

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

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1 The Special Meeting of the Common Council was called to order at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday,
2 June 10, 2020. It was noted that the meeting had been announced and a notice posted at City
3 Hall.

4
5 Roll call was taken, with the following members present: Mayor Kim Smith, Ald. Tom Smith,
6 Ald. Dan Stevens, Ald. Steven Nott, Ald. Jim Olson, Ald. Diane Wulf

7
8 Also Present: City Administrator Eric Rindfleisch, City Clerk Cari Burmaster, Financial
9 Services Director/Treasurer Fred Buehler, Human Resources Director Hope Burchell, Deputy
10 City Clerk JoAnn Marcon, City Attorney Amanda Jackson, City Engineer Jarrod Holter, Parks
11 and Recreation Director Dan Wick, Police Chief Charles Ashbeck, Asst. Fire Chief Troy Guide
12 and Planning Manager Katie Aspenson.

13
14
15 **Item 2 – Public Input: (limited to 3 minutes/individual)**

16
17 Mayor K. Smith called three times for anyone wishing to provide public input and closed that
18 portion of the meeting.

19
20 **Consideration and possible action on the following items:**

21
22 **Item 3 – Review of projected 2020 financials and potential impact on 2021 budget**

23
24 City Administrator Rindfleisch read to the Council a portion of the memo he had written and
25 distributed. The memo reads as follows: *“As we enter the 2021 budget season, which will
26 culminate in November with a complete budget approval, it is important to note the purpose of
27 tonight’s meeting. Our ordinances lay out the annual budget process, which begins with
28 estimates from each department given to the Administrator, followed by the Administrator
29 preparing a budget for submittal to the Finance and Personnel Committee, and then the full
30 Council, for a hearing and approval in November. However, it was agreed that for the
31 Administrator’s budget to best match the philosophical budgetary goals of the Common Council
32 in November, the Council should discuss and provide these goals prior to the start of the budget
33 preparation. The Wisconsin League of Municipalities cites the Institute for Local Government
34 regarding good budgets. A good process should include:*

- 35
36
- *Establishing goals and priorities for the city.*
 - *Allocating resources according to those goals and priorities.*
 - *Comparing actual expenses and revenues to those estimated in the current budgeted expenses, making adjustments during the course of the budget year, as necessary.*
- 37
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41 *The first item will be completed this evening. These goals and priorities should be broad and*

Reviewed 6/15/2020 by Cari Burmaster

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

2

42 *philosophical at this time, not an examination of each line item. The second item will be*
43 *accomplished through the preparation of the Administrator's Budget, which is then given to the*
44 *Finance and Personnel Committee for changes and approval in November. The third item is*
45 *handled monthly through the Finance and Personnel Committee and Council normally.*
46 *However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic we will also be doing a review this evening of the*
47 *status of the 2020 budget and its possible impact on setting Council goals for 2021."*
48

49 Fred told councilmembers they should have received a document he had created with assistance
50 from the department heads. The document was returned to the department heads to confirm what
51 they had given Fred regarding what they were forecasting, both revenues and expenditures, from
52 May through December. Fred said councilmembers also had received a document showing that
53 wages and benefits account for 78.3 percent of the budget within the General Fund. Fred noted
54 that in November 2019 the city had decided to exceed the expenditure restraint cap. As a result,
55 the city would forego \$71,853.49 in 2021. Fred then asked councilmembers what they would
56 like to hear from him.

57
58 Ald. Nott said he would recommend a recap, but also focusing specifically on areas of concern
59 and items that stand out because they are different from past years.

60
61 Ald. Stevens said, "Just to add for transparency to the public, how far areas that we are off
62 specifically – not by the line item – but how far are we off, or how much have we been affected
63 by COVID, both in the plusses and the minuses, and what the net is. From that figure we can
64 parlay that into the next segment, which is starting to plan for the next year."

65
66 Fred referred to the General Fund estimated revenues, noting the documents represent the
67 original budget that was passed in November 2019. The activity from January to April is shown,
68 as is the estimated revenue from May to December, and the grand total of those revenues. Fred
69 noted he had written in shortfalls in pencil.

70
71 Ald. Stevens noted COVID-19 would affect the room tax revenue as hotels are not seeing much
72 activity due to a reduction in travel. Ald. Stevens noted there is a deficit, and he said some of the
73 room tax is utilized for funding operations at the Omni Center, and some is directed toward the
74 La Crosse County Convention and Visitors Bureau. Ald. Stevens said, "The hole that's created
75 from that (estimated \$24,663), it's not under our control. This is a part of the market." Ald.
76 Stevens asked how past shortfalls were addressed, and he asked Fred what his recommendation
77 is as far as proceeding this year.

78
79 Fred noted Tourism is an Enterprise Fund, and he said most of the funds generated by the 8-
80 percent room tax that is levied is directed toward the Room Tax Fund. The Special Projects
81 Fund 204 receives a portion, and "Room Tax Revenue" in the General Fund receives a smaller
82 portion. Also, 1 percent of the gross sales (approximately \$101,000) would be directed to
83 Tourism before being routed to the Omni Center. Fred noted the city had anticipated receiving

