



OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

DAWN M. JONES, CITY CLERK

PERSONNEL AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

SEPTEMBER 6, 2023, 5:33 P.M.

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

Committee Members Absent: Troy Warner

Others Present: Sharon L. McBride*, Lori K. Hamann*, Karen L. White, Victoria Trujillo, Jade Harbert, Denise Riedl, Kyle Willis, Dawn M. Jones, Bob Palmer*

Presenter: Jordan Gathers, Interim Director of VPA

Agenda: Common Council Working Session #1: 2024 Budget Discussion

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=370360>

Committee Chair Sheila Niezgodski called to order the Personnel and Finance Committee at 5:33 p.m.

Common Council Working Session #1: 2024 Budget Discussion

Committee Chair Niezgodski explained that the meeting's objective was to address questions arising from the presentation by Jordan Gathers, interim executive director of Venues Parks & Arts, 301 South St. Louis Boulevard, at the last meeting. Since the meeting was a working session, public input was not allowed to avoid breaking open door laws.

Jordan Gathers highlighted that the adopted budget for 2023 was \$37,033,164 while the proposed budget for 2024 is \$34,313,978. Community initiatives have been expanded due to an increase of salaries and benefits for the GVI program manager position. Budgets for park maintenance, park administration, golf courses, and recreation have seen slight changes. Under development and promotions, changes were made for the funds allocated to the Morris Performing Arts Center. A decrease was recorded in park projects and capital because of the MLK dream project, which was \$6,000,000. Since the sum budgeted for 2024 is small (\$570,000), the money will be used for paving, Studebaker Museum improvements, capital requests, and court improvements.

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The higher sum for inter-government/shared revenue in 2024 was because professional sports convention development areas had significantly increased. VPA is planning to expand some of its projects. The proposed sum for donations in the budget is because the goal is to raise \$4,000,000 for the King Center project to ensure that there is long-term funding for the project. Jordan Gathers emphasized that proper budgeting enables VPA to continue to service the community at a high level.

Committee Member Eli Wax asked for an explanation of the increase in “park debt”.

Jordan Gathers explained that the increase in debt servicing is for the Four Winds project expansion. Committee Member Wax asked for the reasons for the increase of approximately \$400,000 in “community programming”.

Jordan Gathers stated that the increase is for additional staffing and new FTEs for the new Dream Center set to be online in 2024 and for other community spaces. New staff include a group leader for LaSalle Park. The revenue increase is also to staff MLK and to support LaSalle Park and other positions. Most of the funds will be for salaries and benefits.

Committee Member Canneth Lee asked if VPA had considered how it will allocate the funds that will be received from the hotel/motel tax.

Jordan Gathers expressed gratitude for the funding from the tax to support VPA’s capital projects and stated that discussions are ongoing. Once a final determination is made as to how to utilize the fund, he will address the council on the issue.

Committee Member Lee asked if the fund, which is for city buildings, will be used toward MLK or Charles Black.

Jordan Gathers responded that he has not been involved in discussions on how the fund will be utilized for ongoing maintenance and other services in VPA spaces but will inquire about the issue.

Committee Member Lee stated that, since some of parks’ debts have been paid, the council is seeking ways to maintain the budget to allow for funds for additional services and programming given the expanded building of MLK Center.

Committee Member Rachel Tomas Morgan asked for an explanation of the additional \$1,000,000 in “park maintenance”.

Jordan Gathers explained that most of the item is charges for services. The increase is due to VPA beautifying its right of way and parking spaces, as well as for additional staffing. Jordan Gathers stated that the intent is for parks and maintenance to have the capacity to guarantee secure and well-kept park spaces.

Committee Member Tomas Morgan asked if any area is targeted.

Jordan Gathers replied that the fund will be applied across the board.

Councilwoman Karen L. White asked if there is a time frame for raising the \$4,000,000 for the dream team and the consequences if the target is not met.

Jordan Gathers responded that VPA is working diligently to ensure that it secures long-term funding for the \$20,000,000 project on the west side of South Bend. VPA intends to approach both local partners and partners outside the community to raise funds. He stated that he believes that his department is working at a good pace.

Councilwoman White asked to be informed of the status of the fundraising for the Morris project.

Jordan Gather responded that the department is very close to finishing. Councilwoman White asked where additional funds may be spent given that the budget is on a decline. Jordan Gathers replied that he would spend any additional sum on youth programming, staff support, and training because he considers those areas vital for the city's growth.

Councilwoman Lori K. Hamann pointed out that nothing in the presentation referenced code. She mentioned her conversation with a VPA staff member during which she was informed that VPA is responsible for the code piece. She sought clarification on how code fits into VPA and how it is budgeted.

Jordan Gathers responded that, to his knowledge, code is within the Department of Community Investment (DCI) not VPA.

Denise Riedl, Chief Innovation Officer for the City of South Bend, CCB, confirmed that Mr. Gathers is correct regarding the structure. She suggested that the VPA staff with whom Councilwoman Hamann had conversed had meant that the VPA maintenance team handles mowing for some environmental code citations. Denise Riedl stated that the coding and VPA maintenance teams collaborate on certain mowing tasks. Councilwoman Hamann noted that the code likely falls within the "park maintenance" line item in the budget.

Jordan Gathers will follow up on the specifics of the code.

Committee Chair Niezgodski noted that she will keep track of all questions that will emerge from the ongoing meeting and forward them to the Jordan Gathers with any additional, relevant parties.

Councilwoman White requested clarity regarding graffiti that used to be a major problem in the city approximately ten (10) years prior, noting that additional funds may have been earmarked for the removal of graffiti.

Jordan Gathers will confirm.

It was noted that the mayor had unveiled that the ARP money appropriated for the homeless intake center (\$4,000,000) was spent on other initiatives. A report in the Tribune stated that the mayor and the chief will be spending an excess of COVID-19 funds on grants to promote the Real Time Crime Center.

Councilwoman Hamann asked about the use of excess funds and queried why it was not being used for the purpose for which it had been appropriated. Kyle Willis, City Controller, third (3rd) floor, County-City Building, responded that the administration has allocated the ARP funds as planned. There were two programs: partnership for homelessness and mental health at an approximate total of \$5,000,000 to \$5,300,000 and public safety technology upgrades.



There was approximately \$1,000,000 meant for the county. Another \$1,600,000 went to Our Lady of the Road. Approximately \$2,600,000 was for the Crisis Center, leaving approximately \$560,000. Kyle Willis emphasized that funds were being spent as allocated and planned in the 2022 budget and excess funds were not being spent elsewhere. The city is dedicated to ensuring that the Crisis Center remains operational and to funding any capital needs for the property. A five (5) year agreement on the operation of the building for the Crisis Center begins in 2024 and ends early 2028. Approximately \$2,500,000 was allocated for public safety technology upgrades. A remainder of approximately \$425,000 will be used for business security grants allocated toward small businesses. Kyle Willis has had discussions with the police department about obtaining security cameras for small businesses to help prevent and solve crimes in certain areas. He reiterated that funds were spent as designated and minimal funds remained but would be used for similar purposes. Mr. Willis clarified that approximately \$530,000 remains for county partnership for homelessness and mental health. Kyle Willis confirmed that the city had to support funds after a partner pulled out of a partnership.

With no further business, Committee Chair Sheila Niezgodski adjourned the Personnel and Finance Committee meeting at 6:02 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sheila Niezgodski, Committee Chair

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