Owen County Council

Meeting-September 9, 2024 @ 6:00 PM

Courthouse 2nd Floor

YouTube Live Streamed-Owen County Government

1. Meeting was called to order by President Polly Chesser

- Opening Prayer and Pledge of Allegiance

Roll call and public sign in
Council members present: Amy Casebeer, Steve Carrell, Polly Chesser, Anton Neff, Nick Robertsonon, and Andy Wood
Council members Absent: Verl Keith
Auditor: Sheila Reeves and Nicole Vandermoere

2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

- **Minutes Approved**:
  - **August 12, 2024**: Motion by Wood, seconded by Casebeer, approved 5/0/1 Carrell abstained.
  - **August 28, 2024**: Motion by Neff, seconded by Carrell, approved 5/0/1 Wood abstained.
  - **Budget Workshop (August 28-29)**: Motion by Neff seconded by Robertsonon, to postpone approval until the next meeting approved 5/0/1 Wood abstained.

3. Financial Report

- **Reports Presented by Reeves:**
  - Financial statements from January 1 to August 31, 2024.
  - Monthly report for August.
- **Discussion**: Nothing new beyond what was presented at budget hearings on August 28-29.

4. Old Business: Jail Project Update

- **Updates Provided**:
  - A new project timeline and public hearing notices were shared.
  - The upcoming public hearing was scheduled for September 27, 2024.
- **Discussion on Transparency**:
  - Concerns raised by Anton regarding the transparency of the appraisal process.
  - Motion made by Neff to invite Barnes and Thornberg (legal representatives) and Craig Coffman (RDC President) to the next meeting to discuss appraisal transparency. motion seconded by Wood 6/0. Next meeting will be October 15, 2024, due to Columbus Day.

5. Open Public Hearing for Additional Appropriation Requests

- **Opened By**: Chesser
- **Requests Reviewed**:
  - Additional funding for 911 services, including overtime and other adjustments.

6. Additional Appropriation Requests and Budget Reallocations

- **Overtime Funding for 911 Services**:
  - The council discussed overtime funding, noting the need to potentially revisit funding by the end of the year depending on the staffing situation.
  - The proposed $20,000 for overtime will be available on an as-needed basis.
- **Computer Equipment Funding 911 Services**:
  - $37,000 previously planned for other services has been redirected to the equipment line item to assist with audit needs.
- **Chesser called for public comment, no public comment**
- **Appropriations**:
  - Motion by Neff seconded by Robertson to proceed with appropriations see attached requests 6/0 approved.

7. Public Hearing Closed by Chesser

8. New Business: Budget Updates

- **Updated Budget Balances and Decisions**:
  - Attendees received updated budget documents.
  - **Total Budget for 2025**: Approximately $21,363,000, an increase compared to the previous year's budget.

- **Wish List Items**: Items presented from budget workshops were discussed, with the understanding that any granted wish list items would add to the budget total.

9. Wish List Requests (Initial Discussion)

- **Auditor's Office Request**:
  - Request for an additional full-time deputy auditor position. Motion by Wood to approve the new position, seconded by Casebeer was initially supported, but after discussion on budget constraints, it was withdrawn for further consideration alongside other requests.
  - **Vote Outcome**:
  - After reconsideration, the council voted on the auditor's request for a new deputy position. Motion by Casebeer seconded by Robertsonon 4/2 approved with Wood and Neff against.
- **Maintenance Department Request**:
  - **Part-time Laborer**: Requested a part-time laborer position (20 hours per week) to assist with general maintenance and lawn mowing duties.
  - Commissioner Burton highlighted the need for additional support due to the high workload of the current maintenance staff.
- **Building Department Request**:
  - Proposal to increase the existing building inspector's hours from 35 to 40 per week.
  - This funding would come from the building department's own fund, not the general fund. Discussion included flexibility in working hours to meet contractor needs.
- **Code Enforcement Position**:
  - Current position approved at 22 hours per week. Discussion on potentially increasing this to 28 hours a week, which might make the position more attractive for applicants.
  - **Concerns**: Council debated whether increasing hours would impact the quality of inspection, given different training levels between code enforcement officers and building inspectors. The council opted to wait and see how new hires affect the workload before making any changes.