Reviewed 6/15/2020 by Cari Burmaster

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

3

84 \$38,576 in room tax revenue for the General Fund, and in excess of \$10,150,000 in sales. Fred
85 noted approximately \$67,000 of assistance from the Special Projects Fund was included in the
86 Omni Center budget. Fred said the Omni Center receives less financial assistance when there is
87 a decrease in sales. Fred told councilmembers that while the Omni Center receives 1 percent of
88 the sales, a Department of Revenue law passed within the last three years states the funds
89 received from Tourism must be substantiated by events that bring individuals to the city. Fred
90 told councilmembers the Omni Center was spending more funds than it was receiving via room
91 tax funding the last three years. The Omni Center may not receive more funds than it spends.
92 Fred said, "As far as how that's going to be clarified into future months, I have no idea." Fred
93 reminded councilmembers he had sent them a graph showing the outcome from the first quarter,
94 and he said, "I think second quarter is going to be considerably less than what you've seen."
95

96 Ald. T. Smith noted there was a substantial decrease in building permit funds even though there
97 still is new construction, and he asked Fred if the decrease can be attributed to a decrease in
98 construction during the pandemic.
99

100 Fred told Ald. T. Smith the \$40,699 deficit he had written in is for the remainder of 2020
101 (\$120,000 had been budgeted). Fred said Planning Manager Katie Aspenson had provided the
102 financial figures for plumbing, heating/air-conditioning, and electrical permits.
103

104 Ald. Nott suggested that rather than examine individual line items the Council instead should
105 examine the overview on the impacts on both revenues and expenses to determine the aggregate
106 overall impact. Ald. Nott noted the city has savings and recommended waiting to see the entire
107 "budget health" before starting to examine line items.
108

109 Mayor K. Smith suggested to Fred that the Council first see the totals in revenues and expenses.
110

111 Fred said, "I just want to mention for the general public, somebody is going to say we talked
112 about a \$24,000 loss, [and] all of a sudden Fred says there's a \$320,000 deficit. To get up to that
113 figure, I just want to mention to the general public that \$154,456 is directly related to our
114 shortfall within the Park and Rec Department. I also want to mention that \$63,168 is directly
115 related to the interest income. When this budget was put together, interest rates were 1.71
116 [percent], and we're roughly 61 basis points lower now. Those are the largest items that bring
117 the picture of \$320,443 of deficit of anticipated revenues to what I anticipated for actual. ...
118 These figures do not reflect any anticipated revenue that was brought to the city through the
119 Wisconsin CARES Program, which is federal funding. The city is eligible for approximately
120 \$308,698. Also, you had seen [Tuesday] night there was a potential reimbursement of \$12,554
121 from the elections side. The dollars that we were referring to of COVID-related expenditures to
122 a certain level, which we're not exactly sure what levels of degree for reimbursement that it
123 contains."
124

125 Fred next addressed expenditures, noting the city had budgeted \$10,183,948, and anticipated
Reviewed 6/15/2020 by Cari Burmaster

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

4

126 expenditures total \$9,845,316. This leaves a surplus of \$338,632. Fred directed
127 councilmembers' attention to a document labeled "O.P.D." and he reminded them the 2020
128 budget included three new positions apiece in both the Police Department and the Fire
129 Department. Per the budget, the new positions in the Police Department that had an estimated
130 starting date of April 1, with the understanding the Common Council would provide its input as
131 to if and when this would occur. Fred noted this occurred before the arrival of the pandemic, and
132 he said, "If you take three officers at \$60,888, with benefits, [and multiply that by] three, that
133 \$182,664 that's in this budget." Fred said that of the original positions in the Police Department,
134 one has not yet been filled since January 1, and he told councilmembers he had taken six months
135 of an officer's salary, which is a savings of \$42,276.

136
137 Fred next told councilmembers the Police Department had 1,947.59 non-budgeted hours in 2019.
138 A contract was signed in 2020, and officers agreed to receive a \$5,000 bonus and work 2,069
139 hours. Fred said it equates to 121.4 hours per person, and multiplied by 25 officers at
140 approximately \$32 per hour, the total is \$97,128. Fred said including FICA (\$7,430) and WRS
141 (\$11,481), there is \$116,039 that is not in the 2020 budget. Fred said dividing \$116,039 by 12
142 (months in the year) equals \$9,669, and then multiplying that sum by 8 (May through December)
143 equals \$77,352 that is not in the 2020 budget. Fred addressed the \$5,000 bonus for police
144 officers and said multiplying that sum by 24 (number of officers) equals \$120,000. Fred said
145 subtracting the \$120,000 from the \$182,664 equals \$62,664. Adding \$42,276 (representing the
146 six months the police officer position was not filled) to \$62,664 equals a \$104,940 deduction.
147 Fred noted the Police Department's original 2020 budget was \$3,514,537, and the department's
148 budget is \$3,497,680 after being modified.

149
150 Fred next addressed the Fire Department, directing councilmembers' attention to a document
151 labeled "O.F.D." Three new positions had an estimated starting date of April 1, pending
152 Common Council approval, and their combined salaries would be \$167,937 (\$55,979 multiplied
153 by 3). Fred said he also had estimated a two-month absence of a Fire Chief at \$21,765. The
154 total of the two figures added together is \$189,702. Fred noted two current positions still are
155 unfilled and said he had taken six months when calculating the sum of \$70,887, adding he has
156 heard from City Administrator Rindfleisch and other the goal is to fill the two open positions
157 soon. Fred directed councilmembers to the financials, noting \$46,000 had been budgeted for
158 overtime and telling councilmembers that through April \$31,032 had been utilized for overtime.
159 Fred said \$40,000 in additional overtime funds was added to the 2020 budget. Fred said
160 \$189,702 had been removed for the three new positions, as well as a two-month absence of a
161 Fire Chief. In addition, the \$70,887 reduction to which Fred had referred earlier represents the
162 two existing position that are currently open. Also, Assistant Fire Chief Troy Gudie, who
163 currently serves as Acting Fire Chief, is receiving \$3,750 in additional pay for his additional
164 duties. Fred said \$1,709,446 originally had been budgeted for the Fire Department in 2020, and
165 that sum has been reduced to \$1,500,450.

