

City of Monroe
City Hall, Monroe, Louisiana
March 3, 2022
5:30 p.m.

There was a legal special session of the City Council of the City of Monroe, Louisiana held this date at the Council's regular meeting place, the Council Chamber, City Hall Building, Monroe, Louisiana.

The Honorable Carday Marshall, Chairman, called the meeting to order. He then asked the Clerk to call the roll.

There were present: Council members Harvey, Ezernack, Woods, Marshall and Dawson

There was absent: None.

The Honorable Carday Marshall, presiding officer, declared a quorum was present and lead the invocation and pledge.

The Honorable Carday Marshall, presiding officer, then stated the object of the meeting; that being to consider:
(1) The 2022/23 fiscal year budget submitted by the Administration for review by the Council in Budget Hearing #1.

Mr. Dan Richards, Budget Officer, presented a PowerPoint presentation overview of the proposed budget for the fiscal year 2022/2023 of all the appropriations for all funds. This is all the fund combined and subtract out the transfer between funds. The total for fiscal year 23 is 148 million versus 133 million, a 15 million increase and the bulk of the increase is from the Enterprise fund which is about 2/3. The other 1/3 is coming from the General Fund.

General Fund: The estimated revenue is just shy of 64.5 million minus the estimated expenditures which are all in departments and city expense. Once you take away that you have excess revenue over expenditures, but then you have your transfer out, your subsidies to these other funds 3.6 million and now you have a net decrease in fund balance or budget deficit of about 868 thousand dollars. The estimated beginning fund balance and ending fund balance.

Fund Balance for general fund and from previous years 18-20 we hovered around \$14.1 million fund balance. In fiscal year 21 in the previous administration where the pandemic hit at the end of 2020 and they implemented those cost control measures in 21 anticipating revenues would drop but they didn't and didn't spend above those lower amounts that was budgeted for and as a result there was a 4.5 million surplus. The fund balance now is 18.6 million, so in 22 the current year which is not over, there is a required statement in your binder, a comparative statement comparing 22 to your new year 23. Mr. Richard noted that he had to estimate what they are going to look at, at the end of 22 so he looked at all revenues, what's left to come in versus expenditures of what's left to pay out and compute a number. The number he computed was a potential surplus of 3.3 million, that is where you get that 21.9 million. This is his starting point going into fiscal year 23 and since we are budgeting a deficit now the fund balance drops to 21.1 million. That is still above those previous years, the GFOA Governing Finance Officers Association puts out best practices for various areas of governmental finances and one of those is fund balances and their recommendation is 2 months of expenditures to start with at a minimum (10.9million). There are criteria that you look at to determine if that number should be higher, one being are you reliant on a volatile revenue source, is your city prone to natural disasters, flooding, hurricanes, earthquakes etc.

General Fund Revenue by classifications you can see an increase by 6.5% and the bulk of that increase is 99% coming from sales tax, the other classifications are slightly up or slightly down. Classification 130- fees, charges and commissions, part of that increase is 216 thousand coming from sales tax fee, which are the fee charged from other jurisdictions to collect their sales taxes. It is a percentage of collections so if estimated sales tax increase, fees increase as well and you also have an estimated increase on energy service income. In classification 180 there are transfers from other funds, basically a transfer from Capital Infrastructure into general fund which funds the entire street division under Public Works.

Sales Tax Revenue going from fiscal year 19-20 there was a decrease, the last 5 weeks when pandemic hit revenues dropped and the City actually lost about 2 million in Sales Tax Revenue. Fiscal year 21 increased quite a bit to 40.4 million but before they did that number, they had to budget for 2022. They speculated that the increase in 21 possibly coming from federal stimulus, extra unemployment benefits, and not sure if it would be sustainable so they budgeted in 22 what they received in fiscal year 20. About 9 months later the projections for fiscal year 22 is about 42.6 million or an increase over what was budgeted of 5.2 million, which was basically where the bulk in calculating the potential surplus is coming from excess Sale Tax. In fiscal year 23 it is still a conservative number of less than what was budgeted in fiscal year 22 at 41.2 million which is basically a 2% increase off of what was actually received in fiscal year 21. Recalling what was said earlier, are we reliant on a volatile revenue source of Sales Taxes and it is volatile so 64% of all General Fund Revenue comes from this one source Sale Tax, the City is very reliant on Sales Tax.

General Fund Expenditures increased 8% so for City Council there is money in there for the new Council Coordinator position, the Special Project Money is 20 thousand dollars per district a total of \$100 thousand. The Executive Department Mayor has been building his executive team and there was an Economic Development Office come on board mid-year. There is a funding request there for a new Main Street Director position. The Judicial which is City

Court and City Marshall decrease is mainly coming from City Court where they have identified a Deputy Clerk position that they said they weren't going to fill. The City Expense is a big dollar expense almost 1.6 million the bulk of that increase is coming from group insurance and retiree about a million dollars. The insurance plan, base plan, buy up plan, different tiers and costs have increased. The Administration had a division Property Control and Building Maintenance and those will be combined into one division called Facilities Management. The Maintenance and Construction Division under Public Works and its entire personnel and equipment is moving over under Facilities Management and will be headed by Facilities Director Richard Moore. The Police Department had wage increases for personnel, but their budget didn't increase, mainly any increases they requested has been offset by reduction in the employer contribution rate for their pension plan. The Fire Department another large increase over one million dollars about half of that is related to wages, increases in overtime and other inflationary cost increases. Engineering is basically just a stand still budget and they are in the process of looking for a City Engineer, so if that budget needs to be revised at some point in the future, they will request an amendment. The Community Affairs is at 867 thousand, and a lot of that is related to wage increases but there is extra money in programs and other community center activities. The Parks and Recreations has additional money there for their efforts in maintaining the parks and beautification. Other Finance Uses as mentioned in the beginning those subsidies of 3.6 million so the General Fund subsidizes Transit, Civic Center, Zoo and the Shop. There have been renewed efforts in getting the Civic Center and Zoo in the black, to make them profitable or at least break even, if they breakeven that could free up money in the General Fund that can be reallocated to other areas.

