

SCRANTON CITY COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING

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IN RE: FILE OF THE COUNCIL NO. 35 2020  
APPROPRIATING FUNDS FOR THE EXPENSES OF THE  
CITY GOVERNMENT FOR THE PERIOD COMMENCING ON  
THE FIRST DAY OF JANUARY, 2021 TO AND INCLUDING  
DECEMBER 31, 2021 BY THE ADOPTION OF THE  
GENERAL CITY OPERATING BUDGET FOR THE YEAR  
2021.

DATE: December 1st, 2020

TIME: 5:45 p.m.

LOCATION: Zoom

Maria McCool, RPR  
Official Court Reporter

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C O U N C I L M E M B E R S :

WILLIAM GAUGHAN, PRESIDENT

KYLE DONAHUE, VICE PRESIDENT

MARK MCANDREW

JESSICA ROTHCHILD

THOMAS SCHUSTER

LORI REED, CITY CLERK

KATHY CARRERA, ASSISTANT CITY CLERK

KEVIN HAYES, COUNCIL SOLICITOR

1 MR. GAUGHAN: I'd like to call this  
2 public hearing to order. Roll call, please.

3 MS. CARRERA: Mr. Schuster. Mr.  
4 McAndrew.

5 MR. MCANDREW: Present.

6 MS. CARRERA: Dr. Rothchild.

7 DR. ROTHCHILD: Here.

8 MS. CARRERA: Mr. Donahue.

9 MR. DONAHUE: Here.

10 MS. CARRERA: Mr. Gaughan.

11 MR. GAUGHAN: Here. Thank you, Miss  
12 Carrera.

13 MS. REED: The purpose of said  
14 public hearing is to hear testimony and discuss  
15 the following:

16 FILE OF THE COUNCIL NO. 35 2020  
17 APPROPRIATING FUNDS FOR THE EXPENSES OF THE  
18 CITY GOVERNMENT FOR THE PERIOD COMMENCING ON  
19 THE FIRST DAY OF JANUARY, 2021 TO AND INCLUDING  
20 DECEMBER 31, 2021 BY THE ADOPTION OF THE  
21 GENERAL CITY OPERATING BUDGET FOR THE YEAR  
22 2021.

23 MR. GAUGHAN: Thank you, Mrs. Reed.  
24 At this time, I'd ask someone to please make a  
25 motion to accept public comment from the

1 following individual, Marie Schumacher.

2 MR. DONAHUE: So moved.

3 MR. SCHUSTER: Second.

4 MR. GAUGHAN: There's been a motion  
5 and a second to accept public comment related  
6 to the budget. Mrs. Reed, would you please  
7 read Miss Schumacher's comments into the  
8 record?

9 MS. REED: Thank you. The comments  
10 are as follows:

11 0 Considering the Budget volume and  
12 having requested the public be allowed more  
13 time than the usual five-minute Council limit,  
14 I have done my best to meet your requirements.

15 0 I was disappointed the Home Rule  
16 Charter-required balanced Budget was not  
17 submitted and I hope the 2022 Budget will  
18 arrive balanced.

19 0 I do not get any sense of where  
20 the City is going, Exiting Act 47 appears to be  
21 a technique to manipulate some unspoken  
22 strategy.

23 0 Overall, it appears the City  
24 wants to bite off more than the taxpayers can  
25 chew taking over by taking over projects that

1 belong to the County while not be able to  
2 negotiate either a Property Reassessment or a  
3 Stormwater Authority.

4 The Administration wants the former  
5 Reserve Center to become something that will  
6 want to be utilized by area municipalities but  
7 where was the details of this transformation?  
8 They also want a Health Department when they  
9 have a non-profit (Geisinger Community Medical  
10 School) that instituted a Community program. I  
11 say let this be a payment-in-lieu-of-taxes  
12 (PILOT).

13 0 Speaking of PILOTS, the taxpayers  
14 need to know when they are going to start  
15 contributing at least something to the  
16 Operating Budget. The Housing Authority as  
17 contributed in the past, why not now.

18 Since Public Safety (Police and  
19 Fire) are available to all, I believe what Bob  
20 Bolus recommended years ago and that is a fee  
21 for this protection. In the immediate past the  
22 Harrison Avenue Bridge could not be used by  
23 Fire Trucks, but that changed and where is the  
24 Study showing the Fire Department savings?

25 0 I am against the large jumps in

1 salary for City employees setting the low end  
2 of salaries at levels at least double that of  
3 the residents. We have yet to see the Job  
4 Descriptions and how much they will save  
5 expenses. Meanwhile the Council could and  
6 should increase the pay of the City  
7 Controller's \$40,000 salary.

8 0 What has happened to our Parking  
9 Enforcement Program. Those two positions  
10 increased safety and I cringe at the possible  
11 return of vehicles parked to close to the end  
12 of the road that drivers have to say a prayer  
13 and pull out. Also, I believe these two  
14 positions brought in considerable revenue.

