

**Finance Committee Meeting**  
**October 23, 2023, 2:30 p.m. Village Hall**

Present: Chairman Berger, Council Member Galicki, Fiscal Officer Romanowski, Mayor Koons, Solicitor Matheney

The committee discussed the proposed budget deficit. Berger reported that he spoke to the Street Commissioner (SC) about the salt dome and regionalization ~ perhaps storing salt at other locations. SC will talk to Bainbridge, which stores salt for the State. If the Village can store salt with Bainbridge then it can build a smaller salt dome on the Village campus. He did not know how much the rent would be to store salt. Chagrin is building a new salt dome and Russell has smaller salt domes but has land space. Galicki asked if he was referring to smaller as in capacity or without extra structures. Berger replied that if the salt dome is half the size, it should be half the cost. Berger said over the last five years, the maximum amount of salt used in a year was 1,700 tons; last year, 1,000 tons was used. Berger asked if it was possible to store the salt with the supplier and then get deliveries on a regular basis. To store the salt would be \$7 per ton, but they store it on the ground with a tarp over it and it turns into a mess. The agreement dictates that salt must be taken between January 1<sup>st</sup> and March 31<sup>st</sup>. There are 1,000 tons in the salt dome now. Berger wants to avoid paying \$700,000 for a salt dome.

Berger reported there is a “clean streets policy” in SRV. Dramatically more salt is used in SRV than neighboring communities. Russell only uses 500 tons per year, which is 30-50% of what the Village uses. He questioned whether the Village is oversalting resulting in the need for a giant facility to have all the salt when it really isn’t needed. Galicki replied that he had not heard of the “clean streets policy” and asked if it was a written policy or practice passed down from former the SC. Berger replied that according to SC, it has been that way for more than 30 years. It is a choice with financial ramifications.

The Solicitor commented that Russell has two state routes and Bainbridge might be a better comparison. Berger said Bainbridge uses 2,200 tons per year, however they have more road mileage.

Berger said the Streets Committee has not been involved in the conversation, he was just doing research from a finance perspective. The salt dome is a big question mark for the budget. In 2015, Chardon built a salt dome with the idea that they would store salt for five different municipalities. Maybe the Village could collaborate with a neighbor to build a joint dome somewhere. Mayor said it would be best to do it with Russell. Berger stated that Russell does not have the capacity. A facility would need to be built, but where?

FO referred to a previous discussion about a concrete structure. She asked if perhaps it could be scaled back to a less robust structure and set back with trees around it, so it is less visible from the street. She asked if there are there quotes for other options for a salt dome.

Berger said he asked the SC to come up with other possibilities. Mayor said he will contact Russell and Bainbridge trustees.

For budget purposes, FO was told to leave the salt dome in at \$680,000 as a placeholder. FO informed the group that the amount does not include engineering, or add-ons.

Regarding pond assessments, Berger said the budget number should be less than \$5,000 for assessments of ponds for which there are easements.

For the corner lot, the FO said the Engineer was directed to explore options and the Village would incur engineering costs. The Solicitor reminded the group that the Engineer said it should be a grass roots effort and then CT would help. Mayor said he wanted to keep that one tight. He does not want a committee of citizens giving advice. Berger and Canton talked about the clock - \$13,000 - \$15,000 range and asked the Engineer to draft something up. Properties needs to provide a budget number for this line item.

The Mayor has not yet spoken to CRWP to get a cost of taking over the MS4 reporting.

Berger asked if the Fairview/Chagrin Heights drainage issue is in the budget for Streets. Is additional money needed? Galicki said it is not included because it is a new issue.

There was discussion about ditching behind homes on Chillicothe Rd. The Mayor said the residents provided permission for the Engineer to do a survey, then the Village will do easements. Mayor thinks it will be \$5,000 alone for the survey and the work will be \$7,000 - \$10,000. Berger thought this was in the budget, but not the survey. Galicki asked if there is a footprint of an old ditch that the Village would be refreshing. Berger replied that there was more to it than that. It is an extension of the Chillicothe/Bel Meadow ditch.

As a point of clarification, the FO verified, the Village has permission to go onto property, then they will do the survey, and then the easements will be obtained to do the work, and then there will be an estimated cost at that point. Mayor said to plug in \$20,000 for it. FO asked if this included engineering. The Mayor replied yes it did.