166
167 City Administrator Rindfleisch told councilmembers the balance is based on the difference
Reviewed 6/15/2020 by Cari Burmaster

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

5

168 between expenses and revenues, and he said the anticipated revenue loss at the end of 2020 is
169 \$320,443. By comparison, City Administrator Rindfleisch said the anticipated loss in expenses
170 at the end of 2020 is \$338,632. This means that as of now the city will a positive balance of
171 \$18,189. However, City Administrator Rindfleisch said, “It’s into the good by not filling the
172 positions that are currently left empty. Right now, we are projected to be in the good. The items
173 were budgeted to be filled, but they are not being filled so we do not have those expenses. ... To
174 be clear, we’re looking good for this year, but it’s by not filling the vacant positions outside of
175 the [Fire] Chief, which we only took two months off.”

176
177 Fred noted the 2020 budget was created with three new positions each in both the Police
178 Department and the Fire Department. Fred said the expenditures are there for 2020, and the only
179 shortfall will be from January through March if they are moved to 2021. Fred said there also
180 would be the shortfall of the \$71,000 in the expenditure restraint, and the budget also does not
181 include the \$119,000 related to the additional hours for the Police Department. Fred said,
182 “That’s something that’s going to be a catch-up for 2021 as you move forward.”

183
184 For clarification, Ald. Nott asked, “Based on the assumptions in the budget, as laid out, and
185 including the assumption we do not fill the Police and Fire [Department positions], that leaves us
186 with approximately an \$18,200 surplus – is that correct?”

187
188 Ald. Nott was told he is correct.

189
190 Ald. Stevens asked, “Part of the surplus was the grant you mentioned, and that can only be used
191 for COVID-related expenses?”

192
193 Fred said the \$308,698 is not included in the revenue calculations. Fred said the expenses are
194 there, and he told Ald. Stevens, “Right now, through the expenses we have forecasted we
195 currently have of all, in the General Fund and our Enterprise Funds – there’s a large one that’s
196 not here – we have roughly \$47,000 worth of expenditures. Again, until we see the parameters
197 of what is eligible for reimbursement, I have yet to see it from the state.”

198
199 Ald. Stevens asked if the surplus potentially could be larger based on how much is refundable
200 through the grant.

201
202 Fred said yes.

203
204 City Administrator Rindfleisch said, “If, as anticipated, it is not eligible to replace lost revenue, it
205 does make it difficult. But we do have expenses – technology, for example, that’s making this
206 meeting happen right now; additional cameras for the meeting rooms; all of the glass partitions
207 put in into the counterspace. There are expenses that we have spent which will be reimbursed.
208 We’re nowhere near the \$300,000 yet in reimbursements. I think we’re at about \$46,000 the last
209 time I saw something. There’s more to come yet, but it has to be in direct relationship to our

Reviewed 6/15/2020 by Cari Burmaster

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

6

210 response to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

211

212 Mayor K. Smith said, “And not labor as far as you know.”

213

214 City Administrator Rindfleisch said, “We don’t know, but I would not anticipate that, much as I
215 would not anticipate for lost revenue. However, if lost revenue is something that is eligible, you
216 can see on the revenue side, especially when it comes to the Omni Center, there’s \$100,000-
217 some right away that we would be able to plug in. It could be doom and gloom with nothing
218 right now except for [\$18,000] to the good right now, provided we don’t fill the positions, or we
219 could be in a very positive situation depending upon what the parameters of this program are.
220 We just don’t know at this time.”

221

222 Fred referred to the \$12,554.10 the Common Council had approved Tuesday evening as part of
223 the CARES subgrant funds from the Wisconsin Elections Commission, noting that overtime
224 potentially could be reimbursed through the grant.

225

226 City Administrator Rindfleisch said, “The importance of that conversation that we had about
227 where we are is, as we look at establishing goals going forward I think it’s only fair that the
228 Council has a full picture of where we are so you aren’t creating goals that aren’t related to our
229 current situation. We know that 2021 will be a challenging year. It’s not an impossible year, but
230 it’s also not necessarily the year to come up with really creative ideas that literally, in putting the
231 budget together, have no chance because we know where we are right now is difficult.”

232

233 **Item 4 – Discussion and possible action on establishing Council budget goals and objectives**
234 **for 2021 budget**

235

236 City Administrator Rindfleisch referred to the second page of his memo, which reads as follows:

237 *“In order to facilitate the discussion of Council goals, I offer some of the questions I need to*
238 *answer in the preparation of the City budget:*

239

- 240 • *Are there any new initiatives or programs the City should provide?*
- 241 • *Are there any current services which could be cut or reduced?*
- 242 • *Is the allocation of the General Fund expenditures to each department in line with*
243 *Council priorities?*
- 244 • *What direction should the City take regarding employees and compensation (COLA,*
245 *performance steps, benefits, morale, recruitment, retention, liability, efficiency, etc.)?*
246 *(Eighty percent of the General Fund is allocated to wages and benefits).*
- 247 • *Does the City have an appropriate balance between revenues (property taxes) and the*
248 *amount/quality of services provided?”*

