



MINUTES
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE - REGULAR SESSION
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2024, 6:00 P.M.

The Committee of the Whole convened in regular session in the Government Center Boardroom at 6:00 P.M. Mayor Mboka Mwilambwe called the meeting to order.

Roll Call

Attendee Name	Title	Status
Mboka Mwilambwe	Mayor	Present
Jenna Kearns	Council Member, Ward 1	Present
Micheal Mosley	Council Member, Ward 2	Present
Sheila Montney	Council Member, Ward 3	Present
John Danenberger	Council Member, Ward 4	Present
Nick Becker	Council Member, Ward 5	Present
Cody Hendricks	Council Member, Ward 6	Absent
Mollie Ward	Council Member, Ward 7	Present
Kent Lee	Council Member, Ward 8	Present
Tom Crumpler	Council Member, Ward 9	Absent

Public Comment

Mayor Mwilambwe read a public comment statement of procedure. Art Rodrigez spoke in-person and Michelle Grasher emailed public comment.

Consent Agenda

Items listed on the Consent Agenda are approved with one motion; Items pulled by Council from the Consent Agenda for discussion are listed and voted on separately.

Council Member Ward made a motion, seconded by Council Member Kearns, to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

Item 4.A. Consideration and Action to Approve the Minutes of the October 21, 2024, Regular Committee of the Whole Meeting, as requested by the City Clerk Department. (Recommended Motion: That the minutes be approved.)

Mayor Mwilambwe directed the Clerk to call roll:

AYES: Kearns, Mosley, Montney, Danenberger, Becker, Ward, Lee

Motion carried.

Regular Agenda

The following item was presented:

Item 5.A. Presentation and Discussion on Housing Rehabilitation Programs, as requested by the Department of Community Impact & Enhancement and the Administration Department.

City Manager Jeff Jurgens introduced the Item noting that Council had adopted a Resolution in July setting housing priorities. He praised Community Impact & Enhancement Director, Melissa Hon, sharing that after nine years of service she would soon be taking a

position with another municipality. He congratulated her and asked her to outline the foundation for the Housing Rehabilitation Programs.

Director Hon recapped the Resolution approved in July and emphasized Council's key directive was to develop a Housing Rehabilitation Program. She presented a map showing the City's investment of over \$1M dollars in Community Development Block Grant ("CDBG") funding, Illinois Housing Development Authority ("IHDA") funding, and American Rescue Plan Act ("ARPA") investments for housing rehabilitation since Fiscal Year 2020. She also noted that nearly \$100,000 had been invested in a Lead Hazard Reduction Program that continued to accept applications. She then outlined a multi-pronged approach to neighborhood revitalization including City investment, community investment, outreach, and education. She proposed two housing rehabilitation programs: an Exterior Repair & Improvement Program for owner-occupied units in the regeneration area with a budget of \$160-200,000 and a project maximum of \$20,000; and a Minor Home Repair & Improvement Program for owner-occupied homes and mobile homes with a budget of \$40-50,000 and a project maximum of \$10,000. She also introduced the idea of a Community Impact Week where volunteers would perform minor maintenance and repair services for homeowners in the regeneration and preservation areas.

Township Assessor Steve Scudder presented information on the Homestead Improvement Exemption, which helps property owners by not increasing their property's assessment if square footage is added. He noted the property's value gets locked for four years after the improvements are completed, and then the additional square footage isn't added to the assessment until the fourth year.

Director Hon ended her presentation by highlighting upcoming outreach efforts including a Housing Resource Fair to be held on March 19, 2025, as well as staff participation in a variety of community events.

Mayor Mwilambwe asked how many homes could be impacted through the rehabilitation programs to which Director Hon explained the number depended on funding levels. She noted there were currently nine properties condemned in the City, but that the American Community Survey (ACS), a demographic survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, had estimated in 2023 that there were 929 abandoned properties in the City.

Council Member Ward expressed a strong interest in finding ways to incentivize the redevelopment of abandoned properties suggesting strategies such as raising property taxes on owners who did not maintain their properties and drawing inspiration from other cities like Detroit. City Manager Jurgens explained that while Illinois did not currently allow vacancy taxes, state-level conversations were ongoing about the potential for such a tax. Alternatively, he suggested the City could work with other taxing bodies to offer tax freezes as an incentive for redeveloping abandoned properties. Council Member Ward stressed the importance of addressing the 900 abandoned properties over the minor improvements needed by the nine properties mentioned.