For the Fairview project, Berger said there are two backyards where water comes to a standstill. First it was the Village would dig a ditch, but now a drainage pipe will be put in to carry the water out of the yard to the storm drain. Berger said the reason for the water sitting in the backyard was that there was drainage from somewhere else that the Village had created that was stopping in their backyard. It was stormwater related. Berger said to put \$10,000 for that issue in the budget.

Regarding Manor Brook II, Berger said he couldn't speak to whether this is a real opportunity. They are doing the ESID work.

The Streets Committee has to make the call on the Road Program budget.

Mayor said the Road Program is a want and it can be held off for a year. Galicki agreed and said the Road Program has been plussed up in past years. The Village spent hundreds of thousands of dollars more than the historical amount. He was concerned about seeing obsolescence all at once in the future. His takeaway from the OML Conference is that the Village is in a wonderful position financially compared to a lot of comparable and larger-sized villages and cities in the state. Municipalities are worried about the potential increase in the contribution to the police retirement fund and impact. Some will have to disestablish local police departments and go with the county sheriff. There is a value to maintaining a financial comfort zone.

The Solicitor said with the Road Levy, the Village can suspend collections. FO reported the Road Levy brings in approximately \$230,000 per year and the Street Committee is talking about a \$650,000 Road Program. Galicki said historically it was about a \$300,000 Road Program, but almost double or more than that for the last couple of years. He recommends going back to the more traditional amount to keep within levy parameters. It is not necessary to get everything to 100% in a couple of years. Berger said there is a schedule and the goal is to get to 75 minimum score on all the roads and it's close. He asked if that is way over the top. Galicki replied that he thought it was and said the Village's worst road is in better shape than best roads in some neighboring communities. He is concerned that in 20 years the Village will have to do all the roads at once and the Village may not be as financially fit as it is today.

Berger stated the Village may need to go back and rethink the Road Program. He said Bell Rd. East is going to be done in 2025 and he doesn't want to have to do a \$700,000 Road Program on top of that.

Berger reported the Village has a proposed deficit of \$1,350,000. FO replied that is without what the committee told her today, engineering, design, survey, or other committee adjustments. Berger said that is a good problem to have. There is a wish list, but now they need to start paring the wish list down.

Berger asked the Solicitor what Council can do to plan the use of her services instead of knee-jerk reaction.

The Solicitor said lack of planning results in expenses – when things happen that have to be undone. Significant things that have taken a lot of time that are not typical include imminent litigation, the red barn (procedural nightmare) – BZA, Zoning, PC. In 2022 where PC made a decision, and it was appealed to the BZA – never happened. The Solicitor said when she does not have committee minutes and she is not given the full information it causes more work in the long run. There are a lot of start-stop projects. Things get queued up and then fall off the table, and then start back up a year or two later. There could be more planning on the Village's part. The most expensive things are when things are done without consulting the Solicitor or figuring out the right process or what the plan or goal really is. That takes time and expense.

Galicki asked if the Solicitor is doing administrative work that the FO/administrative staff could do such as drafting legislation. The Solicitor replied that the administrative staff should not do legislation, but they can, and she could review. The Solicitor said there have been a lot of public records requests that needed legal review and redaction. This can be complicated. Imminent litigation. Administrative staff does a great job in trying to funnel it down. Like it or not, SRV has numerous things that come up. The previous discount is not being offered because her rate is not going up and hasn't been in five years. Other municipalities TDD represents do not have this hourly rate.

The Solicitor said committees that are considering different aspects of the same thing could have joint meetings to discuss.

Regarding the easement discussion, there was confusion with the Engineer. Berger said that is an example of something that does not have to be done immediately and can be given to a colleague at a lower rate.

The Solicitor asked if Fairview property acquisition is in the budget. Mayor said it wasn't. He hadn't talked to people about it. He told people to take a look at it.

FO explained that admin tries to take care of / draft standard yearly things like the Road Program legislation, but still gives it to Solicitor to review. She gave the example of the NOPEC agreement for streetlights where she gave it to the Solicitor to review because there is always something that the Solicitor may want revised. She said in the past, before involving the Solicitor, Council would weigh in as to whether it was something they wanted to do. They would have some basic information and then decide if it was something they were interested in as a whole before incurring legal fees. With the employee handbook, the last time the handbook was updated, the committee met and worked on it themselves. When they understood what they wanted, did some research and put together a draft, that's when they went to the Solicitor for advice and review. The Solicitor was the last step. She gave another example of the pavilion permit process. It has been worked on for three years and no committee has ever approved it but there are a lot of legal fees invested in it. The Solicitor concurred.

