

BUDGET, FINANCE AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

April 7, 2009

4:05 P.M.

Councilwoman Berz, Chairman, called the meeting of the Budget, Finance and Personnel Committee to order with Councilmen Rico, Bennett, Gaines, Gilbert, Benson, Robinson, Pierce and Page present. City Attorney Michael McMahan and Shirley Crownover, Assistant Clerk to the Council, were also present.

Others present included Dan Johnson, Daisy Madison and Richard Beeland.

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING AND ADOPTING A MISSION STATEMENT, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2010 BUDGET

Chairman Berz began by saying that she would give some background on this matter; that when she came on the Council, Chairman Bennett was dealing with MTAS on a Strategic Plan and Pre-Budget Planning in January of 2009; that at that time Chairman Bennett brought in a representative from MTAS to talk about finances, auditing and the strategic process; that out of the meetings, a Mission Statement was confirmed by the Council and an agenda of the work to be done—that if the Council is planning a Budget, we should have goals in mind for working with Administration.

She went on to say that a lot of the decisions were based on Jerry Stewart's material about infrastructure, and there are a lot of roads that need repair around the VW site.

Secondly, there is the crime issue in areas, in fact, that were worked out by the Ochs Center so that the Council could find out where crime was originating and where the most help was needed. We looked at where “babies are having babies” and people are dropping out of school; where there is the most police activity—that all is a part of this. Another goal that we looked at was the youth and previous crimes and dealing with kids to ameliorate the crime problems. She stated that all of this was written up and sent to the Council members, and comments were asked of the Council.

At this point, Chairman Berz read the Mission Statement: *“The Mission of the Chattanooga City Council is to make ethical policy decisions that serve the public in a just, sustainable and balanced way, to ensure the general welfare of all our community. The Goals of the Mission are at all times to learn and know the needs of the community as a whole—ie: Not to be solely District focused; Prioritize those needs; Make educated decisions by fostering open and full communication among Council members, with the various constituencies and with the Executive Branch; Ensure the safety and security of all our communities, to include infrastructure and fire as well as police matters; and to develop coherent policies that directly address the identified needs. The Objectives of the Mission are to mitigate crime by addressing matters of youth programming; to ensure the ongoing integrity of the City's infrastructure; and to help foster communication within government and with the community-at-large”.*

Chairman Berz stated that this went on the table and the Council said “yes”—that this was our mission; that we were to prioritize our needs and not be district focused; that we would work on issues as a whole and make educated decisions with open communication with our constituents and the Administrative Branch, which was different from what we had done in the past. She went on to say that we would ensure the safety and security of our communities; prevent crime and make appropriate decisions concerning the Fire and Police Departments and keep our ratings. She stated, once again, that this went out and at the next meeting it was reviewed and everyone said “yes”—this is what we want.

She went on to say that at the next meeting, three areas were covered: (1) Communication; (2) Youth; and (3) Infrastructure; that various assignments were given to research areas and council persons were to come back and give a report. We then came up with a Plan to work with Administration—that we set the policy and Administration implements it. She stated that Councilman Gilbert, Councilwoman Robinson and herself met with the Mayor and the Ochs people about the research; that they talked about the next step and Madam Chair asked for a Resolution to be drawn up before Budget time to make decisions that imply the Council’s interest. She went on to say that she got a memo from our Legal Department saying that they did not have all the information that needed to be in the Resolution as to the Mission Statement and Goals; that she sent back to the Legal Department the “stuff” that the Council approved in the meeting, and the Council now had before them this Resolution. The Resolution states the Mission and the Goals that the Council approved; that these are objectives that the Council approved and the concepts. She stated that there was only one objective that the Council had not seen. She stated that Madam Chair had indicated that in making budget decisions we need targets in mind and she noted to Madam Chair that these targets were in the Resolution; that other Councilmembers had stated that this is what they wanted.

Councilman Pierce asked how all of this played into Administration? He stated that he thought the Council was doing what they needed to do. He wanted to know how Administration is accepting this?

Dan Johnson responded that there had been no meetings to talk about the Plan with Administration.

Councilman Pierce stated that if we were going to adopt this that we needed a clear understanding.

