

PLAINFIELD'S CITIZENS BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CBAC)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2014

Committee Members:

Richard Stewart, Chair FY'14

Joyce Wilkerson

Jan Massey

Michael Horn

Mustapha Muhammad

Evanda Henry

Lydia Jones

Recommendations Regarding the Budget Process

- **Late Notice:** The CBAC committee members were all given late notice about the date and time of the first budget meetings. This is inexcusable since the members were selected weeks in advance and proper notice should have been provided shortly after been selected. Mailing notices to the members 1 or 2 days before the first budget meeting is unprofessional and displays a lack of respect for the CBAC members' time.
- **Small sample:** The budget hearings only included a select number of agencies/divisions within the budget. How are these agencies/divisions selected? What review occurs for the majority of agencies/budgets that are not selected? How is it assured that an agency/division participates in the budget hearings on a periodic basis? Some agencies/divisions present every year while others seem to never present.
- **Short review time:** As seen in prior years, budget deliberations were forced to conclude in a short time period (2 weeks-6 sessions). CBAC strongly recommends that more time be given so that the city council and CBAC can provide more thorough reviews of the budget. Total time and session time should be extended. Even extending budget deliberations by one week would have a drastic effect on CBAC's ability to conduct a complete review of each agency/division.
- **Lack of full participation by city council members:** CBAC is highly disappointed in the lack of full participation by city council members. 2 council members did not show up to any of the meetings. Several other members only showed up to a select few. How can the city council make informed decisions about the city's budget if the majority of the council is not present during budget deliberations? They are not present to hear the agency's presentation of their budget and can not ask questions. This is unacceptable and a disregard to their responsibilities. CBAC would like to recognize the two city council members who did attend all of the budget meetings: Councilman Reid and Councilwoman Greaves.

Recommendations Regarding Police/Fire Division

- **Top Heavy:** CBAC is concerned that both divisions have an abundance of supervisors/managers and not enough entry-level position workers. This not only increases the budget's salaries but also forces the division to have its supervisors/managers do the work of entry-level employees. The result is that the city is paying individuals "supervisor" salaries and only receiving entry level work.
- **Tougher during Union Negotiations:** One way to fix the above problem is for the city administration and the city council to be tougher with the unions during union negotiations. The city can not consistently support the high demands of the union. The city can not allow a few hundred city employees to be a fiscal burden on the city's 50,000 city residents. The city administration and the city council must demand compromise and sacrifice on behalf of the unions.
- **Reduction on Overtime:**
 - The Police division's overtime expense in 2013 was almost 1.3 million. There was an additional \$105k spent on comp time. Comp time and overtime represents about 10% of the police budget. The police division expects to lower its overtime expense to under 900k and comp time to 25,000 in 2014 (33% reduction). The city council must monitor and ensure that it does. In 2013, the police department hired 9 new officers. With the additional personnel, overtime should drastically reduce. If it does not, the police division must provide specific reasons why it did not and be held accountable if its explanations are not justifiable. Continued reduction in overtime must be a top priority for the city's police budget.
 - The Fire division's overtime expense in 2013 was approximately \$460k. There was an additional \$22K spent on comp time. In 2013, the fire department hired 8 new firefighters. However unlike the police department, the fire division is not lowering its overall comp/overtime expense. The fire division is requesting \$397k in overtime and \$100K in comp time (\$497K total). This is unacceptable given the increased personnel and the council should drastically reduce those line items. If the police can reduce its overtime and comp time by 33%, why can't the fire division do so? The council should demand that the fire division either explain why they can not reduce comp/overtime or independently reduce it by 25%. Continued reduction in overtime must be a top priority for the city's fire budget.

Recommendations Regarding Recreation

- **Increase statistical data** – CBAC is concerned of the lack of empirical data concerning the recreation division. In order to properly determine the merit of the recreation's budget requests the following data should be available moving forward:
 - The total number of enrollees per month.
 - The total number of unique enrollees per year. (Avoiding the double counting on a child who is enrolled in multiple programs.)
 - An audit of the seasonal workers to determine how many there are and how much each gets paid per season. \$378K was spent on seasonal workers yet there was not enough lifeguards to keep Plainfield pools open last summer. This is alarming and needs further investigation.
 - The total of grant money received per quarter.
 - The total of program fees collected per quarter.
 - The total number of enrollees per program.
 - A list of the programs offered throughout the year.
 - An audit on the amount of fees a program can charge based on demand. The current fee schedule undervalues the programs being offered. Many residents would be willing to pay more for a better product. Better programs = increased enrollments which = increased revenues which = even better programs. The recreation can still make these programs available to disenfranchised residents via income based reduced fees or fee waivers. Despite certain assumptions, Plainfield residents are not all poor! And they are willing to pay a little more for their children's growth.
- This statistical data will increase transparency, identify trends for better efficiency, and justify increase budgets.

Recommendations Regarding Information & Technology

- **Increase statistical data** – Survey on the amount of turnover for the city computers. What is the average age of a computer when it is discarded? How many computers are discarded every year?
 - A quarterly audit of the computer hardware available to the city. Also include what hardware is being discarded and the reasoning it is being replaced.
 - Increased details regarding the capital projects IT would like to do. Capital projects are mentioned several times in the budget write-up but no details regarding how much each project cost is provided.

