

A REGULAR MEETING OF THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BECKLEY CONVENED AT 6:30 PM ON JULY 11, 2023, IN COUNCIL CHAMBERS AND VIA WEB-X.

PRESENT: Mayor Robert R. Rappold, Recorder-Treasurer Billie Trump, City Attorney Bill File, and Secretary Susan Miller. Council Members: Janine Bullock, Robert Canter, Robert Dunlap, Sherrie Hunter, Cody Reedy, Tom Sopher, and Kevin Price. The following Department Heads were present: Director of IT Bill Kelly, Assistant Director of IT Amy Evans, Anthony Martin (IT), Chief Wills of BFD, Director of Board of Public Works (BPW) Pam Frey, Chief Code Enforcement Officer Donald Morgan, Chief of BPD Dean Bailey, and Director of Parks & Rec. Leslie Baker.

The Mayor called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. The public had the option to join the meeting either in person or by WEB-X from their computer, or by phone, using the weblink or phone number provided the day of the meeting on the City's webpage at Beckley.org or the City's Facebook page.

Council dispensed with the reading of minutes from the City Council meeting dated June 27, 2023, copies of which had been distributed to each member. Council unanimously approved the minutes as written on a motion by Councilman Sopher and seconded by Councilman Price. Next on the Agenda was the proposed \$2,500.00 salary increase for all sworn officers of the Beckley Police Department (BPD). The Mayor expressed his appreciation for the officers of the BPD. He said as Mayor, he thinks the City has done all it can do to make the BPD the best equipped police department in the State of WV. The Mayor said in the past two years each officer has received a \$6,500.00 award from A.R.P.A. funds and 2 year-end pay supplements, in the amount of \$850.00. In the past 2 years each sworn officer has received this additional amount totaling \$8,200.00. The Mayor said the City administration has always supported the police department and values what the PD does for the City. The Mayor said the City does not take what the PD does for granted. The Mayor said the City has five other major departments (for example the Board of Public Works Department) who have employees that are up at 3:00 a.m. in sub-zero temperatures to clear roads and sidewalks. If the City would grant an across-the-board increase to members of the Fire Department, to the employees at City Hall, to the Board of Public Works, or the Parks & Recreation Department, they would be surprised. He said the increase in the amount of \$2,500.00 across the board for sworn officers of the BPD is the amount that can be considered and approved this evening because it is the amount listed on the Agenda. Councilman Dunlap said Council had a Workshop regarding the salary increase for the BPD. Councilman Dunlap thanked Recorder-Treasurer Billie Trump for the detailed information he provided to Council so they could know how to respond to people who have asked them questions regarding this. Councilman Dunlap said as the crime rate increases it is important to support law enforcement officers. He said during the Workshop everyone agreed an increase is necessary. He said by increasing the pay for the BPD he believes the City can attract and retain the best officers and become more competitive with other law enforcement officers and agencies nearby. He said numbers have been shared that may not best describe full compensation the BPD officers receive. He said imputed benefits matter but do not always give a full picture, so it put him in a position of needing to do more research. He thanked Mr. Trump for providing him with the salaries for employees of the BFD and the BPD. He said some of this information was gained or received after the Workshop. Councilman Dunlap said he is appreciative of the thorough work the Beckley PD does.

Councilman Dunlap said that after doing his independent research he thinks a salary increase in the amount of \$8,000.00 should be awarded to the Beckley PD. Councilman Dunlap said that he recommends an increase of \$8,000.00 now and revisit it at the mid-point of the fiscal year (at the end of this calendar year) to see if it is sustainable. He understands that the increase cannot be taken away but thinks this is a competitive increase in light of the City experiencing an increase in crime, drugs, etc. He would like to see it voted on this evening.

Councilman Reedy said he agrees with Councilman Dunlap. He said comments that are made by the people that are around him do not represent the opinion of everyone. He said each person speaks for themselves. He said that he does not want any of the officers to leave the City and seek employment elsewhere. He said he is willing to do what he can to keep the existing officers working for the BPD. He said that he has kept and will continue keeping his promise to support the BPD. Councilman Reedy thanked the Beckley PD for all that they do for the City. The Mayor asked City Attorney Mr. File to clarify if, because the Agenda item lists an increase specifically in the amount of \$2,500.00, does this preclude consideration of any other amount during this meeting. Mr. File said that if Council desires to award an amount in excess of the amount listed on the Agenda, the item should be tabled at this meeting because that would constitute a material change to what the public has been given notice was being considered at this meeting. The public was not given notice that Council was considering giving a much larger amount than stated on the Agenda. Councilwoman Hunter said she would like to make a motion that Council awards the Beckley PD an across-the-board increase in the amount of \$8,000.00. Councilman Reedy asked if Councilwoman Hunter can make a motion to present it at the next meeting and vote on it then. Councilman Dunlap said it is also the motion that would include retroactive compensation. The Mayor said that Mr. File suggested the issue be tabled tonight because it represents a material difference. The Mayor asked Mr. Trump if he had any comments. Mr. Trump said an across the board pay increase for the BPD in the amount of \$8,000.00 would be at least \$500,000.00/year added on to the BPD budget. He said currently the BPD budget is approximately \$7M. This would raise the BPD budget by nearly ten percent. He asked where the money would come from.

