

The City Council of the City of Harlem met for a Called Meeting on Monday, November 20, 2023, at 6:30 p.m. at the Public Safety Building with Mayor Roxanne Whitaker presiding.

Present: COUNCIL: Mayor Roxanne Whitaker, Mayor Pro Tem Gregg Stokes, Councilmember Daniel Bellavance, Councilmember Al Reeves, and Councilmember John Thigpen; STAFF: City Manager Debra Moore, City Clerk Leona Holley, and City Attorney Barry Fleming; MEDIA: Skylar Andrews, The Augusta Press.

PURPOSE: 2024 Budget Hearing & Presentation

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Whitaker at 6:30 p.m.

The Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance was given and led by City Attorney Fleming.

FYE 12/31/2024 Budget Presentation: City Manager Moore presented the proposed budget for FYE 12/31/2024 to Mayor and Council. The proposed budget includes a 2.5% COLA increase for employees; Service Year increases for 20 employees for the current plan in place; increases for completion of Clerk certification and four promotions. Total funded personnel positions are 29 full-time positions, 7 part-time positions and 20 volunteer firefighters. Total overall increases in personnel costs (salary, overtime, and benefits) is 6.9%; this includes an estimated 12% increase in employee group insurance. The budget does not provide for a proposed millage rate increase for maintenance and operations but will be reviewed in July for any needed changes. The increase in the Property Tax Revenue takes into account for possible reassessments and new construction. The budget does account for about a 2% increase in LOST collections compared to expected collections for 2023. The budget does account for about an 11% increase in Garbage rates due to the increased operating costs of the contractor and the normal CPI increase. Rates have not been increased since 2018. The Summary Proposed Budget is as follows:

General Fund Revenues: \$3,956,670.00

General Fund Expenses:

Administration	\$ 628,120.00
Municipal Court	\$ 83,200.00
Police Department	\$ 946,250.00
Fire Department	\$ 552,650.00
Public Works	\$ 759,950.00
Garbage	\$ 439,000.00
Community Services	\$ 85,200.00
Festival	\$ 25,600.00
Museum	\$ 171,000.00
Parks	\$ 71,000.00
Community Development	\$ 179,300.00
Urban Redevelopment	<u>\$ 15,400.00</u>
Total General Fund Expenses	\$3,956,670.00

FYE 12/31/2024 Budget Presentation (cont'd): City Manager Moore proposed to look at the ARPA monies at the next quarterly meeting; the ARPA monies will need to be obligated by the year 2024.

Mayor Whitaker thanked Ms. Moore for all her hard work on the budget. There was discussion on the increase in the budget for Public Works; the increase is for the landscaping cost of two parks, and the downtown area. Mr. Fields received a quote from Allen Landscaping on the landscaping. The landscaping would be for the months of May through October and public works will maintain the areas the other months. Public Works will continue with debris pickup, maintaining retention ponds, walking trails, and maintaining of rights-of-way. Councilmember Bellavance expressed concerns about hiring additional personnel for Public Works, he does not understand why they will need additional personnel if the city no longer has the water and sewer system; he stated he has a problem with this.

Mayor Whitaker asked the department heads in attendance at the meeting if they had any questions or comments. Fire Chief Tripp Lonergan replied he has spoken with City Manager Moore about additional personnel for the fire department. He expressed concerns about the pay rate for additional personnel; he feels it is hard to hire the two additional employees at the pay rate the budget has been at. Chief Lonergan appreciates what is being put in place for the pay rate, but feels it is still going to be hard to hire qualified personnel. Councilmember Thigpen stated the starting pay amount needs to be between the City Manager and the Fire Chief. Mayor Whitaker asked Chief Lonergan if he feels it is imperative the department have someone as a First Responder because of all the medical calls the department receives; Chief Lonergan replied yes, they do need First Responders for the medical calls. Chief Lonergan stated that currently the department has an EMR (Emergency Medical Response) class going on, and they are trying to get an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) class started.

Public Comment: Mayor Whitaker opened the floor for any Public Comment; there were no comments.

With there being nothing further for discussion, Mayor Pro tem Stokes made the motion to adjourn the meeting; 2nd by Councilmember Thigpen. The motion carried with Councilmembers Bellavance, Reeves, Stokes, and Thigpen voting in the affirmative. The meeting adjourned at 6:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Leona H. Holley
City Clerk