General Fund-Personnel, salary and wage 2.2 million related to proposed citywide raises to pretty much 900% of all employees both full-time and part-time. For every dollar the general fund spends, seventy-five cents is spent on personnel, so anything related to raises, employees adding or deleting is a big impact on the budget. In Personnel almost 730 full-time equivalent positions and almost 1/2 of general fund personnel is in public safety, fire and police, that is a decrease of 5.91 which represent 2 full-time and 7 part-time. Some division identified 3 part-time positions, 1 filled and 2 are vacant but they really want the other positions filled so they utilize funding for those 2, so that is a decrease of 3 part-time and an increase of 1 full-time. Citywide personnel, this is just citywide, so the general fund is not added in, all your enterprise funds, special revenue funds and shop in the total almost 1,034 FTEs a decrease of 10.74 which is a decrease of 3 full-time and 12 part-time.

Enterprise Funds are Airport, Transit, Zoo, Civic Center, Water & Sewer and this is all combined together, and you can see your state grants increased and the majority of that is the airport, Federal Grants in Airport and Transit. On the expense side Contracted Services, that is all your construction related projects, engineering services. The increase in the Enterprise you can see those budgeted for construction projects mainly the Water Treatment Project and that will continue to be budgeted for another two and a half years. Other expenditures include depreciation which is a noncash expense it's recorded after years so you never see it on any year-to-date reports. When the budget gets recorded on May 1, it is actually zeroed out and it is recorded at the end of the year on April 30th, so it doesn't skew any budget to actual percentages on any reports. Capital Outlay, there are three Transit buses, Sewer has a request for a sewer Vac Truck amount \$475 thousand dollars, by the time it's purchased it will be more. Special Revenue Funds, there are about 33 or 34 funds some are small dollars, but some of your larger dollar funds are your Capital Infrastructure, Fire & Police Sales Tax. There is an increase in Sales Tax Revenue of about 3 million, and there is an increase out there for ARPA Grant. Next week there will be a budget amendment for the current year, they will be budgeting for the first installment of the ARPA Funds. The City was Allocated about 18.2 million and received about 9.1 million this past year, so this is budgeting for the second installment in about June or July of another 9.1 million.

This concluded the overview and Mr. Richards asked if your questions aren't answered tonight or you have additional questions between now and the final adoption, he will be available by email or phone.

The Council thanked Mr. Richards for a very informative presentation.

The Budgets discussed were as follows:

1.) Revenues were addressed in the summary and there were no more questions on that.

2.) Council

Councilwoman Ezernack asked about the funding for the position that the Council has been holding for a while and she wanted to know if there were any raises for our employees that are currently working. Mrs. Stacey Rowell, Administrator said they would fall under the same negotiated contract or even though they may not fall under the contract they are treating everyone either through the Gallaghers Study to increase to the minimum required or if they are already there then they would fall under 5% that was proposed for the contract.

Councilwoman Dawson wanted to know where the tabs were for the built-in increase for the Gallaghers Study.

Mrs. Rowell said the increases were built-in these numbers and that is why the budget is so much higher. They have already applied those assumed rates and changes to the positions that are in the budget.

Councilwoman Dawson noted that she knows they are saying 5%, and she know there is an insurance committee and who all is on that insurance committee because it seems like they need to be finding some type of different rates, rates that can be lower. It seems like each year the rates are increasing but there are no raises given so they are losing money off their checks, so how can 5% help them.

Mrs. Rowell noted that is a committee that the Mayor has spoken about that has been debunk for a little while and that is something the Mayor makes those appointments, and we can get back on that.

Councilwoman Dawson said that is something they need to do quickly so they can get some competitive rates for the employees.

Mayor Ellis noted just to clarify that the 5% were all those who weren't negotiated, there are opportunities where some employees got and seem fairly large.

Mr. Richards, Budget Officer noted that some employees got like a 5 to 37 percent.

Mrs. Rowell said because that was what it would take to bring them to their minimum in the Gallaghers Study.

Mayor Ellis noted that some were actually over the Gallaghers and so the 5% is across the board. What they were really concerned about was the employees who were not at Gallaghers minimum and that's were you probably saw the biggest bulk of the move when they talk about some of the employees getting the 20% and there are a lot of those individuals. Now the ones 5% across the board were the ones that weren't covered or were at or above Gallaghers they still got pay raises.

Councilwoman Dawson noted she was thinking about the ones that at \$10 and 5% only raise them 50 cents.

Mr. Richards noted that the ones at \$10 they are increasing the minimum wage to \$11, so that's 10% for those and some positions that are at \$10 Gallagher says they should be maybe at \$12.50 so they will go up to \$12.50 or whatever Gallagher says their minimum should be.

Ms. Woods noted that we are moving all these people up and we know we have had a lot of inflated money come into our communities. There has been an increase in Sales Tax and that again is due to the inflated amounts of money that's coming into the communities because of all of these stimuluses. Are we going to be able to maintain that once everybody gets these raises or will we 6 months down the line when the money stops come back and say we got to give you a decrease in salary.

