

**Cuyahoga Falls City Council**  
**Minutes of the Finance and Appropriations Committee Meeting**

**December 4, 2023**

**Members:** Mary Nichols-Rhodes, Chair  
Mike Brillhart  
Adam Miller

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes called the meeting to order at 6:41 p.m. All members were present.

**Legislation Discussed**

Temp. Ord. B-116

Temp. Ord. B-130

Temp. Ord. B-131

**Discussion:**

**Temp. Ord. B-116**

An ordinance establishing annual appropriations of money for the current expenses, capital expenditures, and other expenses of the City of Cuyahoga Falls for the Fiscal Year ending December 31, 2024, and declaring an emergency.

Ohio Revised Code §5705.38 requires local taxing authorities to pass an annual appropriations measure classified so as to set forth the amounts appropriated to each office, department and division of the taxing authority. Article VI, Section 6 of the City Charter requires the Mayor to submit an estimated budget for the coming fiscal year showing the requested allotments of the appropriations and estimated income for each office or department for the calendar year.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes thanked the Mayor, Administration and the Finance Director for answering every question and providing Council with a lot of comprehensive information, and especially the Finance Department for providing highlights every week.

Mr. James thanked the Finance Department and Administration. The budgetary meetings become streamlined from the meetings held years ago with Mr. Hoffman and the Finance Department providing information to Council.

Mr. Balthis thanked the Administration and the Finance Department. This is one of the most important things they do on Council, so the information provided is incredibly helpful. He also thanked Ms. Nichols-Rhodes, as Finance Committee Chair, for giving Council an opportunity to share its thoughts and questions and for all the investigation she did on behalf of Council. He appreciates her work and leadership.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that the budget shows priorities and the priorities of this Administration, as it has been for all the prior years, are City services, excellent operational strategy, vision and all the things that are bringing money to what will help the residents and what is important to the residents. She very much appreciates that.

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Mr. Brillhart moved to bring out Temp. Ord. B-116 with a favorable recommendation, second by Mr. Miller. Motion passed (3-0).

**Temp. Ord. B-130**

An ordinance amending sections 923.01 and 923.02 of Part Five of Title Nine of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Cuyahoga Falls, establishing water rates and declaring an emergency.

Mr. Bryan Hoffman, Finance Director, and Mr. Bob McNutt, Senior Project Manager at CT Consultants, presented Temporary Ordinance B-130, along with Temporary Ordinance B-131 to Council.

Mr. McNutt presented a PowerPoint presentation to Council and the Administration. CT Consultants had been hired by the City to review the water and sewer system and develop a long-term plan to keep the City's infrastructure functioning and in compliance with EPA rules so that the City's drinking water will remain safe. In the 1990's, Cuyahoga Falls, along with many other communities in the area, chose to defer major maintenance projects so as not to incur large cost. Mr. McNutt and his team at CT Consultants have produced a 5-year plan to replace and repair much of the water and sewer system, some of which are over 80 years old. Council received copies of the presentation, including a rate sheet showing what the average resident will be paying in 2024 as compared to other communities in the area. Mr. McNutt stated that, at the end of five years, Cuyahoga Falls residents will still be paying far less than the other communities listed.

Mr. Hoffman stated that the pictures in the slide show and contained in the handout are actual pictures of the City's treatment plants or water lines. In the water rate plan in the slide show, Mr. McNutt talked about having the goal of having four to six months carryover balancing. In those numbers, they have a carryover balance line item. If Council would look and analyze it quickly, they will see that they do not hit that four-to-six month carryover until 2028 with the capital projects listed there. What they do not have in there is any sort of grant opportunities that they continue to look at. They did not put those in there because they would not have concrete numbers on what they may or may not be. They have looked at this many times, and he feels comfortable in proposing a plan that gets them by the model by 1.6 months carryover balance with the idea that people will be eligible and there will be grant dollars out there to try to do some of these projects. As time goes on through the next five years with this plan, he is sure there will be changes to the capital that they will be watching closely on how they are going to implement the capital plan.

