

**CITY OF MAPLE HEIGHTS
WORK SESSION OF COUNCIL
OCTOBER 12, 2015**

Council President Jackie Albers called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. at Maple Heights City Hall in Room 7. Those present were Council President Jackie Albers, Council members Alex Adams, Toni Jones, Ron Jackson, Bill Brownlee, Richard Trojanski, and Edwina Agee. Councilman Anthony Cefaratti was absent and excused.

Also present were Mayor Jeffrey Lansky, Law Director John Montello, Police Chief John Popielarczyk, Fire Chief Vito Kavaliunas, Human Services Director Linda Vopat and Council Clerk Leonette Cicirella. Finance Director Irene Crowell was absent and excused.

Council President Albers stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss ideas and review what had already been done by the City to cut costs, save money and generate income in preparation for the City's upcoming meeting with the State Auditors. Ms. Albers said the meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 27th at 8:30 a.m. and will review financial plans and options for the City. Ms. Albers said some guidelines to consider include a realistic timeline, the value of the ideas presented and if there would be any possibility of shared services with the county, the schools or other parts of the community.

Ms. Albers began the discussion with a review of what had already been done in the City. Ms. Albers said the first item was the reorganization of the emergency dispatch center and asked if this resulted in savings to the city. Police Chief Popielarczyk said with the reorganization the city lost some employees which will initially save the city money. Mayor Lansky stated that he wasn't sure of the savings because the cities involved in the regional center will be charged by the number of calls which will obviously fluctuate. He said that so far Garfield Heights had the most calls, followed by Maple Heights, Bedford Heights and Bedford. Mayor Lansky said he had tried to get the percentage paid by each community to be equal to start. Councilman Jackson asked if the charges were broken down by percentage to which Mayor Lansky answered in the affirmative and added that costs would probably only go down if more cities came into the system.

Ms. Albers asked about the employees lost with the reorganization. Chief Popielarczyk said there are five (5) full time dispatchers at the center but two (2) records staff were cut. Fire Chief Kavaliunas stated there would be savings in the cost of shared equipment since updated equipment is expensive (for example, one radio costs Three Thousand Five Hundred Dollars (\$3,500.00).)

Ms. Albers asked council to review city contracts in which the city may have saved money such as the recent union contracts with the employee givebacks that the finance director had quantified for council. Law Director John Montello said the health insurance contract for city employees could be reviewed and perhaps other competing plans could be reviewed. Mr. Jackson asked if Mr. Montello was referring to plans within the same company or with competing firms to which Mr. Montello replied that both could be considered. Mr. Montello also said the city had been self-insured up to this year, so that option could be reviewed again.

Ms. Albers said another contract up for review was the Waste Management contract which could be renegotiated. Mr. Jackson said perhaps the City could partner with another city to reduce the costs for each and get a better rate. Mr. Montello said the city could “piggyback” on another community’s contract to participate in the bid process.

Mr. Montello said the contract with MBIS (now SafeBuilt) for the Building Department is also due for renewal by the end of this year. Ms. Albers asked if the City should consider staffing the Building Department itself or should it keep the contract services. Councilman Adams asked how much it would cost to staff the department. Mayor Lansky said the City would need to hire a Building Commissioner, inspectors, a secretary and also pay for a software system. Mr. Jackson said council could compare the in-house costs to contracted services.

Ms. Albers asked if the City had an ongoing IT contract. Mayor Lansky said this contract is for IT support only.

Ms. Albers asked about the sale of City-owned equipment. Mayor Lansky said some equipment has been sold by auction, but that has not been done recently.

Ms. Albers suggested that utility services to the City be reviewed for better rates. Mr. Montello said the City could check with NOPEC to have an energy audit performed for the City.

Ms. Albers said the leases for the Police Department and Fire Department vehicles should result in savings for the City rather than purchasing such vehicles.

Mr. Adams asked about the sale of the City’s leaf pick-up vehicles and the Mayor said that one (1) item was sold and there were two (2) others left. Mr. Adams asked how much it was sold for to which the Mayor responded that he would need to check. Ms. Albers said she thought it had sold for about Eight Thousand Dollars (\$8,000.00).

Ms. Jones asked if the City had a cell phone contract with any vendor and if there could be better terms for the contract. Mayor Lansky said the city did not have a cell phone contract. Mr. Montello stated not many city employees have cell phones paid by for by the city.

Regarding revenue enhancements, Mr. Adams asked Mr. Montello if there were any billboards or cell towers which could be leased. Mr. Montello said there are no new cell tower leases available. Mayor Lansky said there is still some interest in billboards within the city, but the sites are too close to freeway entrance/exit ramps and would not be permitted under ODOT regulations.