Mrs. Rowell noted that they have a nice fund balance and what they have discussed is that they want to bring the employees up to what the minimum wage study said plus 3 years of inflation on those cost-of-living increases. In doing so if that throws us into a deficit now is the time until we have time to work through positions, in other words, pay quality over quantity. The departments understand that they keep coming and saying that they can't hire people we really need in qualifications because we can't pay enough. Mrs. Rowell noted that they are willing to take the risk for a year or two while there is a strong, healthy fund balance. If you throw attrition in and say instead of having 3 at \$15 an hour, you can do 2 at \$20 an hour and you are going to save even if it's just \$5 an hour overall. The ideal is that eventually you work through that through attrition and by that time, hopefully, we will have sustained enough, put enough through attrition and gotten that quality versus quantity that we can then be okay and sustain this. As apposed to some cities who have gone out and given large increases, they're using their ARPA money for increases and raises and we know that's one time money. That is not a sustainable plan and that is why we have opted not to do that, but that's basically why we decided that an 876 thousand deficit we can sustain for a year maybe even 2. The idea is by the third year hopefully this will all be turned around and to address the sales tax situation, we were assuming that some of that was inflated because of stimulus funds and employment funds etc., that's gone. We feel now we are just seeing inflation, so now the sales tax is going to be inflated, it's probably not a false inflation, it's going to be there. What we have to remember when we budget is along with that so are our cost, because we are also experiencing an inflation. At some point we will have to start putting some of that money into line items a little more significantly more robustly such as supplies, chemicals and stuff like that and we are already feeling that, so as our sales tax is doing this so are our cost at this point. And we know that is not an answer to insurance, we know medical cost are continuing to skyrocket, Covid did not help that any, but we are still looking for alternative and working with consultant who are helping us work through some of those issues and at some point, we will be putting that probably back out. We do feel like this is sustainable if the departments do what they are supposed to do and start hiring quality versus that quantity.

Chairman Marshall asked along with that if they are looking at budgeting annual salary increases or are we just bringing everybody up for right now until we see how things.

Mrs. Rowell noted that we are bringing everyone up now, but it would be nice if they could tell you we will be able to sustain a 2% every year but until we see where the inflation is going it is hard to say what we can do in the future. We are always going to be looking for opportunities to be able to give our folks a raise.

Chairman Marshall noted that he is sure they appreciate that, and he can attest to that with his employees and as insurance goes up 5, 7 percent annually, so they are actually seeing smaller checks

each year if they don't get something annually. The Chairman noted that he appreciates what you are doing giving a decent wage but just looking at the future as well.

Mrs. Rowell noted that we went too long without them that's for sure.

Mayor Ellis noted it's not that our employees are not quality, what we are saying is if you have a skilled operator or line items in there for training for your employees to help them as well. But to also get them to the point to where they are skilled operators where they may not need two helpers. Invest back into your employees and get the training that they need, the answer isn't always more labor to get the job done it's more skilled labor that gets the job and give them the equipment that they need to do it more effectively.

Back to Council:

The chairman note that the budget was brought back up to 20 thousand for each council district and they have two positions open now the secretary and council coordinator position that is in the budget as well.

Chairman Marshall noted that the Coordinator was a position that was in the budget but was not funded.

Councilwoman Woods noted it was a position that was held open but not funded.

Councilwoman Ezernack noted that we never got rid of the position it was just not filled and at the time when sales tax did drop that position was not funded to help out with the budget at that time, but it was still a position in the budget.

3.) Court

Judge Joyce, Monroe City Court, asked if that 5% was going to include the City Court employees as well?

Mrs. Rowell noted that they do their own thing every year.

Judge Joyce said that's where we are every year.

Mrs. Rowell said they get raises when we don't get them.

Judge Joyce noted that the City has not given their employees a raise since 2008, they do have a fund that they have been using to try to supplement since they constantly don't get raises when the other areas get them. He noted that their people get passed over all the time and it's always, you all do your own thing. I appreciate Mr. Richards wonderful numbers here, but it glosses over it by saying I think that's where they are losing an employee and that's why we are going to decrease their funding by 97 thousand. Judge Joyce noted that they haven't lost any employees they are fully staffed right now, so to cut them by 100 thousand he doesn't know where they are going to make it. They are losing two employees Monday because they are not making the money and to the Mayor's point, they are making \$10 an hour with us and Target's paying \$15. They walk on out the door; we spend time training them and these are pretty significant professional people. They deal with the public a lot, they wear ties, suits and dresses and go into court deal with everyone, and we are cutting 100 thousand on them when everyone else is getting hired. He doesn't understand where that comes from when their people don't get raises like everyone else, not to mention judges. The judges haven't got a raise since 1999 and that's 23 years and he noted that Mr. Heard, retired budget officer, use to say that's just too expensive with the health and retirement, with that attitude they will never get one. He noted that he is not here for him he is here for those employees who aren't getting that built in 5% raise into their budget and in fact getting cut 100 thousand and he doesn't know where the cuts are going to come from. They have done everything they can to get every dollar, they take credit cards, debit card etc. They have cut their cost as far as they can and to look at a budget that cuts them another 100 thousand while the rest of the employees get raises is something he take issue with. Judge Joyce noted that he is here is answer any questions the Council may have as to what they can do or where your numbers come from, and he would ask them to keep that in mind when you make your final decision.

Mr. Richards noted that they didn't cut any of their budget and that their budget as they submitted it is the number and that was the budget that Ms. Varner submitted. Mr. Richards noted that she identified a deputy clerk that you weren't going to fill yet, 31 positions and they said they weren't going to fill it. They changed some of the descriptions and she asked about one position that was given a 5 thousand increase after certain period and that's all built into the budget. It was on her worksheet.

Judge Joyce noted that was a position that opened up at the time they submitted the budget, that's been filled.

Councilwoman Woods noted that it was kind of interesting because when she was looking over this and she was wondering, and you come with a good case. You are being decreased by 100 thousand and I did see everyone else getting one and she thought his employees were getting a raise. Ms. Woods was under the impression that the raises were going across the board to all city employees.

