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**SNOW HILL MAYOR AND COUNCIL**

**WORK SESSION**

**Tuesday, April 18, 2023**

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

 **Minutes**

**6:00pm – Work Session**

A Work Session of the Mayor and Town Council of Snow Hill, Maryland was held at The Old Fire Hall on 212 Green Street on Tuesday, April 18th, 2023, with Mayor Pruitt presiding.

**PUBLIC OFFICIALS PRESENT**

Mayor Mike Pruitt

Councilperson Regina Blake

Councilperson Jenny Hall

Councilperson Janet Simpson

**STAFF IN ATTENDANCE**

John Rankin, Grants Administrator

Carol Sullivan, Executive Administrator

Jerry Jeffra, Communications Officer

Lounell Hamstead, Finance Manager

Rick Pollitt, Town Manager

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1. **2nd Budget Work Session for FY 2024**

Mayor Pruitt called the meeting to order at 6:01pm. Mayor Pruitt introduced Grants Administrator John Rankin and Fire Chief Michael Creech, who was in the audience. The purpose of this second session is to finish the remaining questions and comments the council had but did not have enough time to do so during the first session.

Councilperson Simpson thanked the Mayor for continuing this discussion and thanked Fire Chief Creech and John Rankin for their attendance. Councilperson Simpson started with the Fire Department’s budget request and an explanation for the request.

Fire Chief Creech began discussing his staff, how long they work, and the request for an additional staff member to fill in some remaining time gaps in the afternoon. The ever-increasing qualifications and experience of current/prospecting staff raises the need to increase the budget. Mayor Pruitt asked the Fire Chief to explain where the additional $65k is going to be applied. Fire Chief Creech replied that $58k is going into the salary of the new position, the rest will be going into equipment. Historically, half of the budget goes towards the EMS side and the other to the fire response side. There is a heart monitor for each ambulance. The chief also explained that although he knows that the requested increase is large, over time any additional increases in future budget requests would increase by only about 1%. The Fire Chief has also requested additional, more fair compensation from the county, such as an increase in the mileage allowance, from 55 cents to 65 cents per mile.

The Mayor asked the Fire Chief if he could speak about the county proposing to absorb all the EMS/Fire Departments so that it’ll reduce the costs to the municipalities. Fire Chief Creech explained that the idea is currently testing/drafting stages and may not see more serious development for some years. One of the risks however is certain staff members, such as EMS personnel, may not be able to help with the fire response side.

Councilperson Simpson asked Finance Manager Lounell Hamstead about the Fire Department Expense Grant in the budget. Finance Manager Hamstead explained that it is the money that the county gives to the Town as a pass-through grant. Fire Chief Creech helped elaborate more by saying it’s based on a per-call rate, calls in and out of the town.

Town Manager Pollitt asked the Fire Chief where the Fire Department was at with the breathing apparatus. Fire Chief Creech responded that the price has unfortunately increased, however there would be a cheaper alternative one, but they would need to hold off until it became available in October of this year.

Councilperson Simpson asked Grants Administrator John Rankin if there were any grants currently to help with our first responders, and the water/wastewater departments. Grants Administrator Rankin explained that currently on the docket is the Police Department’s need for a new patrol vehicle, the follow-up with the bikeways project and figuring out the future of the Community Legacy Grant and what it may ask for. We need a grant for the comprehensive plan. There are 10 grants currently active, with recently closing the Critical Areas grant and is awaiting further word from the grants surrounding Sturgis & Byrd Park, including upgrades to walkways and the bathrooms, and obtaining additional picnic tables. The Town is also waiting for a response from the county about the Project Open Space grant. Grant Administrator Rankin’s largest priority has been getting grants to go towards the water/wastewater department, with a promising grant of $30k due to the Town’s median income and population grant called the Water & Waste Disposal Predevelopment Planning Grant. Grant Administrator Rankin had just found out about this grant, and that the grant must be put out as a competitive grant which warrants to be bid on.