10. Highway Department Budget Adjustments

- **Seasonal Labor Increase**:
  - The proposal was to double the capacity of seasonal labor hours from 1,080 to 2,160.
- **Adjustment for Equipment**:
  - Proposal to reallocate funds initially set for purchasing used equipment back into equipment budget due to the higher-than-anticipated cost of used machinery.
  - Additionally, reappropriation of funds from the grader lease was requested, with a total of $82,000 allocated for leasing, which is up from the previously allocated $40,000.
- **Bridge #15 Replacement**:
  - Discussed setting aside $100,000 annually for the eventual replacement of Bridge #15, estimated to cost $3.2 million.
  - Anton raised concerns about the expense and its necessity, given alternative routes in the area.
  - Highway Commissioner noted that, without funding for replacement, a temporary fix of $30,000 will be implemented to bring the bridge to a 3-ton limit.

11. Rescue Equipment and Tire Budget

- **Rescue Services Budget**:
  - The council reviewed the proposed budget for Rescue Services, which included costs that had previously been absorbed into EMS operations. A total of $25,500 was initially projected.
  - **Tire Costs**: Agreed to reduce tire costs from $2,000 to $500 for regular tire maintenance and reappropriate $7,500 from the Riverboat fund for immediate tire replacement.
  - **Motion**: Neff made a motion to advertise to appropriate $7,500 from the Riverboat fund for tire replacement for Rescue Equipment tires up to date. Motion was seconded by Robertson 6/0 approved.
- **Further Budget Considerations for Rescue Services**:
  - The council agreed that more detailed work was needed on the Rescue Services budget to finalize line items and ensure accurate tracking.
  - Chris will follow up on further adjustments, specifically focusing on separating existing costs and establishing clearer fund management for Rescue.

12. Economic Development Corporation (EDC) Request

- **Lit Supplemental Distribution Request**:
  - EDC requested that instead of the lit supplemental distribution, invest into the annual budget of Economic Development request is for $20,000.
  - Further review and adjustments needed to align the budget with actual revenue.

13. Clerk's Office Request for New Position

- **Full-Time Deputy File Clerk**:
  - The clerk requested a new full-time Deputy File Clerk position, with a similar cost structure to the auditor's office request.
  - **Funding Source**: The funding for this position would be derived from document fees (Fund 4902).
  - **Council Discussion**: The clerk's office staffing levels are below average compared to similar-sized counties. The current staffing is five, whereas the average for comparable counties is around six.

14. 911 Request for Assistant Director and Training Position

- **Position Change Request**:
  - The 911 center requested the elimination of one full-time Communications Officer and the addition of a full-time Assistant Director and Training position.
  - **Estimated Cost**: The net cost difference would be approximately $13,279.
  - **Proposed Salary Levels**:
    - The council discussed two options for the assistant director's hourly rate:
      - **$24 per hour** as initially requested by the department, based on industry average data.
      - **$21.73 per hour**, which aligns with the existing county classification system and current job classifications for similar positions. Non-exempt.

15. Prosecutor's Request for Investigator Position Hours Increase

- **Increase in Weekly Hours**:
  - **Proposal**: Increase the investigator's hours from 35 to 40 per week to address workload demands.
  - **Estimated Cost**: 90% from the general fund and a 66% reimbursement on 10% through the 4D reimbursement program.
  - **Council Discussion**: The council agreed that additional hours would alleviate workload issues and that the general fund cost was manageable with the 4D reimbursement.

16. Group Benefits Proposal

- **Proposal**: Councilman Robertsonon proposed benefits for employees who voluntarily opt-out of county health plans, particularly for those eligible for Medicare.
- **Discussion**:
  - No ordinance was found that would mandate or regulate such a benefit.
  - **Outcome**: The council decided not to take further action on this proposal without more detailed cost information and supporting documentation.

17. Resolution to Establish Fund for Bridge #15 Replacement

- **Proposal**: Create a new fund for earmarking $100,000 annually for Bridge #15 replacement.
- **Council Motion**:
  - A motion was made to establish a dedicated fund for the Bridge #15 replacement, with $100,000 annually allocated from the highway department’s budget.
  - The fund will be restricted solely for the purpose of bridge replacement, ensuring that it cannot be diverted for other uses.
  - **Outcome**: Motion by Neff to start a line item for Bridge #15 to the Highway Fund for $100,000 along with the appropriate ordinance creating the which would be the recipient of the fund, seconded by Wood 6/0 approved.