Mrs. Rowell noted that the City Court workers are not City employees, and the situation is they don't fall under our days off or anything. We are basically a payroll processor for Monroe City Court

Payroll. They have gotten and turned in raises when our people haven't because they make that termination.

Councilwoman Woods wanted to know where the courts get their money.

Judge Joyce explained that there is a fund that is dwindling.

Mrs. Rowell noted that she certainly doesn't have a problem with the Mayor's permission, 5% on a million dollars is 52 thousand, it is certainly something they can revisit, but you have to consider the pension cost on top of that and when you have a 60 million budget what's another 52 or 53 thousand. She certainly thinks that is something they can revisit and that the logic behind it is the City is basically a payroll processor for them.

Judge Joyce noted that they can't self-fund themselves and no court in the world makes money, they do generate some of their own funds. They can't sustain what they have, they have to get a majority from the City and about 80% or higher of their budget comes from the City. To say we are not a part of the City, but we are dependent on them for 80 or 90 percent of the money, that's kind of dependent.

Chairman Marshall asked for clarification would they have to submit a raise increase to the City to approve to get raises.

Mrs. Rowell noted that her understanding is that they cannot, and that the Mayor had to stop signing the status changes and she looked to the city attorney to explained.

Mrs. Angie Sturdivant, City Attorney explained that there is a Statute that governs it that they are basically governed by State and that is why they are on State Holidays, and we aren't, but she will have to pull the Statute.

Mrs. Rowell noted that they are basically State employees, not City employees.

Judge Joyce said their checks say City of Monroe.

Mrs. Rowell explained because the City process their payroll.

Mrs. Sturdivant explained that the law requires that there be a minimal and we meet that minimal, but they will take a look at the Statute and how the salary is supposed to be shared in the last status change.

Marshal

Marshal Robert Cherry and Marshall Justin January

Marshall January noted that they are in the same predicament as the Judges.

Mrs. Rowell noted that they have the same type of arrangement, and they are State employees and the City process their payroll.

Ms. Woods asked about the 2 thousand dollars decrease in their budget.

Marshall January explained that they had a few people leave/retire during the fiscal year, which lowered the budget after hiring at lesser pay.

Councilwoman Ezernack noted that they audit themselves as well as the City Court does.

Mrs. Rowell said that is right they have separate audit report, so they are apart but also separate.

Marshall Cherry asked if this was the time for that and Mrs. Rowell said that they will apply the same logic to his group to see what they can come up with.

Marshall Cherry noted that they provide a lot of security, not just city court but council as well. They have to have more people and it is so different now. He noted that they are here to provide security and do what they need to do to help the City and they will appreciate whatever the City can do for them.

4.) Mayor

Mrs. Ezernack asked what's different as far as the new position etc., if they absorbed some or what.

Mrs. Rowell noted in the intro they covered positions, the main street coordinator was added, and he is starting to fill and build his team with various positions.

Mr. Richards noted that the new position, the grant administration was moved from under economic development.

Councilwoman Ezernack asked if that was still going to be one person or.

Mrs. Rowell noted that for now, but the plan will be to grow possibly two people, but that's not in this budget.

Mayor Ellis noted that they lacked inhouse someone in economic development to be able to not let someone else control our destiny when it comes to leads and feedback especially when dealing with the I20 Board. They would receive phone calls and not have anybody as a point of contact outside of the Mayor, so he wanted to be able to have this person Kelsea and you all have had an opportunity to work with her now and know her. She has done a wonderful job and she has hit the ground running. The other Main Street position is someone basically to help out with the Main Street Program. There is a lot of funding for these programs, but to have that you have to have a coordinator because of federal guidelines to help with programing, coordinate services with small business.

Mrs. Rowell noted that the City already has the designation but are not in compliance by not having a Main Street Coordinator, so they are trying to get that filled.

Mayor Ellis noted again extra training for our employees to be able to develop them and get them professional development is what he is trying to do to be able to build and grown their team. Councilwoman Woods asked how long the City has had this designation. Mrs. Rowell noted that this was what Myra Gatlin was doing, but what they really required was a Dedicated Coordinator and so the City was not in compliance back then.

5.) Legal

Mrs. Angie Sturdivant, City Attorney noted that there are no significant changes other than salary increases and the increase in benefits. Also, the Pre-trial Diversion and Bond Forfeiture accounts that fall under the Legal Department and those collections are down due to Covid. The Governor suspended in his emergency orders the right to collect on those so those are extremely down.

Councilwoman Ezernack asked if those would be reinstated anytime.

Mrs. Sturdivant said that Diversion is and now that court is back in session and people are coming to court and having court, they are signing people up for Pre-trial Diversion. She sees that changing quickly, but on Bond Forfeiture they can only collect on the ones before the pandemic, so hopefully that will be lifted soon as well.

6.) Planning & Urban Development (PUD)

Mrs. Ellen Hill, Director of PUD noted that she doesn't have much of a change in the budget, but she can say this year she is fortunate that they have a division head for building inspections, but they don't have a division head for Planning and Zoning. This is a position in the coming months that they will work on looking at ways to better use staff and the position they have to better address the public and provide better services. The goal is to get better quality so they can better service the citizens.

Mrs. Rowell noted that it's not that we don't have quality employees, it's just they may not have been afforded the opportunity for that training that will allow for them to become that person that we need in that position.

Councilwoman Ezernack noted that it is an investment in them and the tools they need to be able to succeed and excel beyond that.

Chairman Marshall asked about with the prices of gas and oil going up he wanted to know if that will sustain.

Mrs. Rowell noted that this is one of those line items that with sales tax you don't know and what is happening overseas is impacting everyone. They realize that they may have to come back and adjust fuel etc., and as Dan said about natural disasters there is also world economic impacts that can influence our expenditures. It is very difficult to plan and foresee everything and that's why we get budget amendments.

