

A budget workshop of the City Commission of the City of Apalachicola was held on Tuesday, August 30, 2011 at 6:00 PM at the Apalachicola Community Center, #1 Bay Avenue, Apalachicola, Florida.

Present: Mayor Van Johnson, Commissioner Brenda Ash, Commissioner Mitchell Bartley, Commissioner Frank Cook, City Administrator Betty Webb, City Clerk Lee Mathes, Chief of Police Bobby Varnes

Visitors: George Coon, Officer Timmy Davis, Mark Friedman, Dieter Ambos, David Adlerstein, Shirley Byrd, Susan Clementson, Caty Greene, Gayle Johnson, George Mahr, Tom Daly, Clarice Powell, Leslie Coon

Workshop opened by Mayor Johnson.

Commissioner Ash stated she would like to hear what the other Commissioners comments on the budget issues.

Commissioner Cook stated the City is headed in the right direction, and the City has worked hard in getting the core areas down. The City is not there yet, but getting close to where we need to be. Commissioner Cook stated he has heard citizen comments regarding the employee pay increases. Commissioner Cook stated that maybe the City should categorize things in a different way so there are no misunderstandings with the 3% employee retirement reimbursement and the proposed pay increase.

Commissioner Bartley stated he has heard citizen complaints regarding the 3% retirement reimbursement and the proposed pay increase. Commissioner Bartley stated now is not the time for any type of pay back or pay increase for employees.

Mayor Johnson stated draft #4 is a decrease in the millage rate to collect the same amount of ad valorem revenue that was collected last year, 3% employee retirement reimbursement, and 2% pay increase for employees, and the City still had a surplus after those changes were made.

Dieter Ambos stated the City taxes and millage rate keep going up every year. Mr. Ambos stated he doesn't feel the taxpayers should have to fund the employees' retirement reimbursement or should be allowed a pay increase at this time.

Mayor Johnson stated he feels the millage rate can still be lowered and still take care of the employees.

Mr. Ambos stated the private sector has to pay for insurance and part of retirement. Taxpayers should not have to fund this. Mr. Ambos stated a guaranteed job is better than being without of a job. Mr. Ambos stated the Commission has talked about cutting services if revenues are not generated. What services would be cut and by how much?

Mayor Johnson stated the Commission would have to prioritize services, but public safety is a priority.

Mr. Ambos stated the City should impose fees to raise revenues, and not raise taxes.

Timmy Davis stated he is a City employee and a City taxpayer. Officer Davis stated the 3% retirement reduction has hurt the employees because it has been so long since a raise has been given.

George Mahr discussed what services the City really needs to provide. Mr. Mahr discussed the possibility of the City police department merging with the County sheriff department.

Mayor Johnson stated 4 years ago the City contacted the County about taking over the police services, and the amount exceeded what the City had budgeted.

Mark Friedman stated the taxpayers are paying double for services.

Discussion held concerning merging the police department with the County.

George Coon suggested cutting all department expenses equally the same.

Leslie Coon spoke against employee raises and retirement reimbursement. Ms. Coon stated the City employees should be willing to give a little. Ms. Coon stated she feels that not all employees should be given a raise.

Mr. Coon stated cuts across the board would not hurt any one employee.

Mayor Johnson stated the City laid off employees and lowered taxes last year. The increase is a modest increase. The proposed millage rate in draft #4 will generate the same amount of money as last year.

Ms. Coon stated that giving all employees a raise doesn't give incentive for those employees who don't deserve a raise. Across the board raises does not give an incentive for any employee to work harder.

Mayor Johnson stated for the most part, all City employees work hard.

Mr. Ambos asked if the City has a process to evaluate employees on a regular basis.

Ms. Webb stated yes.

Mayor Johnson stated citizens need to be finding ways to help employees and save taxpayers money.

Mr. Friedman stated the City has a budget committee, and they were not brought into the budget process. Mr. Friedman discussed properties purchased with FCT funds.

Mayor Johnson stated the City purchased property with FCT funds to preserve the working waterfront from development.

Mr. Friedman discussed high school expenses, reuse expenses, property/liability insurance expenses, and Franklin Promise lease. Mr. Friedman stated in summary the ad valorem revenues are down because of the property purchased by the City, expenses are going up, and the citizens are funding the bill.

Commissioner Cook stated when the real estate market comes back, the City does need to sell some properties, but now is not the time.

Mayor Johnson stated the City has to protect the seafood industry heritage.

Mr. Friedman stated the City doesn't have to protect every single thing. Mr. Friedman stated he supports the seafood industry, but the City has to get more diversified.

Mayor Johnson asked Mr. Friedman what is his specific ideas for the budget.

Mr. Friedman stated it takes time to break down a budget to get information together.

Ms. Webb explained high school rentals.

Clarice Powell explained the social services that are housed in the high school.

Discussion held concerning usage of high school.

Tom Daly stated he doesn't feel employees were let go just to balance the budget. The City can generate revenue in enterprise fund and can allow an increase for admin transfers. The City has to know what everything costs and what every building cost to maintain.

Mayor Johnson stated the Commission needs to look after the employees. Mayor Johnson stated any budget that is not for the employees, he would have to vote no.

Commissioner Ash stated there are going to have to be hard decisions made. Everyone needs to be willing to make sacrifices. Everyone is going to have to work together to come up with a solution. Everyone is going to have to work together to get a common ground to offer services that are needed.

Mayor Johnson instructed Ms. Webb to look at the budget and see what can be cut, but do not cut employee retirement reimbursements or pay increases.

Ms. Webb stated she would like to meet with those individuals who made comments on an individual basis to explain the facts and give them the whole concept.

Commissioner Cook stated we are not addressing the problems, and there are people willing to help.

Commissioner Ash stated she feels all the committees that have been appointed have too much power, and that the committees don't tell the Commission everything that is going on. Commissioner Ash stated the Commission has the final say, and everybody needs to stop criticizing the City and help the Commission find a solution.

Mayor Johnson stated he has given Ms. Webb instructions.

There being no further discussion, workshop adjourned.

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Van W. Johnson, Sr., Mayor

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Lee H. Mathes, City Clerk