Councilwoman Hunter asked if the City would be able to earmark the one percent sales tax that comes into the City quarterly and if it would sustain the increase for the BPD. Mr. Trump said that would be an assumption that the one percent sales has not already been considered for other items the City needs such as maintenance, etc. Councilman Dunlap told Mr. Trump that was a good point, but he thinks Council may be considering earmarking it for something they believe is really needed. The Mayor said the one percent sales tax has been a wonderful windfall for the City for the past seven years (due to becoming a home rule City) and has enabled Mr. Trump to increase the City's contribution to the police and fire department's civil service contribution that the City makes. This makes the City of Beckley somewhat of a shining star as far as financing its fire and police civil service. This allows the City to have a greater degree of solvency in these programs than possibly any other city in the state. The Mayor said the City is already utilizing a portion of that one percent that Councilwoman

Hunter referred to as a means to improve the lives of those in the City's police and fire department. Mr. Trump said that he wished the members of Council would have met with him so that they could discuss this and look at the budget more carefully and understand the repercussions to the budget an \$8,000.00 increase across the board for the BPD may have. He said there are going to be significant repercussions. There will be problems meeting the City's pension obligations and several other things will have to be put off. Councilman Dunlap said that Mr. Trump's expertise is very much appreciated. Councilwoman Bullock made a motion to table item number three on tonight's agenda. Councilman Canter seconded the motion which was unanimously approved by Council. Councilman Reedy asked what the process is now that the item has been tabled. Councilman Dunlap asked the Mayor if the City is able to ensure that this item can be on the next Agenda. The Mayor said that he is not able to ensure that, but the City will strive for that. The Mayor said that he has an upcoming vacation scheduled with children and grandchildren arriving later this week from California, but the City will do its best to keep moving forward regarding this. Mr. File said a Council Workshop should be scheduled to discuss this matter further. Councilman Reedy said that he, Councilman Dunlap, and Councilwoman Hunter expressed their opinions tonight. He would like to know the opinions of other Council members and if more members agree, he thinks it should move forward more quickly. Councilwoman Bullock stated that she supports the across-the-board increase in the amount of \$8,000.00 for the Beckley PD.

OLD BUSINESS: Councilman Price asked for an update on an ordinance regarding panhandling in the City. The Mayor said there has been a lot of research and information regarding this issue. A northern county tried to get an ordinance adopted county-wide, but it was deemed unacceptable by the A.C.L.U. Mr. File said the City is looking at alternatives and is working with other Cities to best decide how to move forward on this issue.

NEW BUSINESS: No comments.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: The Mayor announced if calling in by phone dial \*3 to raise your hand. If connected by computer: Click the "hand icon" on your Participants panel. Mary West voiced her concerns regarding drivers speeding on Larew Avenue. She stated she supports Beckley PD officers receiving competitive pay. She asked for the piles of trash at 209 Larew Avenue to be cleaned up. Roger Cuevas, the father of police officer Ryan Cuevas, spoke in favor of the competitive pay increase for the BPD. Police Officer Joseph Hunter thanked Council members who commented tonight regarding supporting the competitive pay increase and spoke in favor of the increase. Police Officer Jaime Blume spoke in favor of the competitive pay increase. Stephanie French with the Raleigh County Prevention Coalition spoke in favor of the competitive pay increase for the BPD and for hiring more officers. Michelle Cochran said the amount of money spent on training officers only to have them leave is not a good use of the City's funds. She said due to making a post on Woodcrest's Facebook group the number of stray cats has decreased which tells her that the cats have irresponsible owners. She requested that Council pass ordinances making pet owners responsible. Danielle Stewart spoke in favor of the competitive pay increase for the BPD officers.

With there being no further comments, Council unanimously approved adjourning the meeting on a motion by Councilman Dunlap and seconded by Councilwoman Bullock. The Mayor adjourned the meeting at 7:13 p.m.

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Mayor

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Recorder-Treasurer