249

250 City Administrator Rindfleisch said that in preparing past budgets in the City of Onalaska and

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

7

251 other municipalities for which he has been employed, he begins with the aforementioned
252 questions as he starts preparing budgets. City Administrator Rindfleisch noted a goal-setting
253 meeting such as this one has never occurred in Onalaska, and he said, “It was always anticipating
254 what I imagined the Council would answer to these questions, or in private conversations with
255 each individual getting a sense of where people stand.” City Administrator Rindfleisch said the
256 questions posed in the memo are questions he has asked in preparing budgets, and they also are
257 questions he is asking the Council to consider. City Administrator Rindfleisch referred to the pie
258 chart labeled “2020 General Fund Budget by Function,” which breaks down the following as it
259 relates to the 2020 adopted budget:

260			
261	General Government	\$1,694,987	17%
262	Public Safety	\$6,008,840	59%
263	Public Works	\$1,129,031	11%
264	Health & Human Services	\$73,691	1%
265	Recreation & Education	\$1,077,319	11%
266	Conservation & Development	\$200,080	2%
267	Total:	\$10,183,948	100%
268			

269 City Administrator Rindfleisch addressed the final question he had posed and told
270 councilmembers, “There’s a quantitative value to that question versus qualitative value of your
271 total tax levy and your mill rate. Those are often compared, but have very little direct
272 relationship on the taxes actually paid by the homeowner. The mill rate, for example, if property
273 valuations increase in a given year, your mill rate could decrease, but you’re still paying the
274 same taxes. Likewise, your total levy limit, if you’re getting new developments and new
275 properties that are now in your community, paying property taxes to reduce your taxes – or at
276 least maintain them – means that you have increased services, but you’re purposely cutting off
277 your ability to fund those services even though you have new development and that new
278 development is paying property taxes. Those are important questions that when we get to the
279 budget, we always highlight those questions. But in terms of preparing a budget at this point in
280 time, I look at the qualitative methodology – how much are our residents complaining about
281 services they provide is another way of looking at it, ultimately. Those are the kind of questions
282 I like to hear from the Council, which would help me prepare, as then I answer those questions
283 so that I’m not guessing at those priorities and then you’re sitting at a meeting or two in
284 November having to make modifications. We can start from square one establishing those
285 priorities so I can craft the budget to meet those needs.”

286
287 Mayor K. Smith asked the alderpersons to identify items that are important to them and they
288 wish to be included in the 2021 budget, as well as items they want to be more deeply considered
289 before they are included in the 2021 budget.

290
291 Ald. T. Smith asked if the impact of the compensation study, which will occur in 2020, will be
292 felt in 2021. Ald. T. Smith told City Administrator Rindfleisch he believes that the study is

Reviewed 6/15/2020 by Cari Burmaster

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

8

293 something that must be taken under consideration regarding employee compensation. Ald. T.
294 Smith said, “That has to be a high priority – it is to me – because we committed to that for a
295 number of years and finally did some action this year. And of course it got delayed with
296 COVID, but hopefully there would be some results of 2021 that would be impacted in the
297 budget.” Ald. T. Smith noted there is significant development occurring in the city, including
298 along Abbey Road, and he asked if the new developments will be on the tax rolls in 2021.

299
300 Fred told Ald. T. Smith no and said it is the construction that occurred from January 1, 2020 or
301 prior. Fred said, “When I saw the preliminary estimate for net new construction, less the exempt
302 property ... You have to remember we don’t collect taxes on the valuation. The assessor looks at
303 it, puts a value on it based on the estimates from the Inspection Department that’s not taxable. I
304 haven’t seen the final figures. Now that Board of Review is over, that will be a component: the
305 maximum amount of increase. You take net new construction, and the formula is a percentage
306 how much you can increase the General Fund to stay within the expenditure restraint caps.”

307
308 City Administrator Rindfleisch said, “One of the more confusing details of the budget I find that
309 the public often doesn’t catch on to ... We’re beginning the 2021 budget cycle. The revenue
310 portion that we’re utilizing is taxes collected as of January 1, 2020, payable in December 2020,
311 January 2021 for the 2021 budget year. It is the Board of Review and everybody else reviewing
312 the property valuations that we use for the next tax cycle; it’s all based on the January 1
313 valuation of the property of this year. There is always a lag. There is always a delay.”

314
315 Ald. Wulf said, “I think we’re all in agreement that we’re in such a great financial position that
316 we are right now because we did put in to fund three positions for [the] Police [Department] and
317 three positions for [the] Fire [Department] this year. I’m very cognizant of the fact that we have
318 not filled those positions, and I believe the reasons we chose to look to fill those positions in
319 2020 was because we felt there was a need. I haven’t heard anyone say that that need has
320 changed. I just want to go on the record saying that I still have concerns, and whether we as a
321 Council need to reprioritize currently for 2020 positions that we have that I’m going to still be
322 standing up for those positions that we did look to fill. And I for one will be looking and
323 bringing forth to continue to at least talk about the Fire [Department] position – whatever date
324 we can agree on or whatever. But I think we need to look at our numbers, what is realistic, what
325 can we do. But I would like us to keep it in the forefront of thoughts.

326
327 Secondly, I agree with Alderperson Tom Smith: The pay study is at the top for me, and top to
328 bottom for all employees – part-time wages all the way up to the top. That’s extremely
329 important to me. Another topic I feel strongly about is, when we look at the number of
330 employees who have been with the city for a number of years, and looking out going forward the
331 number of retirements and the possible payout balances. If there’s a possibility of us being able
332 to set aside a certain amount every year, however small an amount, so maybe we can cushion the
333 blow ... I don’t look at this, unless someone can tell me otherwise, any different than when we
334 fund the sinking fund for Technology. We don’t use those dollars immediately, and we kind of

Reviewed 6/15/2020 by Cari Burmaster

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

9

335 build up a balance. I would just like us to be in a better position to be able to afford and not kind
336 of be caught by surprise when we need to do any payouts.