Councilman Benson stated that he was not happy at all with the wording of this, and he asked Attorney McMahan if he drew up this Resolution?

Councilwoman Berz responded that “yes” the Legal Department did draw this up—that it was Angela.

Councilman Benson stated that this Resolution would go into our archives forever, and he felt it falls short of what we wanted to do. He referred to the first section of the Resolution and stated that this was not ready to be passed in his mind; that it did not tell him anything about fulfilling his legislative responsibility.

Chairman Berz stated that Councilman Gilbert, Councilwoman Robinson, and herself met with the Mayor, and he had a copy of this, and he was very encouraged about the Fiscal Year 2010; that this was meant to go along with the Budget—that implementation has to be through Administration.

Mr. Johnson stated that for this to be effective for the Budget of 2010, this information was needed well in advance for the Staff to prepare; that the only Budget year this could apply to would be 2011.

Councilwoman Bennett admitted that there was some delay in planning; that the Council’s goal was to get this done in advance of the Budget; that it was not perfect, but the Council had taken a larger look at identifying a few things; that regardless of “wordsmithing” it is generic enough; that it needed to be realized that these are common goals with Administration and improvements; that we are saying these are our priorities, with no details; that next year we can plan ahead with some experience under our belt and be prepared with clear priorities. She stated that with something “new”, we had to start somewhere.

Councilwoman Robinson stated that she thought the work we had done was good but there was not enough “lead” time; that she thought we should take the “heat” off of passing this and allow it to be fine-tuned and have time to see that Administration is comfortable with receiving this. She reiterated that it was a good template, but we should not be in a hurry to pass this—that we can’t hold up Administration.

Councilwoman Bennett responded that our intent is not to hold up Administration but to set the stage; that we were doing something general to prepare for a different mindset.

Councilman Rico questioned if this was our call as a Council Body?

Councilwoman Bennett responded that we were making policy that directs our efforts; that putting the Budget aside, we can focus in committees.

Councilman Pierce stated that the policy is for the Mayor to present a Budget; that the Council can approve, deny or have the Budget re-written in order to implement our policy; that we can try to implement our policy up front, which would “throw a loop” to Administration; that this is all well and good, but we need to slow it down and fine-tune the Mission Statement and have this ready to roll next year.

Councilwoman Bennett urged everyone not to read too much into this and not “throw the baby out with the bath water”; that we are trying to identify key issues; that this is not an Ordinance but a Resolution that says we are going in this direction; that everyone agreed on the Mission Statement; that we can adopt a Mission Statement which gives coherence to the Council; that we review issues and the community is impacted and infrastructure is improved; that next year we might be more methodical; that other cities do this, even with a strong Mayor type government; that this is just “Best Practices”.

Councilman Benson stated that he was not ready to approve this; that he was not proud of this.

Councilman Gilbert stated that last week we brought young men in here and provided an opportunity for our youth and something needed to be put in the Budget to look at where we are; that this needs to be projected now; that we need to put “more meat to the bone” and start something small going toward this goal; that we need something in the Budget now for next year to improve the City and the crime rate; that we need to hire more police and spend more time putting people in jail. He stated that we had to have some idea as to how to do this now—something that would help our youth to have a plan in the future.

Councilman Page stated that he would abstain from voting on this; that he would ask Pam Ladd what she thought about this; that he thought we had the opportunity to accomplish this through our departmental reviews; that Councilwomen Bennett and Berz’ leadership would provide opportunities for this; that we could hear the recommended Budget and have our input at that time; that he thought we would have ample opportunity to do this.

Councilman Pierce stated that what Councilman Page had said was what he wanted to say; that we look at this when the Budget is presented and amend the part of the Budget that we see fit—that this is the opportunity that we have to do this; that helping the kids is a good thing and something he would like to see implemented in the Parks and Recreation Budget. He did question where the funding might come from?

Councilman Gilbert stated that there are organizations we give money to in the millions of dollars that deal with youth, and he would ask that they direct money towards this—that we can re-direct money. We can say that these are the kids we want targeted; that they had talked to the Mayor about the talent in this City in so far as grant writing; that they had talked to the Ochs Center, and they were grant people; that we need a solid plan and David Eichenthal has a Plan that worked in New York; that we could ask him what he did that worked and what did not work, and we could improve what we have here; that we need to look at this and put our money to it to have an impact on crime—that crime hurts everyone, and we need something in place to curb it. He stated that it did not have to be the Parks and Recreation Department.

