The Finance Committee for the Village of Monroeville met on Tuesday, 2/28/23, at 6:00 PM, in the Council Chambers, for the purpose of discussing the proposed restructured wage ordinance and any other financial matters.

Present were: Mayor Fries-Seip, Chris Raftery, Sue Rogers, Craig Franklin, Joe Galea, Bob Whitacre, Sam Wiley, Tom Gray, Heather Alicea, Ann Beck, Gary Lyons, and Troy Kimball.

Sam asked for the total of our annual payroll or a ballpark. Heather advised it’s usually in the neighborhood of $33,000-$35,000, but we can get him an exact figure after the next payroll is done with all the increases. He also asked where that money comes from. Tom advised it’s a combination of our utility accounts, which are enterprise funds, and those are self-revenue generated. Police, parks, streets are general fund supported. The Administrative side is a blend of utility and general fund, which includes income tax, and is pro-rated based on the acceptable amount of time spent in those funds.

(Note…Enterprise funds are user generated. Streets are also funded by the State with MVL fees and gasoline taxes. Wages are not pro-rated; they are based on the average time spent in the appropriate funds)

Chris said she hoped everyone received the revised wage information that Bonnie had sent, which referenced the Ordinance and proposals. Chris asked Tom if he’d like to speak about this. Tom said during the last meeting, holiday pay and earned time were discussed. Tom asked Council to consider those items in the policy committee side of the house and not so much with the Finance Committee. Tom said he believes it will follow on in a manner that can address the MPD’s concerns. Even though earned time and holiday pay have a financial aspect, they are policy driven and should be addressed with the review of the policy handbook. The goal tonight is not to necessarily establish the wage ranges in stone, but to have a general conversation as to the language that fits for the proposed wage increases through the scale, through the various steps, that allows an employee to work through the ranks and for example, how to define an employee getting from entry level to grade 1, grade 2, etc. Tom said his underlying concern is creating an entry level wage point that is conducive to retaining employees, and looking at all of the individuals who currently have training, licenses, certificates, etc. Tom said he doesn’t like to throw money at something, but we are going to have to get to this real world where real money needs put on the table to retain who we have with the appropriate increases, while allowing us to attract, licensed credentialed individuals into our wage and salary plan. It’s coming down to dollars and cents. A class III operator in Attica, Ohio left for Willard. Attica now has no operators in their WTP. The EPA came in and determined Attica is in violation of their operating permit. Bob asked what happens with Attica then. Tom said they are hiring a contract labor force to the tune of $108 per hour, and there has to be 8 hours of operator record time. That could be the same for anyone who operates a Class III plant, just like Monroeville. Tom said Chief can tell Council about trying to hire a police officer. Tom said if we can get the language penned down that allows us to move through the steps, then the real grass roots of this can be brought forward, and we can determine entry level wages, so on and so forth. Tom said Bonnie and the Administrative Office have done a great job with putting language together. We’re on the right track. Sam said 50% across the board would make us more competitive. Tom said we need to make sure the language is there and then figure out the baseline and all the ranges above that.

The Mayor asked Tom about his emails regarding the power APM transition and asked if it needs to be discussed tonight. Tom said that was a general recap about the sale of our assets. His next step would be to present at the next Council meeting, in regards to additional information as to the security and consulting engineering, to place a value on those assets and to establish a relationship with the engineer and work with John Courtney. Once the valuation is there, the three of them can put a proposal together, go out to bid, and see what the assets market values are in anticipation of AMP purchasing them. The proceeds of that sale would be used to pay down our loan with AMP. Tom said we’ve strategized about this, not openly, for a couple of years now since AMP transmission was formed. Keep in mind that the power companies have all vested themselves in their generating assets. They are putting their money into transmission and distributions systems. AMP and the Village have an opportunity to sell these assets. In exchange, AMP values them and they in turn, can go back, market them and be paid to hold these assets. It's a win-win, we can be paid, and AMP can collect an annual fee, which keeps us whole and keeps AMP whole. The Mayor asked what is the negative side is. Tom said at this point, this is being done by municipal communities across Ohio. It’s the way of the future, to spin off the transmission components and receive a return on your investment. This gives AMP the opportunity to have these assets, capitalize them, depreciate them, and you win on both sides of the balance sheet. In our case, there is no downside. It’s an accepted industry practice. As Council took action at one of the prior meetings, to renew the Bond Anticipation Note, we may very well have enough money coming in from the sale of those assets to retire of all our debt or 90% of it. It becomes a stabilizing factor in our rates. Bob asked if we would lose any power negotiating and Tom advised no. It’s a positive step for us and we’re not doing something that hasn’t been tested before.