Ms. Albers asked if there were any other ideas to add to the 5 year plan to which Ms. Jones suggested a review of the vacant lands in the city land bank which could be marketed to a developer. Mr. Montello said that Council may want to consider easing some of the restrictions for consolidation of vacant lots. He said there have been inquiries about the unimproved vacant lots and questions as to the costs of the lot consolidation and future taxes. Councilman Brownlee asked if Mr. Montello was referring to the recent vacant property legislation to which Mr.

Montello answered in the affirmative. Ms. Jones said the fees involved would be for the surveyor to check the property lines of the parcels. Mr. Jackson said people are interested in knowing the costs of the lot consolidation and what will happen to their property taxes. Ms. Jones said since the land is unimproved any additional property tax would come to only about One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00) to One Hundred Fifty Dollars (\$150.00.)

Ms. Albers asked if there was any cost savings from the Police and Fire Departments to which both Chiefs answered in the affirmative. Police Chief Popielarczyk said the police vehicles had been experiencing a problem with the electrical charging system which required the vehicles to be kept idling. He said the electrical systems had been re-worked so now the vehicles do not need to idle in good weather. The Chief said he did not have an exact amount for this savings, but it would save on the amount of fuel used and would also reduce the engine idle hours, hence reducing wear and tear on the engines. With regards to the issue of idling, Human Services Director Vopat said the vans should not be left idling either. Mr. Montello said the cost paid by the city for fuel should be reviewed.

With regards to the Fire Department, Chief Kavaliunas said that the most recent department contract reduced the number of firefighters from twelve (12) to nine (9) per shift. The department also removed one (1) staff member from the fire prevention bureau and reduced the minimum staffing from eight (8) to six (6) per shift. The Chief said these reductions would save the city well over One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000.00.) Chief Kavaliunas said the reduction per shift was a contract concession, but with the SAFER grant the department will be able to increase the staff to eleven (11) per shift which will reduce the amount of overtime. The Chief stated the overtime costs have been high for the Fire Department due to the number of firefighters who have left for other jobs and the delay in getting the new hires on staff.

Both Chief Popielarczyk and Chief Kavaliunas said the biggest concern for each of their departments is the retention of qualified personnel. Chief Popielarczyk said the police department will get new personnel, train the cadet and then the new hire leaves for another city citing as an example, the loss of another policeman recently to the City of Bedford. Fire Chief Kavaliunas said he has the same problem and that new hires come to the city for education and the credentials but then leave. He said the safety forces are basically training facilities for other communities.

Chief Kavaliunas stated that the Fire Department has also reviewed and renegotiated other contracts required in their department such as those for inspections of department equipment including heart monitors, oxygen tanks, certification of the trucks, etc. The Chief said the two (2) vehicles being replaced are being evaluated for what value if any can be assigned to them. He said the rescue squad may not be worth much, but the pumper truck may have some value in the parts. The Chief said with the new vehicles, the department will get on a schedule for preventative maintenance if possible to reduce expensive repairs in the long term.

The Chief said the department is also looking into a new smoke detector program for the residents since the original program had been stopped due to funding issues. He said the Red Cross would supply the smoke detectors and batteries free of charge to the residents, but the department would need to get the devices installed. Chief Kavaliunas said it may be difficult for

the Fire Department to do this with its staffing, but perhaps it could work with a civic organization which could help with the installation.

Chief Kavaliunas said the Fire Department could help generate revenue for the city if new hires could operate the third rescue squad since ambulance charges are paid to the city. Ms. Jones asked if the department uses a collection agency for the non-payment of these calls. The Chief said the department is under a new reporting system which is doing a better job of collecting these charges. He said that any uncollected charges are handled through the Ohio Attorney General's office.

Police Chief Popielarczyk said there has been some savings in personnel costs due to reduced staff manning hours by one per shift, but the savings is offset by the comp time, etc. The Chief stated that as with the Fire Department, the issue of staff retention is critical for the Police Department. He said the retention is tied to the issue of no raises over time, which negatively impacts the pension which is dependent on raises. The retention issue also means that a number of police personnel have only two (2) to three (3) years of experience. Chief Popielarczyk said the city has also eliminated the evidence staff and the secretarial position for the detective's bureau, that his secretary now covers both positions.

Ms. Albers asked Chief Popielarczyk how the Police Department has been affected by overtime. The Chief said his department has been devastated by overtime, both in terms of financial costs and human costs. The Chief said cuts in the Police Department must be weighed carefully because of the safety factor to the residents and the personnel. Mr. Montello said he is cognizant of the overtime issue so he is careful how he calls police officers to attend court hearings, sometimes dismissing cases if it will cost more to have the officer present than the amount of the fine to be imposed.

