



OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

DAWN M. JONES, CITY CLERK

PERSONNEL AND FINANCE

AUGUST 30, 2023, 5:30 P.M.

Committee Members Present: Sheila Niezgodski, Rachel Tomas Morgan, Canneth Lee, Eli Wax

Committee Members Absent: Troy Warner

Others Present: Dawn M. Jones*, Karen White, Victoria Trujillo*, City Clerk*, Bob Palmer*, Shayla Kimbrough*, Bianca Tirado*, ABC57*, Alli Dolz-Lane*, Cynthia*, Henry Davis*, Maurice Scott, Beth San*, Williams*, Rahman Johnson*, BJ Pyle*, Sue Kesim

Presenter: Jordan Gathers, Interim Director of VPA

Agenda: 2024 Venues Parks and Arts Budget Presentation
Council Questions and Feedback on Proposed 2024 VPA Budget
Public Input on Proposed 2024 VPA Budget

Members marked with an asterisk (*) are present digitally

Please note the attached link for the meeting recording:

<https://docs.southbendin.gov/WebLink/browse.aspx?dbid=0&mediaid=370232>

Committee Chair Sheila Niezgodski called to order the Budget meeting at 5:30 p.m.

For the benefit of attendees who may have not been familiar with the process, Committee Chair Niezgodski gave a brief explanation of the budget process and the powers and responsibilities of the council regarding the budget. She highlighted an ongoing survey that provides residents with an opportunity to provide input regarding priorities. A total of nine (9) budget meetings will be held, and the final vote for the 2024 budget is scheduled for October 9, 2023.

2024 Venues Parks and Arts Budget Presentation

The following highlights were presented:

- There are plans to bring an arts council to the community and to place a piece of public art in every district in the city.
- Salaries and wages will continue to rise by two (2) to three (3) percent annually, and there are plans to add more members to the department's team.

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- LAZ Parking has been engaged to replace ASM. LAZ will oversee the Art 3 parking garage and on-street parking and will provide enforcement.
- The three (3) divisions in community recreation and events have been merged into one (1).
- The department plans to continue to grow the “kids play free” golf program in Studebaker Golf Course.
- The setbacks in the Seitz Park project have been addressed.
- Fundraising efforts for Morris 100 are ongoing.
- The Four Winds Field expansion project will enable events other than sports to be held in the space.
- The 35th Street Wetlands project will be renamed to emphasize its true purpose.
- Communications between the community, DCI, and others regarding installing a pool in Potawatomi Park have taken place.
- A new RFP process will be carried out with the Botanical Society and others to provide more programming and educational activities for the conservatories.

Council Questions and Feedback on Proposed 2024 VPA Budget

Committee Chair Niezgodski asked Jordan Gathers for VPA’s budget for 2024. Jordan Gathers, Executive Director with offices at 219 S St. Louis Blvd, South Bend, IN 46617, responded that the budget for 2024 is a little over \$34,000,000, which is a slight decrease from 2023 that was \$37,000,000.

Committee Member Eli Wax stated that the 5th District does not have an adequate park and asked Jordan Gathers about his plans for the district.

Jordan Gathers replied that the department will review and expand the MOU governing its operational partnership with O’Brien Center and others to incorporate more of the south end of town. He stated that the department is open to new ideas and insights from Committee Member Wax.

Committee Member Wax responded that he looks forward to speaking with Mr. Gathers about developing his ideas.

Committee Member Canneth Lee requested more information on the Kennedy project, particularly regarding the possibility of having a pool at the location and the partnership with the federal government, and especially the time frame within which the city can expect a response from the federal government.

Jordan Gathers responded that the department will not receive an update regarding the funding aspect of the federal government partnership until 2024. He stated that the Kennedy project is important because it is located in an underserved, underfunded, and disenfranchised part of town. The establishment of a pool at the park will greatly improve the area and the community. Committee Member Lee pointed out that funds had been allocated for upgrades in other parks in the community. He stated that residents are wondering when the upgrades will take effect.

Jordan Gathers responded that a groundbreaking ceremony had occurred for a pickle ball court in Boehm Park in honor of a former VPA employee of over twenty (20) years, Ray Comer. The department is considering repeating the process in other parks.