337
338 Lastly, [this is] something I have talked about with Eric in the past. I know Alderperson Dan
339 Stevens and I did a newsletter last year that we took out of our own pocket and hand-delivered
340 door-to-door to 2,500 doors last year. It was quite an undertaking that we took on personally that
341 was extremely well-received by our constituents. Then-Third District Alderperson Kim Smith
342 went ahead and did a similar newsletter that I believe was also very well-received. This is
343 something that I think would behoove the City of Onalaska to do in whatever fashion it may be.
344 It could be a possible e-newsletter, it could be an app – some kind of a push communication to
345 inform our taxpayers more of what is going on at City Hall, especially when you look at that
346 election in April and you look at how it was an ever-changing event. People could have been
347 better informed on a day-to-day basis what was going on. Poll workers: were they showing up or
348 were they not showing up because it kept changing those last few days. There are seasonal
349 things that are going on, whether it's mowing or snow removal. If you have any interest at all, I
350 would strongly encourage you ... Eric originally directed me to Bayside, Wisconsin, and I signed
351 up for their e-newsletter. It's called the 'Bayside Buzz.' I get it every two weeks, and it's a
352 fabulous model, in my opinion, one way how someone models it. It's so informative. It's really
353 nice and clean and informative, and I've always told him he should never turn me on to
354 something like that because when I get really interested in something it's something I'm really
355 going to speak highly of because I think it really would make sense for the City of Onalaska.
356 That community is maybe 4,000 people, and I don't know why we don't have something like
357 that to communicate better with our citizens."

358
359 Mayor K. Smith said, "I definitely support the things the alders have said so far. The
360 compensation study, I think I spoke pretty passionately about that when we put together this
361 budget. I felt that it should have been further funded so that when the study is complete we have
362 the ability to make some pay adjustments to the employees, especially the longer-term
363 employees to make sure that we can retain them. I also think it's important that we continue to
364 monitor the budget. Obviously, everyone knows I'm going to be financially conservative about
365 it. But we put those three Police [Department positions] and three Fire [Department positions] in
366 the budget for a reason. We need those people. We especially need most urgently the
367 firefighters, and we can see that in the overtime budget where we're just not meeting the
368 minimum staffing that we need to meet to provide a very important service to our community.
369 Another thing that I think is really important – and we've been doing fairly well – is succession
370 planning, but maybe with a little different twist than Diane is thinking of it – not that I disagree
371 with having extra money for vacation buyouts or whatever. The ability to either reorganize, if
372 that's what's in the best interest of the city, or to transition before we lose those experienced
373 people. We know we're losing quite a few people this year with a lot of experience, and we
374 know that we have several more probably coming up within the next year. I really want to make
375 sure we can transition those people out so they can smoothly go on to their retirement without
376 being stressed out right at the end of their career. We want them to be able to go out on a high

Reviewed 6/15/2020 by Cari Burmaster

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

10

377 note, confident that the city will continue after all their years that they've put in."

378

379 Ald. Olson said, "We've got some difficult decisions to make, that's for sure. The thing that
380 weighs on my mind is we have these promises that we made, and promises that we should keep
381 to staff. But we also have a problem from the perspective of the taxpayer that the mill rate is
382 getting up there. We have to keep track of that too because that's what we're responsible for.
383 It's a difficult decision that has to be made. Hopefully some things will improve as the economy
384 improves such as the Tourism budget and things like that, hopefully as people get moving around
385 a little bit. But I agree with Diane and the Mayor that these are promises we made staff, and we
386 have to figure out how to do that and manage the other things. We might have some difficult
387 decisions to make, but I think the ladies are right that we made this promise to staff a long time
388 ago, and it's important that we do that."

389

390 Ald. Stevens said, "Eric had talked about some of the philosophical thoughts for what the budget
391 should be going forward. I would like to use that time to maybe talk about that a little bit. I feel
392 that our job is really to make it so people feel that Onalaska is a desirable place to live, to raise
393 their family, and to do business. Our lane, really, is to provide the core services that make all
394 that happen. I would commend staff on saying that the picture we are receiving today is
395 significantly more rosy than what we might have thought going into this picture. To contrast
396 with some other communities that received money and essentially gave it away to different
397 entities and are now having to look at furloughs, I think we're in relatively good shape. My main
398 priority is we want to get through the pandemic. We want to put 2020 in back of us. The best
399 thing we can do for the community is to be stalwart, keep providing the services we have been
400 doing through a really strange time, and we want to keep our employees well. I think you've
401 done a great job on that. We want to maintain our amenities and our infrastructure. ... The last
402 item I had was that we need to maintain our municipal fiscal wellness. Who would have thought
403 we'd be looking at a surplus? Great job, everyone. I'm delighted that we're in that position.