Council Member Montney asked for additional information on the ACS data. Director Hon stressed that the City had not fully verified the estimate and then described the complex process doing so would require. Council Member Montney then inquired about the potential for collaborating with Youth Build, and Director Hon agreed there were many opportunities to collaborate with organizations.

Council Member Lee asked Director Hon to explain what was meant by "abandoned" and who maintained ownership of such properties. Director Hon defined "abandoned" as a property with no one living in it or having a non-responsive owner. She noted that banks often take ownership, properties could be sold through tax sales, or the City may foreclose and take

ownership to address Code compliance issues. They then discussed the difficulty of trying to simplify the process when the courts were involved.

Mayor Mwilambwe asked how staff could verify the accuracy of the ACS data. Director Hon believed a block-by-block study was necessary, and suggested a third party would likely be needed to complete the study given the amount of work required.

Council Member Ward suggested using property tax payment records as a starting point. Director Hon agreed that information could be requested. Council Member Ward requested staff gather the data, and they agreed it could be made available by the next Council meeting. Council Member Ward, again, stressed the importance of verifying and addressing the abandoned properties.

City Manager Jurgens acknowledged Council Member Ward's concerns and assured Council that staff had been working on the issue of abandoned properties. He expressed a desire to develop a program that included both a component to address problematic properties and a component to help with redevelopment. He promised to return to the subject soon.

Mayor Mwilambwe thanked Director Hon for her dedicated service to the City.

The following item was presented:

Item 5.B. Presentation and Discussion of the FY2026 Budget Preview, as requested by the Finance Department.

City Manager Jurgens recalled that in November of 2024 staff had projected a \$3.75M deficit, which then grew to a deficit of \$5.7M after working with department heads. He explained he had pushed staff to be creative and conservative, aiming for a budget that didn't cut services or impact residents, but still resulted in significant decreases. He was happy to share the presented budget was approximately \$21M less than the prior year. He also noted the budget included no new full-time employee ("FTE") requests and pointed out that it included seven less FTEs that had been removed through natural attrition.

Scott Rathbun, Finance Director, explained the presentation was the first look at the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget. He focused on category totals and variances from the prior year and highlighted the challenges of flattening or decreasing revenues while expenses increased. He noted that the general fund had been balanced through a combination of cuts, operating adjustments, and equipment delays. He stressed the goal was to continue delivering services the community needs while being good stewards of taxpayer dollars. Director Rathbun explained the reduction in local use tax due to legislative changes affecting online retail sales, noting that while local use tax was decreasing, home rule and state sales tax would offset the change. He discussed the significant drop in property replacement tax with the State continuing to claw back funds for three consecutive years, which had gone from \$6.4 million in the highest year to a budgeted \$2.6 million for the coming year. He ended by detailing cost savings and emphasizing his thanks for staff's work.

Mayor Mwilambwe thanked Director Rathbun noting the extensive amount of time needed to complete the budget. They then discussed the attrition goal of \$600,000 in vacancy savings.

Council Member Ward and City Manager Jurgens discussed the funds earmarked from Behavior Health. She expressed concern about the impact attrition may have on various departments noting her constituents were worried about certain departments being stretched too thin. She emphasized that "efficiencies" and "attrition" were truly human resources were being cut and stressed her belief that they needed to be acknowledged as such.

Council Member Montney asked Director Rathbun to clarify whether the 2.5% year-over-year growth rate was based on the net operating budget. She also inquired about the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) loan on the Locust Colton project. Director Rathbun confirmed that the ARPA funds allocated to the project had materially reduced the City's borrowing obligation, with the general fund subsidizing over \$10M for the project.

City Manager's Report

No City Manager Report was presented.

Executive Session

No Executive Session was held.

Adjournment

Council Member Ward made a motion, seconded by Council Member Kearns, to adjourn the meeting.

Mayor Mwilambwe directed the Clerk to call roll:

AYES: Kearns, Mosley, Montney, Danenberger, Becker, Ward, Lee

Motion carried (viva voce).

The meeting adjourned at 7:22 P.M.

CITY OF BLOOMINGTON



Mboka Mwilambwe, Mayor

ATTEST



Amanda Stutsman, Deputy City Clerk