Mrs. Hill pointed out that they have the Brownsfield Grant, the Corona Supplement Grant both will end in the 23 fiscal year.

Councilwoman Woods asked about the grant for redoing the bus stop shelters.

Mrs. Hill noted that those were CARES Act Funds through CDBG, the shelters will be here in May.

a) 2001 Community Development Block Grant

Mrs. Jawun Downs, CDBG Director noted that the only change she anticipate is taking Project Construction Specialist Manager position from part-time to full-time because he resigned last week. They do anticipate about 1.2 million from the American Rescue Plan, but this is not in this budget.

7.) Fire

Chief Terry Williams, Fire Department noted that they don't have any changes, they do have pay increases like everyone else. The staffing is down 5 firefighters, they have a recruiting academy going on with 13 recruits. They have been dealing with Covid, so it has been difficult. Chief Williams noted that they have completed many projects, fire stations, bought equipment etc., now they are at a point where he has to come to the Mayor for funding to do things on the department or he has to find a way to bring in some revenue. This is one of the things he will talk to you all Tuesday night and he has sent you all an email on that.

Councilwoman Woods wanted to know when the recruits graduate, and Chief Williams said July and that they plan to start another one after that.

8.) Police

Chief Victor Zordan, Police Department noted that significant changes to their budget include pay raises for all employees. The employee contribution for the police pension decreased to 29.75% effectively offsetting all increases in pay raises and other expense accounts. That is just a fortunate event for the City that we got the raise and it worked out for his department. They are fully staffed with 137 officers, 127 right now and 6 in the academy and 6 that come off field training program this month.

That is an additional 11 they will have pretty soon, so that is working out and there are 12 operator, 6 jailer and clerks. There is only \$4,828 difference from last year's budget.

Councilwoman Dawson wanted to know how they are looking on those Shot Spotters.

Chief Zordan noted that they are waiting on the installation of the second round of it to go live around May, it's something about getting the program installed and linking it together, but the apparatuses are in place for that second mile.

Councilwoman Woods thanked Chief Zordan for keeping the City as safe as he possibly can.

Chairman Marshall noted that they discussed the cameras for illegal dumping etc., and he wanted to know if that is something that is still in process.

Chief Zordan said yes, they are able to catch images of people dumping trash where they are not supposed to, and they work with Code Enforcement on this.

9.) Engineering

(a) 2021 Capital Infrastructure

Mr. Arthur Holland, Engineering Department noted that they are showing decrease in traffic and right now he is at least 2 vehicles short in traffic. He has 5 vehicles out, one guy driving a bucket truck that doesn't need to be driven every day, it wasn't designed for that because it increased the wear and tear on it. This vehicle needs to be replaced, add a daily driver and he need a spare because the guys are out 24/7 during storms, power loss they have to be out and right now our fleet is at the extreme. By taking the 61 thousand it is going to hurt the Traffic Division, and as a whole Engineering since 2012 has operated within their budget.

Councilman Harvey noted that you are asking for that, but you have a year over year budget decrease.

Mr. Holland said yes

Councilman Harvey noted that you are reallocating positions in the Capital request.

Mr. Holland noted that they need the vehicles to operate, and his biggest loss is going to be in traffic.

Mrs. Rowell explained that they are on the fleet management program and those are being replaced through a rotation cycle based on the mileage and or age and those will be taken care of in the order that they can get in. Again, they are a year out on vehicles right now and it is very difficult to keep vehicles in, but all 200 vehicles are in the cue. They are ranked in order of need and have been identified in the fleet program.

Mr. Holland noted that they are still looking for a City Engineer and have other vacancies as well and they all are doing double duties to keep thing moving.

Councilwoman Ezernack asked if the positions are funded in this budget.

Mrs. Rowell noted that these positions are budgeted, and they are doing a national search for a city engineer and beyond that should have been posted.

Councilwoman Ezernack asked if we are successful in securing someone for that position how does that affect those outside consultants that are funded in some of this that were getting to do some of the oversight engineering now, like Lazenby and other acting in that capacity.

Mrs. Rowell explained that is the only one currently acting in the position of city engineer and that contract will cease once that position is filled.

Mr. Holland noted that they have been talking about that some as well and once you have a city engineer it is going to take a while for them to get acclimated to what and how they do things.

Mrs. Rowell noted that they would have that overlap, but they have a general service contract with them anyway so they will serve in a consultant capacity for that. They would not just cut us off.

10.) Community Affairs

a.) 6002 Civic Center Fund

Mr. Doug Seegers, Community Affairs Director noted that the new equipment in reference to mowing is going to make our job a lot easier and work with quality and more efficiently. The Civic Center is suffering the effects of Covid, the revenues are down, and they were very optimistic last year that we would be back in action, they are not as optimistic this year. They see the slow growth, so they hired a venue promotor to help bring events and acts into the City at the Mayor's recommendation and there is a lot of development right there and we are going to see a lot of action as far as those. The revenue is going to be down, but the expenses are going to be pretty much where they are, there's not much they can do with that. There is an increase in repairs and maintenance, there are a lot of existing issues that they have to address and hopefully there will be some capital projects that will allow us to address some of that. There are some HVAC issues that are persistent that they are going to have to continue to address as they can.

Councilwoman Dawson asked if he considered the conservation they had about updates?

Mr. Seegers noted that they already have that in process, and he is working to get some information next week.

Chairman Marshall asked about future projects such as hotels and upgrades like that, and he wanted to know what they see coming.

Mr. Seegers noted that he sees the Mayor's dreams coming and what he would like to see done. He has a lot of projects that are out there, and he has them prioritize as far as what needs to be done within his budget. He deferred to the Mayor on how those projects will be forth coming.