404

405 The first priority is I think we just need to stay the course and get through the year. It sounds
406 like that's on plan. After all that's met – everybody else has kind of touched on this – we need to
407 right-size our staffing. We budgeted for more positions. I think we got the buy-in from the
408 public that they want more police and they want more fire. Dealing with attrition and burnout
409 have been things we've had to deal with, and this was part of the solution. We haven't come
410 through on that, and it's part of the circumstances that nobody would have predicted a pandemic.
411 But the onus of getting us out of this fiscal mess was really because we did not fill these
412 positions. I understand that we're not going to fill a position if we can't afford to fund the
413 payroll that's associated with that. But we ask these frontline people in [the] Police
414 [Department] and [the] Fire [Department] to save us, literally, and now they've had to kind of
415 save us figuratively, and I think that we need to, at the very least, recognize that they have kind
416 of bailed us out of a financial hole, and they've really borne the onus of doing that. I think we
417 need to lay out at least a timeline and recognize that it hasn't gone as maybe what they would
418 have expected, and lay out a timeline for when we're going to be able to hire. I think maybe we

Reviewed 6/15/2020 by Cari Burmaster

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

11

419 could space these out and try to get one in Police and Fire toward maybe the end of this year, and
420 at later points in 2021 we start to add that second and third position in both Police and Fire. We
421 made a promise. It's our job to make good on that, both to staff and to the public. And to Jim's
422 point, I don't disagree that we need to pay for this and we need to keep the levy in line with
423 normal growth patterns. I think we're doing that, and I think it's just a matter of timing and
424 making sure that everybody is recognized for their sacrifices and then reassuring that we will set
425 this right.

426
427 The wage study was talked about. It's not just Police and Fire; there are other people who work
428 here too. That should be another priority. And I would like to point out that a lot of times we
429 look at the more high profile positions in Police and Fire, but there are other departments that
430 often get overlooked. Parks does their job without fail and they don't really complain, but every
431 year there is less and less manhours, and it seems like we've added parks and there's more for
432 them to do. We need to show them a little love, and we need to set that right because the
433 amenities that we have are part of what makes Onalaska a good city to live in. I think we have
434 some parks that are not used, and we should look at trying to make it so that the parks that we
435 have are the parks people visit and use and enjoy, and that could maybe help alleviate some of
436 the manpower issues. Public Works, I don't hear a lot from them. But, again, they haven't
437 really come across on the budgets for the radar for personnel. Sometimes we need to
438 acknowledge the people that are doing their job and not yelling the loudest. I know Human
439 Resources was up for a position, and they sacrificed it in last year's budget. People have made
440 cuts for the good of the city. In a nutshell, we need to right-size and look at different
441 departments and [ask], what is the way we can fill the needs of the city most efficiently with the
442 resources that we have and honor and respect them and reward them, as appropriate.

443
444 As far as new initiatives, this is going to sound like a broken record, but I agree with Alder Wulf
445 that if anything, the COVID process has shown us we could find some ways to improve outreach
446 to the public. We recently looked at the garbage can pickup, and we really don't have a way to
447 get messages out to everyone. Whether it's a public newsletter people could subscribe to, I see
448 that that would have some merit. In the last year we started an Arts Committee, and there's
449 really no funding for it. I think the idea is they'll provide a lot of their own funding, but I think a
450 few thousand dollars so they could maybe do some printing to help start raising their own
451 money, [or] perhaps create a Friends of the Onalaska Arts and maybe they can use that to self-
452 grow. I agree again with Alder Wulf that if every year we know we have employees and
453 sometimes they retire and there are costs associated with their retirement, we should budget for
454 that so if somebody retires it doesn't throw the whole budget out of whack."

455
456 Ald. Nott said, "I'm looking at the memo Eric sent out where he talks about the Wisconsin
457 League of Municipalities setting out what a good budget process looks like. The very first one is
458 the goals and the priorities. I'm going to go out on a limb here and state what my personal views
459 of priorities are to give some guidance to the staff. I do want to caveat that, though, because it
460 could be misconstrued. I understand that everything we do – public safety, the governance, the
Reviewed 6/15/2020 by Cari Burmaster

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

12

461 infrastructure, health and human services, conservation, recreation – they’re all important. By
462 me establishing one or two priorities here, which I’m going to do in a bit on what I think they
463 should be, does not mean I don’t care about those other areas. But we live in a world where
464 resources are always less than what the needs are, or especially what the wants are. With that
465 said, for me, my number-one priority is always public safety. I know, for instance, if one of my
466 constituents were to have some type of an emergency – say, a house fire or whatever it might be
467 in their own lives – they’re going to care far more about whether or not they have an immediate
468 response of a well-trained firefighter/EMT or police officer arriving on site in a timely fashion
469 than they are whether or not Steve Nott is their alderman, as an example. That’s going to be
470 their number one focus because their safety is important. I think number two is the good
471 governance, and that’s where it comes in, perhaps, with some of the compensation concerns that
472 the Mayor has brought up as well. With the public safety piece, I would like to even take a look
473 at some feasibility studies on whether or not by the end of this fiscal year it would be possible to
474 get some of the firefighters on board because the cost could be offset by reduced overtime, the
475 \$18,000 surplus, and any type of COVID expense reimbursements that we’ll receive.

476
477 We have to take a look at that on whether that’s a one, two, three, or even a zero, but I would like
478 to look at what the feasibility of that is even this year. Certainly, I would like to see by 2021
479 trying to fill the Police and Fire [positions] as fully as possible to include potentially all three of
480 those months in January, February, and March that are currently not funded, is what my
481 understanding was – that they’re only really accounted for from April on so that there was still a
482 shortfall. I would like to look at seeing if we could bring some on this year, and trying to bring
483 all of them on by next year. My second priority for me, personally, is I’ve been looking at, what
484 are we going to do to make sure we can retain the staff that we have? And how can we reward
485 the best workers in the governance portion of the city?”

486
487 Mayor K. Smith said, “It’s nice to hear everybody’s input, and I feel like we are pretty much all
488 on the same page. We’re all really grateful for the good staff we have here taking care of
489 business and treating each other, our community, and our taxpayers’ money with care so that we
490 can end up in this good position. ... We only had things that we would add. We didn’t really say
491 anything that, if push comes to shove, that we were willing to give up. Would that be something
492 that would be helpful for you [City Administrator Rindfleisch] to have us discuss?”