15 0 We definitely need to provide  
16 funding for all ECTV does.

17 0 Finally, it would be nice if an  
18 expected 2021 Cast Flow would be made available  
19 so our municipalities health may be tracked.

20  
21 MS. REED: As submitted by City  
22 resident Marie Schumacher.

23 MR. GAUGHAN: Thank you, Mrs. Reed.  
24 On the question? All those in favor signify by  
25 saying aye.

1 MR. SCHUSTER: Aye.

2 MR. MCANDREW: Aye.

3 MR. DONAHUE: Aye.

4 DR. ROTHCHILD: Aye.

5 MR. GAUGHAN: Aye. Opposed? The  
6 ayes have it and so moved.

7 And now as part of this public  
8 hearing, Mayor Cagnetti and Business  
9 Administrator, Carl Deeley are joining us to  
10 answer questions and respond to comments from  
11 the public and the only questions or comments  
12 we got tonight on the 2021 budget was from  
13 Marie Schumacher.

14 So I'll turn it over now, Mayor  
15 Cagnetti and Mr. Deeley, if you want to respond  
16 to any of those questions or comments and  
17 provide any feedback.

18 MAYOR COGNETTI: Sure. Good  
19 evening. How are you guys? Thank you for  
20 allowing us to be on tonight. I thought it  
21 might be helpful if we could answer a couple of  
22 the questions. Yeah, I think some of the  
23 commentary was just commentary.

24 So we'll kind of take a few of the  
25 questions that Miss Schumacher posed. On the

1 county piece, I think that she's referring to  
2 the health department. So as you all know,  
3 we're looking to explore potentially having a  
4 City health department as we've spoken about  
5 before.

6 I'm agnostic to what the best  
7 solution is, County or City. We just need to  
8 have something because to this day, we need  
9 more data and we cannot access that Department  
10 of Health data until we have a health  
11 department here locally.

12 Al Lucas continues to be an  
13 incredible manager along my side while we look  
14 at this. He and Amanda Hallock who's in our IT  
15 Department have been pulling data and trying to  
16 collate all of these things. But there is  
17 nothing that would be better than having a  
18 Department of Health data.

19 And we won't be able to get that  
20 unless we have -- whether it be County or City  
21 a health department. So I think it's important  
22 that we try to move forward with that.

23 Miss Schumacher mentions the  
24 Geisinger Commonwealth Medical College.  
25 Unfortunately, that wouldn't solve our problem



1           because we would need to be a government entity  
2           in order to get that data.

3                       So it's an imperfect system as we  
4           know. We're just looking for the ways that we  
5           might be able to mitigate these things going  
6           forward. And we really can use that data. But  
7           in the mean time, a big thanks especially to Al  
8           Lucas who is continuing to get that information  
9           out to us.

10                      Councilperson Gaughan, I know you're  
11           on the e-mails about hospitalizations. They  
12           are pulling data on their own. It's not  
13           something that's just sent to us like I believe  
14           it should be.

15                      On the pilot piece, I want you all  
16           to know that we sent out I think two weeks ago  
17           we sent out letters to all tax exempt  
18           properties -- organizations to ask them to help  
19           fund city government in some way in some sort  
20           of form of a payment in lieu of taxes.

21                      We have gotten, as you know, which  
22           you see in the budget the Lutherwood Senior  
23           Center and the University of Scranton have  
24           pledged 200,000 and \$6,000. We're hoping that  
25           we might get some other pledges or some other

1 different types of funding.

2 And, you know, if it's not this  
3 year, we know there's a lot of organizations  
4 that are really hurting. We're hoping that we  
5 set the tone with these letters and with this  
6 outreach for more success in the coming years.  
7 So I'll look forward to working with all of you  
8 on that.

9 The other -- oh, I don't want to  
10 jump too far ahead. Carl, you wanted to maybe  
11 address the Serrenti Center.

12 MR. DEELEY: Yes, absolutely. So  
13 the question was around the progress on that  
14 and what the plans are. And absolutely, the  
15 City's obviously made some substantial  
16 commitment. So the last several years our  
17 intention was to bring that building in line to  
18 actually bring some added value to the City.

19 So this is being done in phases. So  
20 currently the first phase that we have is to  
21 install a simulator -- a police simulator which  
22 has been purchased through previous budgets and  
23 needs to be installed so we can actually use  
24 it.

25 That first phase currently is going

1 through the RFP process for the building work.  
2 And we also got an LSA grant out for \$250,000  
3 which has been applied for.

4 So that first phase has utilized  
5 money that's already been spent on the  
6 simulator. And as soon as we've got the RFPs  
7 opened we'll get that work going quickly as we  
8 can.

9 In terms of the longer term plan,  
10 absolutely, yeah, the plan here is to obviously  
11 use that building on multipurpose and, indeed,  
12 in the future we're looking to make that into a  
13 revenue generating facility where we can,  
14 indeed, kind of get county and maybe statewide  
15 support for that as well in terms of its usage.

