

MINUTES OF THE GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE
COMMITTEE MEMBERS PARTICIPATED REMOTELY
VIA ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE

April 28, 2021 – 5:00 p.m.

Committee Members present: Councilor Richard Michaud, Chairman
Councilor Nancie Cameron, Vice-Chair
Councilor Don Austin
Councilor Matt Gerding

Administration/Staff present: City Manager Bob Belmore
Finance Director Scott Smith
Deputy City Clerk Ammy Ramsey

Chairman Michaud called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Chairman Michaud stated due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor and in accordance with the Governor's Emergency Order#12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, this public body is authorized to meet electronically. This meeting will be held via Zoom online platform. The public is asked to submit comments via email to jslaven@somersworth.com or bblmore@somersworth.com. Comments must be received by Wednesday, April 28, 2021 at 12 noon. The public can access the meeting and listen live by telephoning any of the numbers posted on the agenda.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Councilor Austin made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 30, 2020 meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gerding and passed 3-1 by a roll call vote. Councilor Cameron abstained.

CABLE TV & INTERNET ACCESS

City Manager Belmore informed the Committee that Attorney Kate Miller from Donahue Tucker and Ciandella will be giving a presentation at the May 17, 2021 Council Meeting regarding her recommendation for how the City could proceed with the Cable Franchise Agreement renewal with Comcast and the new one being proposed by Atlantic Broadband. Belmore also informed the Committee that the City receives a franchise fee of 3% under the current Cable Franchise Agreement, but the fee is based on cable tv fees and does not include the phone or internet. Under

current Federal law, the City has virtually no input on service and rates. The franchise fee the City receives has been used for a variety of items, and is mainly used to for the equipment need to broadcast the City and School Access Channels. The FY 21-22 Budget includes money for upgrades to the broadcast equipment for the two channels. Belmore also mentioned that Atlantic Broadband is interested in extending their service which will give comparison opportunities to residents. Councilor Michaud inquired about the expiration of the current agreement and Belmore stated the current agreement extension with Comcast started June of 2013 and will expire in June of 2023. Michaud also inquired if the City would have more than one company to offer and Belmore replied we would should City Council approve an Agreement with Atlantic Broadband.

CITY ORDINANCE, CH 4, NON-UNION WAGES – COLA TO INCLUDE WATER/WASTEWATER UNION

City Manager Belmore explained that in the past Non-Union workers have generally received the same wage increase as the Union workers for the City. Manager Belmore recommended a wage increase of 2.5 percent. The City typically will present an Ordinance to update the wage schedule at the second meeting in May or first meeting in June. The Committee members were all in agreement to support the Ordinance Amendment to Chapter 4, Personnel Rules and Regulations. Belmore also explained that the Water/Wastewater Union would receive the same increase as their Union Agreement has a “me too” clause so that any changes to wage COLA adjustments or Health Benefits given to Non-union employees would carry over to these Union employees.

Councilor Austin made a motion to support an Ordinance increasing wages for Non-Union workers by 2.5%. The motion was seconded by Councilor Cameron and passed 4-0 by roll call vote.

ELDERLY EXEMPTIONS

City Manager Belmore informed the Committee that the parameters of the Elderly Exemption have not been considered since 2015. He referred the Committee members to two memos prepared by City Assessor, Marybeth Walker of Corcoran Associates. He explained the second memo refers to a State Statute that allows for a Disabled -non-Veteran Exemption. The City currently does not offer this exemption, but helps disabled residents with limited income to stay in their homes.

Finance Director Smith stated that the Assessor mentioned that since the re-assessment of properties, a few instances occurred whereby residents that qualify for an exemption that used to cover their entire property saw the assessed value of their property go up and exceed the exemption this year and are now having to pay the difference. The Assessor is recommending an incremental increase of \$15,000 to the elderly exemption amount which will cause an estimated \$750,000 reduction in the assessed value and have an estimated 2 cent impact on the City’s tax rate.

Councilor Gerding inquired about how the increase of \$15,000 to the exemption amount was determined. Director Smith stated that the exemption amount was compared to what other surrounding communities are doing and applied the median value of those communities.

Councilor Austin mentioned that the re-assessment process happens every five years and inquired about any new exemptions that could be approved resulting from the recommended change. Director Smith stated he is not aware of any.

Councilor Michaud and City Manager Belmore discussed how an Ordinance could be supported by this Committee and then move to the Council's Finance Committee for consideration.

Councilor Gerding inquired about the impact it would have on the budget. Director Smith stated that it would not affect the budget, rather, it would affect the tax rate but not until 2022.

Finance Director Smith informed the Committee that the Disabled Non-Veteran Exemption is new and the parameters are very stringent, but it might allow people to stay in their homes. Councilor Austin mentioned he thought that this is something the City should investigate further, and that the restrictions recommended may be too restrictive.

Councilor Austin made a motion to support an Ordinance to approve an increase to the exemption amount recommended by the Assessor for the Elderly Exemption. The motion was seconded by Councilor Cameron 4-0 by roll call vote.

MISCELLANEOUS

City Manager Belmore presented the FY 2021 Employee Breakdown by Department for their information and stated that there are no new positions.

ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Austin made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gerding and passed 4-0 roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 5:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ammy Ramsey, Deputy City Clerk