493
494 City Administrator Rindfleisch said, “Most certainly. When we’re looking at possible actions in
495 2020 to fill positions, that will have to be part of the conversation while we’re projecting forward
496 both the expenses and the revenues for the rest of the year. It’s basically break even without
497 those positions filled. Filling those positions will cost money from somewhere else. Any insight
498 as to those kind of program priorities would certainly be useful for 2020 as well leading into ...
499 even if it’s partial in 2020, what that means for a full hire those positions in 2021.”

500
501 Mayor K. Smith noted there currently are several vacant positions for which the city is not
502 actively recruiting replacement.

Reviewed 6/15/2020 by Cari Burmaster

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

13

503
504 City Administrator Rindfleisch noted the positions are in both the Police Department and the Fire
505 Department, and he said, “We’re waiting to be able to balance that. In terms of other
506 departments, there is the paralegal and the administrative assistant for the Administrator position
507 which we recruited for, but we have not taken any further steps under the pandemic.”

508
509 Mayor K. Smith noted there also is the Deputy City Clerk position.

510
511 City Administrator Rindfleisch noted the Deputy City Clerk position is part of the budget and is
512 funded, and it has not been eliminated from Fred’s calculations.

513
514 Ald. Wulf asked Hope if, per the discussion that occurred at the June 3 Finance and Personnel
515 Committee meeting, she is waiting for employees to return to City Hall before she possibly
516 attempts to contact the individuals who had interviewed for the paralegal position.

517
518 Hope told Ald. Wulf that while interviews had been set up, no one has been interviewed for the
519 paralegal position at this point. Hope said city staff would have to reach out to candidates for the
520 first time since March to determine if they still are interested in the position. Hope said the IT
521 position also has not been filled. Staff will be looking to GEC for assistance via contracting due
522 to a retirement in the Inspection Department. Hope said there will be payouts for contracting out
523 those services, but she is unsure of the savings to the city. Hope said the Deputy City Clerk
524 position will be filled, and a contingent offer has been made to fill a position vacated by Lisa
525 Schmidt, who accepted a position in the Inspection Department.

526
527 Ald. Wulf asked Hope if it would be improper for her to speak further regarding the paralegal
528 position and ask that it possibly be referred to the Finance and Personnel Committee for further
529 discussion.

530
531 City Administrator Rindfleisch said he likely had misspoken regarding his intent, and he referred
532 to the financials included in councilmembers’ packets. City Administrator Rindfleisch noted
533 Fred had provided a detailed description regarding the vacant paralegal position. The position
534 was filled through January 21. Fred listed it as being vacant February through June. City
535 Administrator Rindfleisch noted the \$28,115 that is listed represents the half-year that the
536 position is vacant, and he said, “It is to be hired, as we’re talking about, but what I meant to
537 reference is the fact this is included. The current vacancy is already in the budget. The current
538 vacancy has already been in [Fred’s] calculations here.”

539
540 Ald. Wulf asked if it is assumed the paralegal position will remain vacant for the remainder of
541 2020.

542
543 City Administrator Rindfleisch told Ald. Wulf no and said the position will be filled the
544 remainder of the year.

Reviewed 6/15/2020 by Cari Burmaster

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

14

545

546 Mayor K. Smith said if the position was not filled, the city would gain what is listed in Fred's
547 financial report. Mayor K. Smith said Fred had accounted for the vacant position.

548

549 Hope said, "I think if you were looking at filling something, either Police or Fire, you're not
550 going to have that position for the full year, either. In other words, if that's what you were
551 looking at you would see a wash."

552

553 Mayor K. Smith asked Hope to discuss the status of the two current vacancies in the Fire
554 Department that are not the new positions and are in the process of being filled. Mayor K. Smith
555 said, "I don't think any of us have felt an urgency to apply pressure to determine when these new
556 hires could start because we couldn't even fill the natural succession backfilling. We weren't
557 even at a position to have people to fill."

558

559 Hope said one Fire Department candidate has passed his/her background check and still needs to
560 complete the physical agility test as he/she has not passed it twice. This individual will move to
561 the bottom of the list if he/she does not pass it on the third attempt, and he/she will have another
562 opportunity if the city reaches his/her name on the list. Hope said the second Fire Department
563 candidate is currently undergoing a background check and will need to complete the physical
564 agility test once the background check has been completed. This individual then would need to
565 undergo the psychological exam if he/she passes both the background check and the physical
566 agility test. Hope said staff would need to go to the next person on the list if the first individual
567 she had discussed does not pass the physical agility test. Hope said one individual has chosen to
568 opt out of the recruitment process; one candidate currently resides in Virginia; and the Village of
569 Holmen Fire Department had hired another candidate.

570

571 Hope said, "Slowly, that list is getting whittled down. We had seven on the list. Now we're
572 looking at four. We're looking at filling two [positions]. This is the struggle that we're having.
573 Right now we're looking at hopefully having two positions filled this summer. That's the goal.
574 I do believe that we have qualified candidates that would fill at least those two positions this
575 summer from the list that we have right now. If we needed to go fill firefighters for the three that
576 are new that were budgeted, we would probably have to start a whole new process, which we do
577 have the application process open so that we can continue that process of doing applications.
578 We're working on the [vacant] Fire Chief [position] and other police officers, then looking at
579 starting that process again in creating another eligibility list. It's kind of ongoing doing that
580 process.