Mr. Montello said the Law Department is in the middle of an amnesty program called the Fresh Start Program which encourages people to call the Court or the Law Department to pay fines without having to go to court for hearings which increase the court costs. Mr. Montello said if people took advantage of this program it could generate about Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000.00) to One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000.00) for the city. He said that not many people however had called to participate in the program even though it had been publicized to various media outlets.

Ms. Albers asked the Chiefs when they anticipated hiring new personnel. Police Chief Popielarczyk said the department is completing the background checks and would try to hire what the department is budgeted for which is thirty-three (33) officers. The Chief said there are only twenty-eight (28) officers on staff, soon to be down to twenty-seven (27). Ms. Jones asked Chief Popielarczyk if the city needed to hire full-time officers first, or could part-time police be hired as per the recently passed legislation creating those positions. The Chief said there are some retired officers interested in returning as part-time which would help since they know the city. The Chief said these officers could be used with other officers not as familiar with the area.

Chief Kavaliunas said the Fire Department is ready to hire seven (7) new firefighters. He said they have passed the background checks so second interviews will be scheduled. The Chief said the last step in the hiring process is the physical exam

Mr. Jackson requested Council return to consideration of the amnesty program described by Law Director Montello. Mr. Jackson suggested that perhaps a church could be involved as was done in Cleveland. Mr. Jackson said the Church hosted the program and judges were involved to work with the participants. Mr. Montello said the City could also consider an amnesty program for people with past due RITA taxes to get onto a payment plan. Ms. Jones said these programs could be done in collaboration with neighboring communities like Garfield Heights, Bedford, and Warrensville Heights and could be a "Southeast Cuyahoga County Amnesty Program." Ms. Albers said this was a good example of collaboration between communities and departments in communities such as the courts.

Ms. Albers asked if there were other shared services that could be considered. Councilman Trojanski suggested that health insurance could be shared with the city school district.

Mr. Jackson asked about the number of city vehicles being used by city employees. Mayor Lansky said there are only about six (6) city vehicles assigned to employees, including one (1) he uses and one (1) for the Service Department. Chief Kavaliunas said there are two (2) vehicles assigned to the Fire Department. Chief Popielarczyk said there are three (3) vehicles assigned to the Police Department, one (1) he uses, one (1) for the Police Captain and one (1) for the detective's bureau. Mr. Adams asked how old were the vehicles and how are they used by the staff. Mayor Lansky said the vehicles are 2008 models and are used for city business only. Mr. Montello said the City policy is that the vehicles are not to be used for personal use and this has not been abused.

Mr. Montello said another shared service could be with the Cleveland Water Department if the Department would take over ownership of the city water lines. The Mayor said the City had a contract with the Cleveland Water Department seven (7) years ago and in a number of instances never repaired the lines for the City. Chief Kavaliunas said he had been told that since the sewer system hadn't been improved, when the City of Cleveland would do repair work it could plan to modernize/improve the system if they owned it.

Ms. Albers said another shared service could involve the city school district if it would allow the city to include a page of city news in the district newsletter it sends to all the residents.

Ms. Albers asked if there were any other shared services or other ideas to discuss. Chief Popielarczyk said the Police Department had closed the jail which resulted in savings from reduced personnel and the elimination of the maintenance contract. Fire Chief Kavaliunas suggested that each director provide a department review report to Council to which Ms. Albers said would be very helpful. Ms. Jones said the department reports could help council see which departments were making money for the City such as the Building Department. Ms. Albers said the Building Department could also be considered a shared service perhaps since it is operated by SafeBuilt which also services three (3) other local communities. Mr. Montello reminded Council that the contract with SafeBuilt will need to be renegotiated for next year and said he

would arrange a meeting with the company. Mr. Jackson asked when the contract ends and would the City receive a notice of termination from SafeBuilt. Mr. Montello said the contract ends December 31, 2015 and does not require any notice of non-renewal. The Mayor said the City is trying to negotiate a new contract with the company. Ms. Jones asked if the City was obligated to supply any services under the contract, such as inspectors or secretary. The Mayor said a city employee is at the window for the Building Department. Mr. Adams asked Mr. Montello if he would send a letter to start negotiations with the company.