Mr. Hoffman stated that during the years 2026, 2027, 2028, they are still averaging over five to six million dollars in capital improvement in the Water Treatment Facility, so it is a significant increase to the amount of money they are going to be putting into updating, renovating and upgrading the Water Treatment Facility and making sure that they do have that clean water and that, as time continues and as things age, that they will be prepared for the future in the Water Treatment Facility. Sewer is a similar story. When there are heavy rain events and water inflows into the City's pipes, some of which are 100 years old, the sewer overflows go into the river and the EPA does not like that. The City has done a lot over the years to reduce the number of these events. The

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Gorge Interceptor Project would take the sewer pipe out of the Gorge and to run it into the Akron run tank. This would significantly upgrade the plan they have. They have been working on this plan since 2017 to develop the best plan to keep the rates low and get the work done.

Mayor Walters stated that these issues with water and sewer have been brewing for decades. It has deteriorated and it needs replaced and the only way to pay for that is extra dollars. Even with the increase, they will still be the lowest in the region with the increase. It is coming due. Far be it for them to keep kicking the can down did road about the Water Treatment Plant and the sewer. It is not pleasant, but it is the right thing to do. They took a deep dive because they do not want to charge one penny more than needed. It has been a long process and he appreciates Council's support on this.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes thanked the many people she has met with and have answered her questions. Touring the facilities was an eye opener, but she wants to assure everyone that the City's water is tested every other hour and is safe to drink and of good quality, but how long will that last if they do not put the investment into the infrastructure that's needed. There is not anything more important than water. Water is life. She is happy that this is happening. This is the five-year plan and those are specifically to pay for things that are needed during that year. Akron recently put in a large increase in their water rates and, in a way, they front loaded. So, Cuyahoga Falls is not doing that. They are increasing the rates as needed.

Mr. Hoffman stated that that is correct. What they have done is to try to smooth it out over the next five years and lessen the burden as best they can. They did not completely front load rate increases and tried to phase those in. They tried to keep it as low as possible and smooth it out as much as they could to make sure they have financial capability as well as the capability to make sure all this problems get solved.

Mr. Brillhart echoed the complements to the Administration and the Finance Department and also CT Consultants. They have done an excellent job. He also thanked the Water Department. When they took a tour and saw everything there, they have to give them a shout out for keeping that stuff going.

Mr. Mark Wilkerson, 2467 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Cuyahoga Falls, asked about the used of reverse osmosis in the Water Plant. Mr. Kring, Water Utilities Superintendent, stated that they use an ionic exchange system. Mr. McNutt stated that a reverse osmosis system would be cost prohibitive for a system this size.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that, again, this is a very stringent investigation of what is needed. They have been mandated for some of the studies, but this is all a result of a Capital Improvement Plan, a Distribution Plan, and an Asset Management Plan that began in 2016, and a Water Master Plan that contains asset management, risk and resilience, and a lead survey. None of this is being looked at without a lot of smart and considered thought, so she appreciates that this is how it is being done.

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Mrs. Penta expressed her appreciation. The tour was of the water and sewer facilities were such an eye-opening experience. Everyone is on a tight budget. She loves the thoughtfulness of having this extended over some time for everyone to get used to the idea of this. It is something that is needed for the City, and if this is the way they have to do it, it has to be done and she supports this.

Mr. Brillhart moved to bring out Temp. Ord. B-130 with a favorable recommendation, second by Mr. Miller. Motion passed (3-0).

**Temp. Ord. B-131**

An ordinance amending Section 925.02 of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Cuyahoga Falls and declaring an emergency.

Mr. Bryan Hoffman, Finance Director, and Mr. Bob McNutt, Senior Project Manager at CT Consultants, presented Temporary Ordinance B-130, along with Temporary Ordinance B-131 to Council.

Mr. Miller moved to bring out Temp. Ord. B-131 with a favorable recommendation, second by Mr. Brillhart. Motion passed (3-0).

The meeting adjourned at 7:23 p.m.