Mayor Ellis noted that there has been a lot of discussion and talk especially among the community because we all understand that civic center is very unique and a property that is prime for what needs to be done. No fault to anybody here, but in his opinion, it wasn't marketed the way it should be marketed with the expertise that it should've been done. There are some gaps that they are continuing to look at as far as website and the way things have always been ran that they are changing. The future goal for that is for the Jack Howard theater to be the best singer song writer series off the I20, hands down. It will support the Color Purple, Miss Louisiana Pageant, but if the investments are not made in that campus our biggest revenue generators will go elsewhere.

Councilwoman Woods asked about the arena promotor settlement for 335 thousand dollars.

Mr. Seegers explained that has to do with the events and what they have to pay for promotors to bring events in etc. With the decrease in events coming in that settlement goes down as well as with the theater.

Mrs. Rowell explains that the promoter incurs all the expenses to get us there at 100 thousand and the promotor may see 50 thousand of that, but we see the revenue as the 100 thousand the promotor expense is their share for getting it there. If you are not booking events, you are not going to have as much promotor settlement, the more events the higher promotor settlement.

b.) 6003 Purchase Garden & Zoo Fund

Mr. Tom Pearson, Zoo Director noted that we want to make positive changes and make it a Zoo we all deserve that we can all be proud of. We know that people from all over the region comes to the Zoo because we are keeping track of where our guest are coming from. They come from all areas of Louisiana and many States and several different Countries. We look for new way to make the Zoo look better such as the interactive exhibit. The Mayor has been there, and we have several thousand parakeets and if you like you purchase a feed stick and the birds land on it and eat the seeds. The exhibit has been open for about 4 months and they are making approximately 1 dollar for every person that comes into the Zoo. Last year they had about 70 thousand guest and that is just one interactive exhibit, so there are more plans for interactive exhibits and more reasons for people to come to the Zoo and generate revenue.

Councilwoman Dawson talked about the parking lot and how good it looks at the Zoo as well as how much has changed out there over the past year.

Mayor Ellis noted that Doug and Tom have done extensive thought around the Zoo being equitable for our community and to find ways we can still enjoy the Zoo at different price points.

Chairman Marshall noted that it looks great out at the Zoo and that you can tell his dedication.

Mr. Seegers noted that he wanted to talk about the Chennault Golf Course and Johnny Myers formally Muni our Golf Director Don Walters putting in countless hours. We met prior to the meeting and he shared some February numbers, and the fees are under 10 thousand dollars, this year they were over 20 thousand dollars, so golf is doing well and there are a lot of improvement that they are making out there. Chief Bryant is working diligently with them and working to get the cart path repaved by late spring this year. There are continued needs out there but they are making great improvements, we brought the greens back tremendously. There is a project to get the Greens at Johnny Mayers in much better shape. On Forsythe you have seen a lot of the tree planting going on and on Plum Street, South 2nd, North 18th area and there are a few more going out. The Monroe Gardening Club through their funding will be providing flowers to go around all those trees.

Mayor Ellis thanked everyone for the work they have put in.

Ray Wright, Park & Rec. Director, noted that all the monies donated from the Council for the ball field which haven't been done in about 20 or 25 years. The Carroll's baseball field has lights now and Wossman field has the fencing repaired. Mr. Wight noted that the flag is coming in, the young lady that passed away on the Wossman Softball team they do have a hole drilled with a new flagpole and they are going to post her flag and he would like the Council to be there. There are a lot going on with the parks the lights are all fixed on the walking trail and on the bathroom as people were walking out, they would self-lock and that is repaired. Bendal Field they are waiting on the archway design, and it will say Bendal Neal Stadium.

Councilwoman Ezernack wanted to know about the improvements at Saul Alder and ballfield there.

Mr. Wright noted that all the softball fields are done, they had lights out at Neville they are fixed.

Councilwoman Woods noted that Powell Street is good too, but she wanted to know about the lights, the fences, dugouts, and the bleacher areas.

Mr. Wright noted that he has all the materials to repair the dugouts, the problems is he's down 8 employees, but it's on his agenda to complete.

Chairman Marshall asked if they plan on doing anything in the area by Lyda Benten?

Mr. Wright said they are going to do the same thing that they did at Powell and bring back the infield to life, put bases back down for kids to be able to go out there and play. There are no plans for lighting because it would take away from the walking trail.

Councilwoman Woods noted that they were looking at putting a walking trail at Powell.

Mr. Wright noted that they will talk about that later because there is one that could possibly happen in another deal that the Mayor is working on. He thanked the Council for the new equipment, and it will change their cycle time.

Councilwoman Ezernack asked about what was talked about with the different division increasing fees.

Mr. Seegers said they are working on that as far as a complete plan along with the Zoo, the increases, and fees for the facilities across the board. They are also going to look at the fees for the civic center as well and where they need to be in line with the market and have that nice equilibrium that can make it affordable for everybody.

Councilwoman Ezernack asked when he thought that would be finished and brought to Council.

Mr. Seegers said within the next 30 to 60 days.

Mrs. Patience Talley, Community Centers and Programs Dir. noted that they have had some upgrades in their programming budget, the Camps such as summer camp, spring camp, fitness center camp, holiday camp and most of the camps are little to no cost. They have allocated some funds to MCAL if they decide to move forward with them in the future, they have done a great job so the City wants to help them in any way they can. The Maintenance Budget was increased, and the centers are eye sores, and they want to attack that with the maintenance budget making sure the facilities are maintained. They are looking at some major increases that is part of the Mayor's plan and they want to make sure they are maintaining restrooms, event spaces and if they are moving up fees on these, they have to make sure that the facilities are up to par. They have increased maintenance fee and thankful the Mayor our staffing fee is sitting at 10 dollar an hour for the majority of the employees, which has been allocated within their budget. They are updating the game room, and everything is on back order, but they are making those inclusive for everyone. They are working on staffing training as well and most of the programs at the community centers are free. The only thing that they charge for is summer programs at a 6-dollar fee that Omega Psi Phi is planning to elevate the cost for all of the summer campers this year, so all of the programs thus far are free of charge.