Ms. Albers asked if there were any other ideas regarding the collection of RITA and property taxes. Mr. Montello said RITA does do some collection activity on behalf of the City. He said RITA gets judgments in court, but the City needs to collect on these. Mr. Jackson asked about the use of CCA to collect past due taxes. Mr. Trojanski said last year it was decided not to go with CCA because of the fees which would be charged to the City. Ms. Jones asked Mr. Montello if the city gets reports from RITA regarding outstanding taxes. Mr. Montello said he does not receive reports from RITA, but perhaps the Finance Department does. Mr. Montello said he could ask RITA for a report since he will be meeting with that agency to discuss the new municipal income tax legislation which will need to be passed by the end of this year.

Ms. Albers said passage of the Senior Levy would be a source of income for the Human Services Department which would relieve stress from other departments such as the safety departments. Mrs. Vopat said the Senior Center is the “safety net” for the community and that if it would close there would be an increase in calls to the Police and Fire Departments.

Regarding levies, Mr. Montello said he had received information from the Board of Elections that if the city wants to introduce legislation for an operating levy, the deadline for this filing is December 9, 2015. Mr. Adams said an operating levy may be necessary. Mr. Brownlee asked about the RITA collections after the agency gets the judgments. Mr. Montello said in the past the City hired a collection company. He said RITA tries to make payment arrangements with the taxpayers. Mr. Brownlee asked what form of collection seems to be most successful for collecting payments. Mr. Jackson said a collection agent gets a percentage of what is collected. Mr. Brownlee said some money would be better than no money collected. Chief Popielarczyk said if a collection agency is used it’s worth the fee. He said collection agencies are more aggressive, know the legal requirements of debt collection and even if a fee is paid, it’s taken from what is collected so the money that does come to the city is “free and clear.” Mr. Montello said he is finishing the changes required by the new income tax legislation and there is concern as to the amount of fees which will be permitted under it.

Mr. Adams asked how many employees does the Human Resources Department assist at the City. The Mayor said he would need to check, may be Two Hundred (200) to which Ms. Albers said she didn’t think there were that many employees, maybe One Hundred (100). Ms. Albers said perhaps a couple of city departments could be combined such as economic development and human resources Ms. Jones said those two departments did not go together but economic development and housing could be combined.

At this time Ms. Jones asked about ideas to rename the Senior Center since it serves the whole community to let people know what programs are available that are not just for seniors. Ms.

Jones said she posed this question in case the levy doesn't pass and the city would need to go on the ballot again under the December 9th deadline. Ms. Jones said the name change could also make it easier for the department to receive grants for its different programs. Mr. Brownlee asked how this related to revenue to which Ms. Jones said if the levy didn't pass, council would need to try again for funding and it would be important to show the multiple uses of the department. Mr. Brownlee asked how the city would exit from the senior center if the levy didn't pass. Mrs. Vopat said the grant money received this year would get the department through the first quarter of next year to March 31, 2016 and the department could do other fundraising. She said the department also gets paid for services it provides. If necessary, Mrs. Vopat said the department would have to make arrangements for other agencies to provide services to the residents.

Ms. Albers asked if there were any final questions, ideas or suggestions. Mr. Adams said the Mayor has made all the cuts possible but that has not been enough. He said the city needs the senior levy passed and then next year perhaps an operating levy. Ms. Jones said the city needs to start marketing its vacant lands.

Mayor Lansky thanked Mr. Adams for his comments and said some kind of tax increase will be needed such as an income tax increase or a reduced tax credit.

Police Chief Popielarczyk said Council should focus on the retention of safety personnel since the city loses money when the departments train new employees who then leave for another city. He said the tests are expensive to give, the hiring process is expensive and the training takes about sixteen (16) to eighteen (18) weeks. The Chief said the city is losing the middle tier of employees who are a buffer between the first line supervisors and the new hires.

Ms. Albers asked what positive incentives to stay are available for employees. The Chief said in union negotiations raises need to be offered, with perhaps an increase in health care costs for the employee to offset the raise. The Chief said this would keep the employees on staff and would improve the city's image to the employees. Mr. Montello agreed and said the city needs to give employees a good view of the city and instill confidence in the administration and the council. Chief Popielarczyk said the Police Department is used to the workload, but needs to retain people which in turn would promote a more positive view of the city to the employees.

Chief Kavaliunas said another consideration is that things are interconnected such that with increasing workloads and decreasing staffing levels there is a safety factor to consider. He said that like the Police department the Fire department has lost its middle tier of employees which is the backbone of the department. The Chief said the department has employees nearing the end of their careers who are ready to retire and now new cadets being hired who then often times leave for other cities. Ms. Albers said many residents feel they are "stuck" here as well, something the city needs to work on to change. Mr. Adams said the benefits issue is critical, otherwise the employees will not stay.

The Meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

S/S Leonette F. Cicirella, Clerk of Council

