



MAYOR AND TOWN COUNCIL

Special Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, January 16, 2024

4:30pm – Regular Session

A Special Meeting of the Mayor and Town Council of Snow Hill, Maryland was held at The Old Fire House on Green Street on Tuesday, January 16, 2024.

PUBLIC OFFICIALS PRESENT

Mayor Mike Pruitt
Councilmember Janet Simpson
Councilmember Diana Walsh
Councilmember Margaret Ann Fletcher

STAFF IN ATTENDANCE

Rick Pollitt, Town Manager
Carol Sullivan, Executive Administrator
Maureen Howarth, Attorney
Andy McGee, Police Department Chief

1. Call to Order

Mayor Pruitt called the meeting to order at 4:34pm. Mayor Pruitt stated that the Council would like to have a discussion on our legal fees. As he prepared the budget last year, he had no idea how much to budget for the legal fees. He just doubled the amount that was paid in the last fiscal year. He stated that he takes full responsibility in not allowing more funds in the budget for legal fees. He stated that you learn as you go. We have expended the legal line item. Going forward he will know how to budget for the legal fees. He turned the meeting over to Councilmember Walsh.

2. Discussion on legal fees and budget adjustment:

Councilmember Walsh thanked Mayor Pruitt for taking responsibility in that the legal fee had a short fall in the budget. In years past the highest amount spent on legal fees was \$24,000 in 2021, and last year \$22,700 was spent. The budget this year had \$40,000, which isn't far off from past years. We are currently at \$56,456 in legal fees through December. We have six months to go to the end of our fiscal year. This is a work session for the Council to decide what

we are comfortable with going forward to spend in legal fees. We will discuss and come up with an amount the Council is in agreement with going forward. Also, we would like to discuss ways on how to decrease our attorney fees going forward. Whether, accomplish the budget amendment by an Ordinance or Resolution.

Councilmember Walsh stated that she was opened for the public to ask question in the moment, just raise your hand.

John Gilliland suggested that the lawyer doesn't need to attend every meeting, just to observe.

Councilmember Walsh agreed. Maybe as on needed basis.

Mayor stated that we need legal representation at our Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals meetings. Town Hall meetings we need to have legal representation at all of those meetings. Work session, if something comes up, we will not be able to continue the discussion or make a decision, if we don't have legal representation. We will need to table the discussion until the next meeting.

Councilmember Walsh stated that maybe we don't need to have legal representation at our work session.

Councilmember Fletcher stated that there are a lot of emails, maybe we need to reduce the emails going to legal.

Councilmember Walsh stated that she sees a lot of phone calls with the Manager and the Mayor. Maybe the calls could be reduced.

Mayor stated that \$9,000 for July with three references to Mayor, there were no reference in August, September, one in October and no reference in November and four reference in December. He continued to say that he sends his concerns through the Town Manager. And that is what we all should do, as he may already have the answer.

Councilmember Walsh stated that the better versed we are with the Charter, we can interpret the Charter and Code ourselves. It is straight forward.

Councilmember Simpson asked Ms. Howarth how she reviewed the questions.

Ms. Howarth stated that she waits for the emails to slow down before answering, or reading them.

Councilmember Walsh stated that a lot of time, someone is asking for legal advice for difference opinion on the Charter.

Ms. Howarth stated that looks at everything in black and white; resolves the dispute and that she is very sensitive to Snow Hill's time.

Fran Price asked if the Council has the opportunity to call the attorney.

Councilmember Walsh stated yes, we do.

The Council decided that they would like to have time to review the packet they received tonight and like to discuss at the next work session, Tuesday, January 30th.

Jan King stated that the lawyer is here tonight, she is not saying much. Wouldn't it be best to have her not at work session and if something comes up, table the matter.

Councilmember Simpson asked what the difference is between an Ordinance and Resolution. In the past the budget was amended by an Ordinance.

Attorney Howarth stated that our Charter states that the budget has to be passed by an Ordinance. But budget amendments can be passed by Ordinance or a Resolution. A Resolution

can be passed in one meeting, an Ordinance takes two meetings and needs to be advertised. A Resolution gives the flexibility to do a transfer in case of emergency.

Councilmember Walsh stated that on January 30th, we will have a final decision on how much to budget for the legal line item to continue for this fiscal year, and if we want to pass the amendment with an Ordinance or a Resolution.

Ms. Howarth asked if she needs to continue to work on the Water and Sewer Ordinance. It was agreed upon for Ms. Howarth continue to work on the Water and Sewer Ordinance.

Mr. Pollitt stated that this is first time that he didn't have legal counsel. He suggests to finding the opportunity for legal input, and cut back a little bit. We believe it's very important to have legal representation readily available.

Mayor Pruitt stated that he likes to have the Council's involvement earlier on in the budget process. This year we will have a clearer vision on how much to budget for legal fees.

Comments from Public:

Kathern Culbertson, 106 Bank Street, asked how much the increments were charged for the lawyer.

She asked if we have money left over from this year's budget will it go back into our reserves. Her only purpose here today, is to make sure that the Town's money is spent as the towns people would want it to be spent. She thanked the Council for being here today to discuss this important issue.

3. Adjournment:

Councilmember Simpson made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Councilmember Fletcher and passed unanimously. The time was 5:52pm.

<u>NAME</u>	<u>AYE</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>ABSTAIN</u>	<u>RECUSED</u>	<u>ABSENT</u>
<u>Margaret Ann Fletcher</u>	<u>X</u>				
<u>Janet Simpson</u>	<u>X</u>				
<u>Diana Walsh</u>	<u>X</u>				
<u>TALLY</u>	<u>3</u>				

Respectfully Submitted,

Carol L Sullivan

Carol L Sullivan
Executive Administrator