Chief presented his wage proposal and provided a hand-out. Chief had talked to Bonnie, who had previously spoken with Michelle Ish and she had said it’s important to establish levels with the wages. Chief feels employees need to be compensated when they reach those levels. With police work, one of the most important things to be obtained is street experience. There is good training that can make officers more well-rounded. He thinks it’s important to have them cross-trained in as many avenues as they can. Chief said his proposal shows he has broken it down to a Chief of Police, a Lieutenant, a police officer, a police officer in a probationary period, a senior police officer, and a part-time police officer. At each level, the officer is required to have a certain level of training and have a certain amount of time working for the department. Chief said if the Village has a good enough financial package, we might end up having people who want to come here. Chief asked how applicants can be compensated if they already have firearm instructor training, self-defense instructor training, and have achieved master core investigator classes from the Ohio Peace Officer’s Training Academy. He certainly wants to compensate them if they come here with experience, as that’s a valuable commodity. His proposal shows the bottom level of what is needed to attract officers and he can’t guarantee that will happen because of the competitiveness. Norwalk is one of the highest paid and they can’t attract anybody. Sandusky is allowing lateral transfers, something they haven’t done before. We are in crisis mode, just like anybody else, and we are scrambling for the best possible candidates. That segues into the part-time officers. Any officer who is graduating from the academy and looking for a job is looking for a full-time job. It’s unlike where the Village was a starting ground for part-time officers before. That doesn’t happen now. What is available is what we’ve got. We have part timers who are full-time police officers elsewhere or security officers and are supplementing their income. Chief said he applauds Council for the $3 per hour increase last year and the COLA increase this year. That certainly gets us towards a competitive goal. We need to continue to head in the same direction to attract people, just like the Village Administrator said. Joe asked Chief what kind of full-time staffing levels does he want to see or what would be best, what would be Chief’s preference. Chief said if it were up to him, he would like to see 7 full-time officers. He would like to expand and get a resource officer position, while finding a grant to help with that. They need someone to cover days off, vacations, sick time, training, so he needs a relief officer. It’s also a good idea to have 2 officers on a shift. It happened previously, although there was a restaurant and a bar here at that time. Right now, we are at 5, but Jordan Eggleston is leaving on 3/12/23. Jonah Mersereau still needs to get his physical and drug test to be moved to full-time. Once Jonah is full-time, Chief would like to find another full-time officer. He had an interested party, but they are looking for more money. Joe asked how much more. Chief said $26-$29 per hour. The Mayor said we haven’t had full-time MPD staff in months because of Jordan Hanuscin leaving. Chief said part-timer Gerald Broeckel is leaving soon for Green Springs, Ohio. Sue asked Chief what he is proposing for part-time wages, is it $15-$19 and Chief confirmed. Sue said she thinks that $15 per hour is way too low for a part-time police officer, McDonald’s workers get paid more than that. Chief said part-timers don’t work as many hours, but personally, he thinks it would be fair to give them what our starting probationary officer makes, whose range is proposed at $21.80-$24.80 per hour. Joe agreed. Joe said part-time is a misnomer and it suggests a part-timer is less experienced, which is untrue. Craig said part-timers can work as many hours as they want to and Chief confirmed. Chief said we have Curtis Silvers, who works for the Lorain metro parks and since we’ve been short, Curtis has almost always covered. He’s on the short list for Avon Lake and we can’t accommodate what he would make there. Joe said he feels we need to get more creative on how we attract people, we have to make the cost of living more attractive and advertise in more papers. Chief mentioned our staff attending more job fairs a well, and our lieutenant or another representative to recruit people. Chief said he needs to figure out a way to publicize more and be more creative. Chris said let’s throw a figure out there. She asked what Officer Meyer is currently making. Chief advised $23.37 per hour and he gets a .40 shift premium per hour. Chris said we don’t want to lose him, but what if Council threw out a figure across the board that they are financially comfortable with, say around $5.00 per hour. But not stop there, take everyone up $5.00 per hour and that makes the Village more competitive. Chris thinks realistically, they need to implement a hard figure. Chris wants to know what the $5 would do for the MPD staff, and the other departments as well. Can we live with that and use it as a basis for combatting the hiring problem. Chief said he feels that increase will make us very competitive and other locations may bump up if they see us do it. The Mayor asked Troy how many requests he has gotten to be hired elsewhere. Troy said he has had numerous offers. Sam guessed it’s probably every day. Craig said with how much experience our officers have, they could walk in anywhere and get a job. Chris said we need to continue across the Village. Heather asked Chief if he would ever offer a swing shift to all the officers in order to entice people into applying for a police officer position. That way, all the officers would have a turn working a different shift and it may help draw someone in to apply if they know they aren’t going to be stuck on second or third shift, they have a chance at first shift as well. Chief said Nick Meyer is on nights and he wants to work nights. He tries to talk to the guys to find out their preferences, but whoever is at the bottom of the seniority list gets whatever shift is left. The Mayor said technically, if they got a 7th officer, that person would be filling days off and would get a shot at a day shift now and again. Chief said he rotated shifts at his old job and it’s hard, he was sleep deprived. Craig said swinging shifts is too hard on an officer’s sleep schedule and studies show they are hard on the body and mental state. Chief said we need to be more creative and aggressive.

