting two vehicles under leases, with four vehicles currently under lease. The speed cameras are paying for a decent amount on the leases of the vehicles.

**Fire Department**:

Councilmember Simpson stated that the fire department is asking for an increase of $65,000, what is the additional request covering? Mr. Pollitt stated that would cover one full-time position and supplement equipment purchases. The town is only committing to $40,000 from general revenue and $25,000 will be funded with re-assigned ARPA funds.

**Tax Rate Increase:**

Councilmember Simpson asked Mayor Pruitt to discuss the property tax rates increase.

Mayor Pruitt stated that he asked what it would cost the Town to fund LEOPS and the fire department’s request in full. It would cost the Town about ten cents on the tax rate to cover the cost to fund LEOPS and the fire department. If we increase our property tax rate by 7.75 cents/per $100 and add funds currently available from general revenue that will cover the cost. When comparing our property tax rates to other towns in Worcester County, this rate would put us even with Pocomoke.

**Water/Sewer Rates:**

Councilmember Simpson stated that the least painful increase in the water and sewer rates would be to stay at the 6,000 gallons base for each. There were three options provided by Jean Holloway, a 0-gallon allowance, a 3,000-gallon allowance, or a 6,000-gallon allowance, which is the allowance currently in place. Upon investigating all the options, choosing the 6,000-gallon allowance but with the new base charge and new rates would be the least financially impactful to our citizens.

We will have a comprehensive list of public assistance resources available to the residents, and we will have payment arrangements available.

**Attorney:**

Councilmember Simpson asked about having a local attorney at our meetings and will this be in addition to Attorney Kevin Karpinski. Mr. Pollitt stated that while Mr. Karpinski would be available for specialized legal representation as needed, the new “Town Attorney” would provide for all of the routine legal business, including attending local meetings when necessary.

**Clerk position/Grant writer position:**

Councilmember Simpson asked about the clerk position going to full-time and what the duties would include. Town Manager Pollitt explained that on top of the responsibilities that Communication Officer Jerry Jeffra is doing now, which are extensive, he would also be the vital backup to Accounting Clerk Connie Watson, attend meetings to take minutes and prepare for Zoom meetings, and provide research support for various offices. Councilperson Simpson remarked that she also would like to have a full-time grants writer.

1. **Adjournment:** Finally, with no other matters to discuss, on a motion by Councilmember Blake and seconded by Councilmember Simpson the meeting adjourned at 6:55 P.M.

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| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Regina Blake** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Jenny Hall** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **TALLY** | **3** |  |  |  |  |

Respectfully submitted,

Carol L Sullivan

Carol L. Sullivan

Executive Administrator