Councilperson Blake asked if there was a deadline for that grant, which Grant Administrator Rankin replied no, it is year-round. Town Manager Pollitt explained further to the Council that the Town is expecting a complete and detailed analysis report back from Davis, Bowen & Friedel which will help, not only highlight the areas in critical need of repairs or upgrades but will serve to help facilitate obtaining grants and where to best put grant funds towards if awarded. Town Manager Pollitt also remarked on the Circuit Rider Program, a grant-funded full-time position in which would be shared between Pocomoke and Snow Hill. Their main objective would be to assist the grants writers by locating and helping with grants so that the municipalities can apply for as many grants as possible as effectively as possible.

Mayor Pruitt asked Town Manager Pollitt if he could detail the current problem of not having enough engineering firms close by. Town Manager Pollitt explained that the competitive bid for the grant, if the Town is accepted to receive the grant, would be no different in how the competitive bid for the bikeways feasibility study was handled. There is admittedly a low pool of choice when it comes to different firms to accept and compete for the bids.

 Councilperson Hall asked Town Manager Pollitt for the process involving the USDA, the $30k we requested to get it started, is what Davis, Bowen and Friedel did going to give us a leg up on that? Town Manager Pollitt also hopes this process won’t take too long, as the Town is getting calls from the Maryland Department Environment.

 Councilperson Simpson wanted to talk about COLA, cost of living adjustment for the employees. Are we having a hard time attracting certain positions, such as the Police Department and a water/wastewater tech, and what’s the justification for the 6% in COLA? Town Manager Pollitt replied that there is just no desire to work in the water/wastewater department. The Police Chief had also explained during the last budget work session that, without the LEOPS program, Snow Hill would remain uncompetitive with other municipalities. Town Manager Pollitt addressed the question about COLA, cost of living adjustment, that this is to fight against inflation and is not necessarily a salary increase. Mayor Pruitt added that despite increasing the salary of the water/wastewater tech, people are still unwilling to work that type of job, especially when other municipalities and other businesses out compete Snow Hill. Town Manager Pollitt remarked that one of the ways to combat this is having great benefits by working for the town.

 Councilperson Simpson also raised the question about the auditorial needs, and where in the budget it is. Town Manager Pollitt spoke to this by saying it is still currently being researched, it also depends completely on the needs of the Council as to what they desire.

 Councilperson Simpson raised the idea of looking out for new interns for the Town, giving students a chance to learn about the mechanics of municipality work. Town Manager Pollitt responded by saying that it is already in the works actually.

 Councilperson Simpson asked if there are new meters in the budget for the water/wastewater department. Finance Manager Hamstead commented that, currently meters are on a rotation, and are systematically put in as old ones expires. Those without meters should be getting a meter. Mayor Pruitt further explained that the main purpose of meters to be installed is to detect leaks, and not to necessarily charge the owners or tenants of those properties. Councilperson Hall asked how many buildings are meter-less? Mayor Pruitt responded that he doesn’t have a definite number, but the churches surely do not have a meter, guessing at least 12 or more buildings are meter-less.

 Councilperson Simpson offered the chance for members in the public if they had any comments or questions. Fran Price asked if there was difference in water and wastewater rates between residential and commercial properties. Finance Manager Hamstead responded to this inquiry by saying yes, they are, and that they are on a different multiplier when calculating. Fran Price also asked has the town considered offering incentives for new hires, such as paying rent or some other expense, such as moving vans, or some other benefit? Mayor Pruitt appreciated the idea. A citizen asked Fire Chief Creech how is getting medical services from the department billed, and is that somehow in the budget? Fire Chief Creech responded that they send the bill to your healthcare or insurance provider. Rita Williams asked how much it would be to replace a water meter. Finance Manager Hamstead answered her question saying that it could be $500 or less. Rita Williams also asked if there could be additional help for people who cannot easily afford the water/wastewater, such as billing some people monthly, especially with the coming price increase in the rates. Finance Manager Hamstead said its possible; there isn’t a need for a brand-new position just for that task alone, and that the Town is getting a new billing system soon to support that function better.

1. **Adjournment: Mayor called the meeting to an end. The time was 7:17pm.**

Respectfully submitted,

Jerry Jeffra

Communications Officer