Chairman Marshall asked about the Rec. Center being a safe place for kids who may not have anywhere to go during the day and find out why that kid is not in school or just out in harm's way.

Mrs. Talley noted that the centers are open at 8am but do not allow kids to come in until 1pm because we know they are supposed to be in school and that is something they can address because all the community centers are a safe place and have partnered with Christopher Youth Center to insure that.

11.) Public Works

Mrs. Roshonda Gospel, Public Wks. Superintendent, noted that Sean Benton, couldn't be here and thanked the Council. There were no questions.

a) 6000 Airport Fund

Mrs. Dorea Elmadih, Operations Dir. Airport, filling in for Charle Butcher Airport Director and he apologizes for his absence. The changes at the Airport are they have added 2 full-time positions, one of those position is a full-time ARF Chief. The current ARF Chief is a full-time City of Monroe Fire employee and his duties at the airport are just an addition to his primary responsibilities at the Fire Department. The absence of a full-time leadership at the ARF Station is a major contribution to the previous right ups that were received for training, and record keeping from the FAA during the certification inspection. The other position is a full-time operations person, the current staff is insufficient to meet their requirements for the FAA. The requirements states that the airport is required to have sufficient qualified personnel and that they may be available at all times during airfare operations. Currently they are only covering 5 days and that's without being flexible for sick time or leave of vacation etc., and not covering weekends are city observed holidays, so they are in compliance with federal regulations. For the full-time ARF Chief some of the duties normally associated with their roll she is having to cover for that, and it is creating a load for her and difficult to manage with her primary duties at the airport. The other changes are small, increases to maintenance account, training accounts because of the increase of labor and materials. Mrs. Elmadih noted that she has a list of grants that Charles provided to her and if you have any questions on them, she can try to answer.

Councilwoman Ezernack wanted to know if they had any funding for refurbishing of the lady's restroom in the main terminal, she said it needs some attention and she didn't know about the men, but she did reach out to Charles and left a message, and she will get with him on his return.

Councilman Harvey noted that the men was fine this afternoon about 3 hours ago.

Mrs. Elmadih noted that the grant she has are mostly for airfield operations and constructions.

On the State side they have 2 grants currently open, a taxiway Delta that's open and the project is in the design phase and only 25 thousand has been spent so far. The other grant is for the runway construction and that is 1.5 million that they have not uses yet. There are 6 federal grants the 2016 drainage project to be completed in about 1 month. The runway extension grant, the phase II drainage project, also a phase III that is expected to be in construction this spring. There is the Covid grants at a total of 5.4 million.

Councilwoman Woods wanted to know if they were looking at putting some type of eatery in the terminal.

Mrs. Elmadih noted that she believed Charles is working on that for a restaurant and a bar.

b) 6001 Transit Fund

Marc Keenan, Transit Dir. noted that their budget is the same and they haven't change any of their services, they are doing some capital which include replacing 3 buses or it may be one if they consider purchasing an electric bus as opposed to the diesel. They are looking a making some maintenance facility improvements which part of it is putting a fence around the facility, there are vagrants that come on the property from time to time which make it a little uneasy for the ladies working there.

Councilwoman Woods wanted to know if they would put a fence all around the property.

Mr. Keenan said we have a fence there now around the back part and they are going to enclose along the front to where they have a gate that opens and closes. They are looking at replacing the transit terminal on Catalpa and moving it to another location. Of the employees most of them will not be getting a raise because they are union labor employees.

Mrs. Rowell noted that theirs was negotiated under a separate contract, so they are getting a raise.

Mr. Keenan said not the bus drivers because theirs is being negotiated, there contract is still being negotiated.

Mrs. Rowell noted that they are all above the maximum.

Mr. Keenan noted that they are on the high end of the pay scale, but there are some not a part of the labor union and are showing a raise in the budget.

Chairman Marshall asked when was the last time the bus drivers actually had a raise?

Mr. Keenan said it was 2017, the last contract ended in 2017 and they didn't come to the table until 2019 to start those negotiating.

Councilwoman Woods noted so right now they are not working under a contract.

Mr. Keenan said technically no, the contract ended in 2017 but it automatically went over for an extra year so in 2018 the contract was over, but they are still honoring it.

Councilman Harvey noted that is pretty standard.

Mrs. Rowell explained that they have had a raise when the other employees haven't. the last raise for the other employees was 2014. They did get one in 2017.

Councilwoman Woods noted that with their contract they need to negotiate these raises, so how long usually would it take.

Mr. Keenan noted it usually last about 3 years, so every 3 years they are back at the table.

Councilwoman Woods wanted to know what is going on that they are not working under a contract.

Mr. Keenan explained that they just haven't come to an agreement yet, hopefully it will be soon.

Mrs. Rowell noted that they have asked for significant increases that are unreasonable, considering they are already where they alt to be on the high end.

Councilwoman Woods asked when they did the survey with Gallagher and were their salaries looked in as well.

Mrs. Rowell noted that they did and as she said earlier, they were on the high end.

Councilwoman Ezernack wanted to know if they have seen any increases in the ridership?

Mr. Keenan noted that since Covid ridership has decreased maybe 40% and they have not seen a rebound yet. They still have the mask mandate, so there may still be some fear out there because of that.

Councilwoman Woods asked since they still have the mask mandate if they are limiting the number of people that can ride.