16 I think there's a question too about  
17 the parking? Yes, I could take that on the  
18 parking. And absolutely, Miss Schumacher is  
19 correct. In the -- previously in the budgets  
20 the -- we have a budget for 2020 around \$11,000  
21 in terms revenue.

22 Year to date obviously it's much  
23 lower than that, we're around the 3,000 mark  
24 mainly because COVID and the lack of the  
25 traffic through the City. But that's now

1 reopened.

2 The budget for next year is \$10,000.  
3 There are two positions -- those two positions  
4 are still in play. We have one position which  
5 is open, the other position which is filled.  
6 And that person is actually fulfilling those  
7 roles right now. So there is no intention  
8 right now to cut those jobs.

9 MAYOR COGNETTI: Reviewing the  
10 comments, I think the only other thing I see  
11 would be the -- we did send you all job  
12 descriptions. Maybe those haven't made it to  
13 the public yet. So -- or Miss Schumacher might  
14 have written that before those were into the  
15 record.

16 And on the -- in terms of the  
17 salary scale, I think that there are a lot of  
18 other government entities around us that have a  
19 higher salary scale than the City, not just  
20 other cities which you saw in the overview that  
21 we're far under the salary scale for a lot of  
22 other cities.

23 But I think having -- a lot of us  
24 having come from the school district, for  
25 example, the management salaries, they are far

1 higher than anything that we're proposing for  
2 the City.

3 And, you know, state jobs, county  
4 jobs are higher. So I think it's important  
5 that we remember the context that we're in.  
6 And we're trying to -- we're trying to retain  
7 talent. We're trying to attract talent. We're  
8 never going get there if we don't set the bar a  
9 little bit higher.

10 MR. GAUGHAN: Okay. Thank you.  
11 Anything else Mayor or Mr. Deeley?

12 MAYOR COGNETTI: I don't think I  
13 have anything else tonight. Any of the  
14 questions that you guys have we can stay on or  
15 we can hop off and let you get to it.

16 MR. GAUGHAN: Okay. I don't have --  
17 does anybody else have any questions regarding  
18 the public hearing or the budget at this point?

19 MR. MCANDREW: Yeah, just the three  
20 questions that I posed two weeks ago at the  
21 work session and then they were e-mailed last  
22 week. I'm still awaiting the responses for  
23 them.

24 MR. DEELEY: Yeah, Councilman  
25 McAndrew, I do have those, yeah, and we're

1 working on those right now. And I'll start to  
2 get those answers to you tonight.

3 MR. MCANDREW: Thank you.

4 MR. DEELEY: Thank you, sir.

5 MR. GAUGHAN: Anyone else?

6 MAYOR COGNETTI: Tom -- or  
7 Councilman Schuster, I will -- I'll respond  
8 formally to your letter. I think it's  
9 important to remember that a couple years back  
10 when we were on the School Board we were  
11 looking at -- we were looking at financial  
12 fees.

13 We were really focused on the  
14 financial advisor who was there that was  
15 charging a percentage and made 1.2 million  
16 dollars off the backs of the taxpayers in four  
17 years at the school district. That was  
18 egregious and you and Councilperson McAndrew  
19 were right by my side with that. And I  
20 appreciate that.

21 Those were exorbitant fees and the  
22 three of us along with Miss Gilmartin were able  
23 to make sure that that person was no longer  
24 working at the school district. That's a  
25 different -- that's a different scale than

1 looking at the transaction fees that we're  
2 looking for for the TAN. But I'll respond to  
3 you formally.

4 MR. SCHUSTER: Yeah, I think when  
5 we're looking at those, I mean, that tally for  
6 1.2 million was huge there. And, I mean, there  
7 was, you know, some laws that may have been  
8 skirted there. But, I mean, when it comes to  
9 this, I mean, tightening our belt with  
10 everything, the type of transaction it is, I  
11 think we could have saved some money on that.  
12 But I'll await the response.

13 MAYOR COGNETTI: Yeah, and we had  
14 looked back at prior years. A couple years ago  
15 the fees were 94,000 for that transaction. So  
16 we're on -- we're definitely on a downward  
17 trend pretty quickly. And we'll continue to  
18 review those.

19 MR. GAUGHAN: Okay. Anybody else?  
20 All right. Thank you very much, Mayor and  
21 Mr. Deeley, for coming and answering those  
22 questions. We appreciate it. Have a good  
23 night.

24 MR. DEELEY: Thank you.

25 MR. GAUGHAN: All right. At this

1           time since there is no further business or  
2           further questions, I'd like to make a motion to  
3           adjourn this public hearing.

4                       MR. MCANDREW:  Second.

5                       MR. DONAHUE:  So moved.

6                       MR. GAUGHAN:  So there's been a  
7           motion and a second.  On the question?  This  
8           public hearing is adjourned.  Thank you  
9           everyone.

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