Some villages do not have the Solicitor attend every meeting. Galicki asked the Solicitor if she attended other meetings like the CRWP in the past. The Solicitor replied for Special meetings of Council, and she usually asks if she is needed or not.

Galicki asked if there is merit to having the Solicitor only attend one meeting a month like the Engineer. FO commented that some municipalities have two meetings a month where one is a work session and the other is just to consider approval. She asked which meeting would the Solicitor attend. Berger said he is less concerned about meetings and more concerned about how we utilize the Solicitor in the projects. Has permission been given to the Solicitor to push back to ask about timeframe and necessity? Council needs to ask this of themselves until there is a better understanding of a project and scope of work needed from the Solicitor.

FO said some municipalities specify who is allowed to contact the Solicitor. The Solicitor stated that is spelled out in the contract as to who is the point person. TDD does not have this with their clients. She would not want there to be a chilling effect where someone would not call her with an issue. Berger wouldn't want to preclude other council members from calling the Solicitor by requiring approval.

FO commented that sometimes the Solicitor is doing footwork the committees could be doing, or the committees could ask the administrative staff to do. Berger wants the Solicitor to push back as to whether the committee has done its homework first. If someone is abusing the privilege, Berger wants the Solicitor to suggest meeting with Council to say someone is out of line.

Discussion of Socia Media policy and authority to speak to the press.

Berger and Galicki concurred that they'd recommend approval of TDD contract.

FO said STAR Ohio needs two signers. Without having a Fiscal Auditor, the only one currently approved is the FO. The FO had contacted the Solicitor if the Village could authorize the same signers as those who sign checks, which is the FO, FA, and current Finance Committee members. The Solicitor explained the section refers to the Ohio Subdivision Fund she was not sure if this is predecessor to STAR Ohio. If it is, the section should be changed and also the additional signer should be added. It is not the same as the issuance of a check because there are other things with STAR Ohio. There was discussion about who had bonds. FO said the Village no longer has Public Official Bonds, but rather Faithful Performance insurance.

Regarding the Ohio Subdivision Fund , the Solicitor said if it is the same fund, the name should be changed. If it is different, a section should be added. Berger Concurred.

The Solicitor reported there was new legislation passed effective in January regarding municipal income tax collection and changes needed to be made to the ordinance. She is looking for a recommendation from Finance to amend the code according to the new law. She will prepare that for the Committee's review and recommendation to Council.

FO stated she sent the committee information from the Budget Commission about the property reevaluation. They are asking everyone to look at taxes and consider reducing collection of a levy to assist residents with the upcoming increase in property taxes based on the revaluation.

FO asked about Wreaths Across America. She said the Finance Committee discussed it previously but then Mayor said to put it back on the agenda again. FO said the Village should not be in the donation collection business. Berger clarified for a third party. FO said generally in the program there would be a committee that would be the go between the Village and Wreaths Across America. The Village would not be involved. After discussion, Berger said to put a line item in budget and write a check if Council supports. FO asked why the Village couldn't put money in the budget and put wreaths on the graves themselves just like the Village puts flags on Veteran graves. Galicki said his understanding is that the Village could write a check, but it does not guarantee that it would purchase wreaths for our cemeteries. FO said her understanding was that it goes to the overall program. Berger stated in the Cemetery budget add a line for \$250 for wreaths and the Village can

purchase and install them itself. Berger said this is making the statement that it recognizes and values the service that they gave to the country and is honoring them. Berger will talk to Linda Mattern. Mayor said to hold on, because he has already talked to Friday Tomco, and the Village can buy the wreaths from them (Wreaths Across America).

FO provided a comparable salary increase spreadsheet. The budget reflects 3.5% Berger – the difference between 2.75% and 3% is \$4,500. In terms of an overall budget, 3% makes sense, and Galicki concurred.

Motion for healthcare and salary increase for 10/23 meeting and FO will put this in the budget.

Adjourn at 4:03 p.m.