Mr. Keenan said not at this point, but the mandate is set to end at the end o this month if it is not renewed.

c) 6006 Water Fund

Mrs. Angela Campbell, Water Distribution Supervisor, asked if there were any questions.

Mr. Daren Johnson, Water Treatment Plant noted that water treatment budget is pretty much the same as it has been for the last couple of year and really no changes. As far as raise, they are union and that

has been taken care of and the contract has been signed. He invited everyone to come out and look at the new construction and noted that they are on schedule with everything. Mayor Ellis thanked them for the work they do.

d) 6008 Sewer Fund

Mr. Charles Westrom, Sewer Manger, noted that they don't have a lot of changes in the current budget, but he wanted to introduce Joshua Laneaux, plan operator and Will Davis, operation collection system. Mr. Westrom noted that they have problems that they haven't been replacing the stoppage trucks and there have been budget constraints, and hey are down to two that work. Funds were put in the budget to replace a truck and he was told that it might take up to 2 years to get it once ordered. The plan is to go ahead and order it as soon as the budget cycle rolls. Prices have gone up again on maintaining the pumps at the lift stations and they have a new contract with a repair service and the cost has skyrocketed. He further noted that they put in the budget 800 thousand dollars for Mr. Davis to operate and it was reduced to 700 thousand and they are already at that amount. They will be well over that, and they will probably have to do a budget amendment at some point during the year. Also, he wanted to address the 5-year Capital Improvement Plan, there is an item that got left off the plan which is the UV System replacement and that is estimated 1.2 million and they have to have that this year. There is no way around it, it's what keeps the plant in compliance and disinfects the water. The system went out of maintenance this month and there are no replacement parts. They have a big order for parts around 200 thousand and they are hoping that will get them by until they can get the UV System replaced. Mr. Westrom noted that they have something that they are really proud of, and that's Mr. Laneaux has kept the sewer plant in compliance with no exceeds for over 2 years solid which is an outstanding job far better than anybody who has had that job.

Mr. Laneaux note that it was just getting all the employee on the same page, boost morale and stress the importance of how important their roll and job is and letting them know they are appreciated.

Mr. Westrom also thanked Mr. Davis for his efforts because he is so dedicated that he takes the calls when he can't get people to fill the slots.

Mr. Davis noted that they have to do what they have to do and that the rain event is a challenge, the sewer system is a challenge and he thanked everyone working together for all these things to come out to be a success.

The Council thanked them for all their hard work and dedication.

Mr. Westrom noted that the Calypso Street project has been on the books for a long time, and they are finally going to make headway on it.

Mayor Ellis noted for the Council's information that they are doing a lot of work as far as assessment to where they are, especially, on sewer because for the next 5 years there is going to be tremendous amounts of federal funding coming down. So, we have to have these top evaluations to be done, get engineering behind it to go after these competitive grants with these different entities. He noted that he will be in Baton Rouge fighting for what we need, and he will stay on our delegation to get some help.

e) 7002 Central Shop

Mr. Antonio Riser, Assistant Shop Supervisor.

There were no questions.

12.) Administration

Councilwoman Ezernack wanted to know what's the same and what's different.

Councilman Harvey noted that they have more security stuff.

Mr. Richards noted that they have more IT related cyber security cost, maintenance cost and the new division facility management are the really big changes.

Mrs. Rowell just wanted to say thank you to Council and noted the changes over the years from the long binder computer paper you couldn't half read and not being tabbed. There also use to be 3 different nights that ran about 3 hours long each time. We have been able to pair this down to the one night and she appreciate that they have been very accommodating and seem to do their homework ahead of time and you allow us to do our job and that's appreciated. There are a lot of things that can be tweaked, and she will work with the Court and the Marshal under the Mayor's direction that we can find something for them. She noted that the city attorney sent her some language in the law, and she will take a look at it and as a municipality they have certain minimums that have to be paid but beyond that the City can supplement. It was a different administration at one time that basically they had to pay for any of their raise, if you all choose and the Mayor so chooses that we start considering to looking at that another way she has no problem with that, it is just a matter that the City will have to be able to fund it.

She noted if the City does that, they have to look at something on their side because there are issues with the way the court is run over there that they aren't being fined, and that runs both ways. She further noted that she thinks that conversation will have to be had.

Councilwoman Ezernack noted that the judges get some type of supplemental pay.

Mrs. Rowells noted that the City can supplement and keep in mind too that their pension is significant, and we are fortunate that we only have 3 judges. If you have anything else, we need to look at it in the form of a budget amendment.

Mr. Richards noted that the Marshal from their funds have given their people raises.

Mrs. Rowell noted that when Judge Joyce said that they have a fund and it's dwindling and that comes from their share of those things that they need to look inside their procedure are they not fining or putting in these fines that they have the power to produce revenue. They say they are not supposed to be a money maker, but they have the power to produce revenue and are they doing everything that they can or what. Again, they will work with them.

Mrs. Rowell on another note offered to bring maintenance construction crew under Administration and she thinks they are already seeing some great improvements. There is an electrician on board, and we will hire HVAC Person which will have significant savings and more than pay for itself in the long run.

Mr. Richard Moore, Facility Manager noted that they have been running crews doing different things.

Councilwoman Woods wanted to know how many employees will be on this team.

Mr. Richards noted that there are 11 full-time and 5 part-time.

13.) City Expense

(explained in the synopsis.)

There being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting was adjourned at 8:28 p.m. upon motion of Ms. Woods and seconded by Mrs. Ezernack.

Carday Marshall, Sr.
Chairman

Carolus S. Riley
Council Clerk

For extended details on the council meeting please call the Council Clerk Monday-Friday at 318-329-2252 to schedule an appointment to listen to the minutes.