18. Motion for Assistant Director at $21.73 per Hour

- Casebeer made a motion to approve the Assistant Director and Trainer position at a rate of $21.73 per hour, consistent with similar classification targets within the wage study seconded by Carrell. Anton proposed an amendment to eliminate one
- Communications Officer position to accommodate this new role.
- After brief discussion, the motion, including the amendment was voted on, 5/1 approved Robertsonon voted against.

19. Immediate Implementation for the Assistant Director Position

- Neff made a motioned to immediately implement the Assistant Director position for the remainder of 2024, at the approved rate, with the specific dollar amount for advertisement to be calculated by the auditor, seconded by Casebeer 6/0 approved

20. Maintenance Department Request

- Wood moved to forgo any action on the maintenance department’s request for a new part-time laborer seconded by Casebeer. After deliberation on workload demands and the current use of contracted services for mowing, the council voted. 4/2 approved with Robertsonon and Carroll against

21. Prosecutor's Investigator Hours Increase

- Wood moved to approve increasing the investigator's hours from 35 to 40 hours per week, seconded by Casebeer 6/0 approved.

22. Clerk's Request for Deputy File Clerk

- Neff moved to approve the Clerk's request for a full-time Deputy File Clerk, to be funded from document fees (Fund 4902). Seconded by Carroll 6/0 approved.

23. Highway Fund Budget Considerations and Follow-Up

- The council finalized funding for Highway Fund changes, including appropriations for the grader lease and adjustments based on anticipated equipment costs. Motion by Neff seconded by Robertsonon 6/0 approved

24. Building Department Request

- Wood motioned to forgo any changes to the building department's hours, preferring instead to wait for additional staffing and workload assessment seconded by Neff for discussion vote called 4/1/1 approved w/Robertsonon against and Carrell abstained.

25. Economic Development Corporation Funding Increase

- Neff made a motion and proposed a $10,000 increase for the Economic Development Corporation (EDC), raising the line item from $75,000 to $85,000, instead of the requested $20,000 increase seconded by Casebeer. The motion resulted in a tie, which meant no action was taken, and the budget remained unchanged.

26. Motion Request: Reeves asked for a motion to have Chesser and Neff work with her and Vandermoere to fine tune the numbers motion by Wood second by Neff 6/0 approved.

27. Jennings Township Trustee Approval of Budget-Susan Nicholes

There are people on her board that are not allowed to vote on the budget. Wood made a motion for approval of her budget, seconded by Casebeer 5/0/1 Carrell abstained.

28. Appropriations and Transfers

Motion by Wood to approve advertising (see attached) seconded by Casebeer 6/0 approved.

29. Wage Study Approval for 2025

- **Discussion**: The council discussed the need for an updated salary study for 2025, given the changing wage landscape and past inconsistencies in following classification guidelines.
- **Motion**: Wood moved to allocate up to $16,540 from Contract Services to hire a consulting firm to conduct a comprehensive salary and classification study. Casebeer agreed to amend the motion, allowing Neff to move forward with contacting the firm to initiate the contract. 5/0/1 approved Robertsonon abstained.

30. Certification of Net Assessed Values - Public Hearing Scheduled

- **Issue**: Deputy Auditor Vandermoere explained discrepancies found in net assessed values due to errors in abatements and utility assessments.
- **Action Required**: A public hearing was scheduled for September 30th at 5:00 PM to certify and correct these values.
- **Motion**: Wood moved to schedule the public hearing, seconded by Robertsonon 6/0 approved.

31. Public Comment - Wage Study and Classification Concerns

- **Speaker**: Walter C., a new resident, expressed concern over inconsistencies in pay for employees within the same classification, specifically citing the 911 dispatchers versus jailers.
- **Council Response**:
  - Anton and other council members explained the process, the decisions that led to the discrepancies, and the council's ongoing efforts to correct the imbalance through new studies and targeted budget increases.
  - The council acknowledged past errors and emphasized the importance of consistency in future wage adjustments.

32. Adjournment

- **Motion to Adjourn**: Wood made a motion to adjourn the meeting, motion was seconded and passed unanimously.