Tom said this new ad they will be placing for a water employee will also include water and wastewater in hopes of hiring two candidates. Bonnie is going to be finishing this, and not only are we using language for entry level, we are using language for licensed operators well, in hopes of someone catching a glimpse of this ad and then be prepared, as Council just discussed, to pay a rate necessary to bring the individual in. Tom said if they use $5 and add that to everybody’s pay rate today, there is your baseline for starting the scales and working through the various grades. That gives us leverage going forward. Seasonal and part-time on the Village side would need to be addressed, the $5 may not fit that classification. Bob asked if a percentage is better. Tom said just to think on it for now. The Mayor said $15 per hour is more than appropriate for summer help. Tom asked Chief to comment on the incoming GATSO money for the first two months. Chief said for the first two months this year, it was around $285,000. Tom said that isn’t guaranteed money, but it’s fluid at this point. Gary said our share of that is 63% and we basically take in $4,000 per day on average. Right now, there is nothing in legislature or the courts that should disrupt that. Bob said they have stopped the cameras before and Heather verified there is no guarantee to those funds. Chris said we need to strive for people wanting to work here and live here. Craig said we need to be more aggressive with the wages instead of paying people to train here and then leave. Tom said we can be optimistic but cautious. Tom said Bonnie is the key player in this, determining how this increase would affect benefits and everything else. The utility review coming up for water, wastewater and electric and we will know within the next 30-45 days what the rates look like. All of that will need to be looked at, as well as the loans for infrastructure, those loan allocations will still need to be paid. The increase is a positive move and gives us basis from which to work. If not, we will continue to bleed and we will continue to wrestle with hiring. Tom said our people are being courted every day.

Sam reminded not to forgot the front office either, Chris agreed. Tom said of course, this would include everyone under our roof. Chris would like to task Bonnie to look at what the figures would be for $5.00. Joe said maybe the idea should be to go to the newspaper and advertise this kind of increase if we do it. The Mayor said that may go the wrong way though, throwing around money we are raking in. Heather said it may be a good idea to do a hiring event and partner with Job and Family Services to do an on-demand hiring event, with interviews, one day a month, for x amount of months, to see if any qualified candidates apply. Tom said we have an avenue through municipal links that creates a global exposure, nothing against Job and Family Services. He’s discussed it in the past with JFS and Ehove and we haven’t been able to attract qualified applicants with certificates for peace officers and water/wastewater. We can’t use those avenues right now until the baseline wage is figured out.

Sam said looking through this wage ordinance, he can’t help but notice something: all the departments, except Administrative, start at top levels, Grade 3, Grade 2, Grade 1, but Administrative staff start at the bottom and grade up as they go. He feels it needs to be more uniform across the board. Tom said that is really just the order they are hired at.

Heather advised Bonnie wants Council to not only review the wages line by line, but figure out the ranges, and how to get from point A to point B, so on, and so forth. That way, we continue moving up in the right direction, and we don’t pause and then have to “catch up” but doling out a lot of money at one time.

The Mayor said all these talks aside, in this Ordinance, everyone has someone they report to, except the Fiscal Officer and language needs to be added to show who the Fiscal Officer is specifically reporting to, for the future. Heather asked if the Fiscal Officer reports to Council? The Mayor said the Ordinance needs state that then.

There being no other finance business to come before them, the meeting was adjourned at 7:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Alicia