Councilman Benson pointed out that we hire professionals; that Adm. Zehnder was here, but he might have made him mad, and he left. He reiterated that we hire professionals to work with the Mayor and his Staff, and they are experts on how to best serve the City; that once they come to us, we have the advantage of their training and expertise—that he might not agree with them; that this would be the time to come in—that we might not agree, but we need to listen to them when they come in and weigh our constituent and community needs; that the Council always has the power to take money away.

Councilman Rico stated that is if you have “five” votes.

Councilman Gilbert still maintained that we should have a Plan.

Councilman Benson stated that it was not the Council’s role to tell them a Plan; that we had to listen to them first, and then we could have input; that if we saw they were failing, then we will step in.

Councilman Gilbert stated that they had a Plan.

At this point, Chairman Berz asked that Councilman Page step in and chair the meeting so that she could speak.

Councilwoman Berz stated that she thought Strategic Planning was a fabulous exercise; that the Council should not be re-active but pro-active; that checks and balances does not mean that we have to be adversarial—that she wanted to commend Madame Chair for bringing this idea to us; to not shirk away from what we believe in and take an oath relative to checks and balances. She asked that the Council read the Resolution that Angela sent; that the Council had agreed with the three concepts that Chairman Bennett had asked to be put in; that we could send them back to committee and postpone a decision, but this is something we have to stand up to because it is our job. She went on to say that the Mayor was excited about this but did question where the funding would come from; that Richard Beeland was in the meeting, as well; that the response from Administration was good; that the Council has been given a task; that we could refer it back to committee and not make a decision and not have a focus, but we need to show that we care about infrastructure, the kids and communication; that to shirk away from voting on this is too bad; that she would fully respect the Council if they withdrew this from consideration, but we can do this, and it is totally up to the Council; that as Dan Johnson said, it would come on the agenda tonight; that the Council could say withdraw this and that is fine; that as Chairman of this committee, she could not speak, but she thought this was very very important; that as Councilman Gilbert says we should have a focus and not just be seen as re-active—that pro-active is good.

Councilman Page noted that three Councilpersons wished to speak.

Councilwoman Gaines stated that she would pass.

Councilman Rico stated that he agreed with Councilman Gilbert that we need to do something; that Mike Feely is working with the City, and he is trying to get churches to help to get something for our youth—that the government is not the answer to everything.

Councilwoman Berz stated that this written in our program, and she was glad that Councilman Rico believed it.

Councilman Rico again stated that government is not the answer to everything.

Councilman Benson stated that pro-active is a wonderful word—like motherhood, but there are bad mothers, too; that George Bush was too pro-active; that we need to be prudent; that being pro-active could be just being aggressive, which is not pro-active; that he thought it would be imprudent to rush on this at this time; that he would want this to be something he could be proud of; that the way it is written is not something to be proud of—that there are even dangling participles.

Councilwoman Bennett stated that Councilman Pierce appointed her Chairman of Budget and Finance; that she did not fully understand how Administration could do their work on the Budget, knowing it could be chopped up by the Council; that we need to communicate with them before they get into their work and then find nine people who will take them apart; that in the long run we are partners; that the professionals are making the decisions, but the Council is elected by the people to be their voice, and this is where the Council weighs in; that people send the Council here to do a job for them; that the item most on the hearts of people and the professionals we have in place is that we are all here to serve the taxpayers; that the question is where we will go next—today or six weeks from now if we do not take this important step; that it is important to do this, even if we stumble; that our real goal is working with Administration—that we are not antagonistic; that we all want a transparent and effective government.

Councilman Gilbert stated that we would be getting funds and dollars from the Stimulus Package, and we have to think outside of the box in ways to help our youth; that if the money comes, we need a plan so that it will not bypass us; that the money is coming to town, and we have to be prepared; that if we don't vote on this today, we need to set a deadline and implement part of this.

Chairman Berz stated that it would be on tonight's agenda.

The meeting adjourned at 4:45 P.M.