581

582 With the police officer positions that we have, we still have one remaining open. We just had the
583 Police and Fire Commission meet [Wednesday evening]. Both have been approved to fill, so we
584 have one position open right now. But ultimately, I think we had four apply that actually came
585 to the testing out of the eight that said they were going to come to the testing. Four actually
586 came. One failed the physical agility test. Three showed up for the interview. One did not pass

Reviewed 6/15/2020 by Cari Burmaster

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

15

587 the interview process, so we have two candidates for a recruitment. This is the struggle that
588 we're having with Police and Fire: eligibility lists. And we have two very qualified candidates
589 for the Police Department. I think the struggle is, I know those additional positions ... Right
590 now we have the one position. Police and Fire are struggling wanting to get those positions
591 filled, understanding that there are budget constraints."

592
593 Ald. Stevens inquired about the length of the hiring process if Hope were given the means to hire
594 a police officer or a firefighter.

595
596 Hope told Ald. Stevens there were two positions that were open from the beginning of 2020, and
597 the city still is attempting to fill one of the positions. Hope said, "Realistically, right now we
598 have two candidates that we really could fill the position pending backgrounds and psychological
599 [exams] and those kinds of things. Should they pass those, right now they've already passed the
600 written exam, they've passed through the [Police and Fire Commission] interviews, and they've
601 passed the physical agility [test]. The last two things they would have to pass are the
602 psychological [exam] and the physical. That would take probably another month for them to go
603 through the background check and the psychological [exam] and the physical. For the Fire
604 Department, they're going through the process of that physical agility within the department.
605 Then they have to finish because they're working on the backgrounds. Once they complete that,
606 it's a psychological [exam] and a physical. If we get those two filled, more than likely we'd
607 probably have an additional ... I'm not sure if we'd have two more on the books. We'd likely
608 have at least one or two from the existing list that may pass. The problem is I don't know if
609 they're going to pass their backgrounds. That's the issue we've been having with a lot of Police
610 and Fire candidates: they're not passing the background checks. We may have to start another
611 list. That could take another three to six months, logistically. Ideally, another three months."

612
613 Ald. Stevens asked if the process should begin by September, if not sooner, if the goal is to hire
614 someone by the end of 2020.

615
616 Hope said, "Literally, yes."

617
618 City Administrator Rindfleisch said he wishes to clarify a statement he had made earlier
619 regarding not filling any positions, stating that Fred's financial figures do include filling
620 positions that are currently there and vacant. City Administrator Rindfleisch said the two
621 positions in Fire and the one in Police are included in Fred's financial figures, adding, "That's
622 still under that break-even number where we are right now."

623
624 Hope told councilmembers there currently are qualified applicants, but she also said she does not
625 believe they will be there in six months and the city will have to start the process over again.

626
627 Ald. Stevens noted the city was approximately \$450,000 under what was budgeted for the
628 reservoir project, and he asked, "Assuming that that comes into plan, does that stay in Capital

Reviewed 6/15/2020 by Cari Burmaster

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

16

629 Improvements and we can spend that on something else? Does it get returned to the taxpayers?
630 Do we carry it forward to the following year and borrow less?"

631
632 Fred noted the Water Department is an Enterprise Fund, and Enterprise Funds must be self-
633 sustaining. Fred noted that via the budget process, the Common Council has given authorization
634 both himself and Hawkins Ash CPAs to conduct a full Public Service Commission water rate
635 application, with an estimated increase of 30 to 40 percent. Fred said City Engineer Jarrod
636 Holter had submitted the estimated cost of doing the reservoir, and Fred had sent the information
637 to Hawkins Ash CPAs. Fred said it is possible the percentage for a water rate increase will
638 decrease slightly. Fred said, "We're not even on the 'look at the Onalaska water rate application'
639 yet. That's how backlogged they are due to this pandemic. When we do look at it, then we'll be
640 able to look at that direction and if there's any materiality of the differential between what we
641 speculated versus the actual." Fred cautioned there could be unforeseen costs.

642
643 Mayor K. Smith said Fred was stating that the funds will remain in the Enterprise Fund.

644
645 Ald. T. Smith asked if the 2020 Census will impact future budgets.

646
647 Fred said he believes the pandemic will drastically slow the process of conducting the census,
648 adding that any impacts would not be seen until 2022 and going forward.

649
650 City Administrator Rindfleisch said, "Often, like the COVID-19 response from the feds to the
651 state, there is a soft tier of 20,000 that often defines a large municipality for direct grants and
652 other ones." City Administrator Rindfleisch noted the City of La Crosse had received a direct
653 grant while the City of Onalaska had not, and he said it was based upon the size of the city. City
654 Administrator Rindfleisch said, "If everyone returns [the census] and we get a good count and
655 make 20,000, then I think there will be a benefit to us long term. It won't necessarily be a direct
656 benefit to our 2021 budget, but I think there are benefits to us to be a population of that size."

657
658 Ald. Stevens said the outlook is better than what was anticipated, and he complimented city staff.

659
660 Ald. Wulf thanked City Administrator Rindfleisch, Fred, and the department heads for their
661 efforts in putting together the packet the Council had received. Ald. Wulf noted there had been
662 discussions regarding holding a yearly meeting such as this one once the Council is seated
663 following the April election, and she said the pandemic had prompted this meeting. Ald. Wulf
664 added, "I look forward to having this in the future, because I think it just benefits all of us."

665
666 **Adjournment**

667
668 Motion by Ald. Wulf, second by Ald. T. Smith, to adjourn at 8:25 p.m.

669

**Special Common Council
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

17

670 On voice vote, motion carried.

671

672

673 Recorded by:

674

675 Kirk Bey