Committee Member Rachel Tomas Morgan requested Maurice Scott, Chief Community Officer, 321 East Walter Street, to speak on his experience regarding the recent merging of community initiatives in VPA's divisions and on his division's portfolio post merging. She asked Jordan Gathers to speak on the Alive grant to clarify if there is an increase or a decrease in the grant. She asked what outcomes and impacts are expected from the Alive grant, so that its efficiency and necessity can be measured and assessed.

Maurice Scott responded that the transition has been working well and generally been a success. Since his division's background is recreation, the merging was seamless. Pursuing the Alive grants through the community center spaces has been more intentional; staff had to be trained, but their efforts have been well received. His division has partnered with Community School Corporation so that the corporation can better understand community initiatives. His division has concluded its first "Adopt-a-School" program with Muessel School, where training was given. The division has partnered with its Alive grant recipients and with Boots on the Ground in those spaces.

Jordan Gathers stated that there is a slight decrease from the 2023 budget regarding the Alive grant since the amount of funding per grant has decreased.

Committee Member Tomas Morgan stated that her priority is staff—including talent attraction and retention. She asked for more information on the department's emphasis on staff development and opportunities. Committee Member Tomas Morgan acknowledged the restrictions for wages and pressed that staff development, training, and research opportunities are important to employees.

Jordan Gathers responded that John Harris, from a VIP training institute, has conducted several leadership training courses in the department and many staff members have participated in the training. The team invested in conferences for staff engagement. The department is focused on creating, growing, and maintaining relationships to increase staff retention and to encourage involvement in the community and VPA's programs.

Committee Member Tomas Morgan asked about cross-training in the department.

Jordan Gathers replied that cross-training occurs in the department and is of importance, particularly the Ecological Advisory Committee (EAC), which partners with VPA and advises it on nature planning. He committed to placing more focus on cross-training in 2024.

Councilwoman Karen White requested a financial comparison from 2022 to the current status of the department to understand the reductions in the proposed 2024 budget. She asked if the department had human and financial resources.

Jordan Gathers undertook to make the comparison available to the council.

Councilman Henry Davies asked Mr. Gathers if he is the interim or new department head for VPA.

Jordan Gathers replied that he is the interim director. The permanent director position is an appointment position.

Committee Chair Niezgodski asked Jordan Gathers to include VPA's total number of programs in the financial comparison requested by Councilwoman White. Walker Field was not included in the interim director's presentation even though the neighborhood plan included it and has completed work on the VPA structure. She asked if VPA considered Walker Field as one of its capital projects.

Jordan Gathers responded that conversations are ongoing to progress Walker Field in a timely way.

The Chair informed attendees that the next meeting will be a working session open for public observation but not for questions.

Public Input on Proposed 2024 VPA Budget

Sue Kesim, 422 Kennedy Drive, expressed her dissatisfaction regarding the absence of figures in the budget presentation and requested when they would be made available to the public. Sue Kesim referred to Section 19 of the city ordinance, which requires reduction of invasives. She asked how much funding is being appropriated for reducing invasives since this addresses the land management plan, of which only 20% has been enacted. Sue Kesim stated that the department's five (5) year strategic plan needs to include land management and grants should be pursued. Ms. Kesim highlighted that there are no paid staff to carry out programs at Howard Park, only volunteers. Sue Kesim suggested grants from health and human services for staffing cost. She attended an EAC meeting and applauded Gary's work with the nature programs and his commitment to protecting nature. She pointed out that there was no mention of an indoor pool at O'Brien Center; it has been a common topic of discussion that would benefit the health of seniors. An indoor pool would also complement the YMCA programming.

Committee Chair Niezgodski responded that Councilwoman White and herself had requested budget numbers, and there will be a comparison between 2022 and 2023. The council is also seeking to clarify the distribution of funds, what encumbrances exist, and revenue sources for the department. Once the comparison is received, it will be placed in the budget folder and made public, ideally before there is a vote for the budget. Sue Kesim will receive an email when the comparison is posted.

With no further business, Committee Chair Sheila Niezgodski adjourned the Budget meeting at 6:20 p.m.



Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sheila Niezgodski".

Committee Chair Sheila Niezgodski

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