Recommendations Regarding Media

- **Reduction in salary**– Media’s request for an over 100% increase in salaries is ridiculous.
 - Director position (\$80k). Not only didn’t the write-up justify the Media’s Director’s position and salary, the director, who was present, did little to justify her position at the budget hearing. The City Council must be strict with the motto that employees/divisions must prove themselves first before asking for increased budgets. CBAC heard no justification on why Plainfield needs a full-time Media Director. Not only is the salary large but the city must also consider the job benefits the city will also be responsible for.
 - CBAC recommends reducing the Director’s position to part-time. CBAC also recommends the council review quarterly (or at least during next year’s budget’s deliberations) the accomplishments/goals of this position to see if the position can justify its existence.
 - Clerk 1 (\$36k). Many divisions/agencies who represent/serve larger portions of the city have no clerk(s) to support it. The Media division did not justify what administrative duties were so burdensome that it needed a new clerk position to function. The Clerk 1 position should be removed.
- **Better use of Ad space on PCTV**- It was discussed that during most hours PCTV only displays slide shows of uninformative facts about the city. The Media division should conduct studies to determine the best use of this ad time. Can the ad time be monetized by selling ad space to local businesses? If not, it may still be beneficial to the city to provide local businesses with ad time to promote their businesses. This may increase commerce within our city at no additional cost to Plainfield Taxpayers.

Recommendations Regarding Health Division

- **Increase # of Inspectors:** One of most alarming facts uncovered during this year's budget hearings is the city's inability to inspect its food establishments. It was reported that Plainfield has over 200 restaurants in the city. Yet the Health Division has only conducted inspections for 14 restaurants within the first 4 months. The Health Division only averages inspections for 30% of Plainfield restaurants in a given year. Further disturbing is the Health Division's lack of concern to increase that number.
 - CBAC demands and hopes the Council demands that the Health Division devise a plan that addresses the low number of restaurant inspections conducted. The Health Division must immediately be held accountable for putting Plainfield's citizens at risk everyday.
 - Increase the # of part-time inspectors so that Plainfield can have a 100% inspection rate for its restaurants. Increase full-time inspectors is also an option but part-time inspectors will save the city by avoiding the cost of employee benefits.
- **Plan for increasing Animal licenses:** The Health Division should create a plan to increase the number of registered cats/dogs in the city. License checks at public parks, pamphlets, knocks on doors can all be done to increase this number. Also, incentivize the public to get animal licenses (pet coupons, free/discounted vaccines, animal toys, etc.)

Recommendations Regarding Public Works

- **Top Heavy:** CBAC is concerned that Public Works have an abundance of supervisors/managers and not enough entry-level position workers. This not only increases the budget's salaries but also forces the division to have its supervisors/managers do the work of entry-level employees. The result is that the city is paying individuals "supervisor" salaries and only receiving entry level work.
- **Tougher during Union Negotiations:** One way to fix the above problem is for the city administration and the city council to be tougher with the unions during union negotiations. The city can not consistently support the high demands of the union. The city can not allow a few hundred city employees to be a fiscal burden on the city's 50,000 city residents. The city administration and the city council must demand compromise and sacrifice on behalf of the unions.
- **Accounting for Seasonal Workers:** An audit of the seasonal workers is needed to determine how many there are and how much each gets paid per season. Public Works requests an increase of 50% for their seasonal workers (from 100k to 150K). But additional justification is warranted. How many seasonal workers are hired, how are the seasonal workers recruited, who are they, how much are they paid, and how are they qualified? All these questions need to be answered before an increase occurs.
- **Be more Proactive less Reactive:** Public Works' model seems to be reactive instead of proactive. They spend most of their attention on what's broken now with little attention on developing plans to avoid/prevent issues. Storms happen every year and Public Works can not simply be playing catch-up every year. Other municipalities have plans in place to allow growth and development. Council should demand Public Works provide a plan that demonstrates its ability to be proactive and address some of the long standing issues of the city. One stormy season should not excuse Public Works from its yearly responsibilities to the city (i.e. Sandy or last winter's snowfall).

Recommendations Regarding Inspections Division

- **Inspection availability:** Inspectors are not available on weekends to address violations that occur during the weekends such as illegal multiple dwellings. Clear violations are not addressed, resulting in missed revenue opportunities. Furthermore, there is no reason that Inspections Division should need overtime pay. The requested overtime pay for 2014 is \$5K. With better management of personnel and proper planning, it should not be difficult to remove this budget item.
 - **Tougher during Union Negotiations:** One way to fix the above problem is for the city administration and the city council to be tougher with the unions during union negotiations. The city can not consistently support the high demands of the union. The city can not allow a few hundred city employees to be a fiscal burden on the city's 50,000 city residents. The city administration and the city council must demand compromise and sacrifice on behalf of the unions.
- **Integration of Technology:** The Inspections Division should do a study on how technology could make it more efficient. Complaints should come through an automated system and logged automatically. Complaints should not have to be manually imputed in an excel spreadsheet.
- **Public Awareness:** Inspections needs to aggressively inform the public about the need for inspections and the importance of compliance. This will mitigate any surprises when homeowners / businesses are issued summonses which will bring it revenue. It is imperative that the citizens of Plainfield be held accountable for the appearance of their residence and store owners accountable for their businesses.

Recommendations Regarding Economic Development

- **Increased Director Oversight:** Based upon past performance, Economic Development has little to show for its department. The department should be generating more funds and more economics for the city. With a new Director comes a fresh new approach. The Director should conduct a review of this department and its operations to uncover inefficiencies and redundancies. Necessary adjustments should be made in order to create a viable and productive department. What studies from previous years can be utilized? What information is still viable? The wheel does not need to be reinvented because someone new is now in power.
 - While big plans are great, the division should first concentrate within and ensure it is working in the most efficient way. Only at this point can the Director's big plans be taken on.
- **Increase Council Oversight:** The council should request periodic updates (quarterly) from the division that specifically details its progress and goals. The Director was unable to give timetables for the Division's projects. This can not be so easily accepted and pressure should be given to the Director to meet an appropriate schedule. Economic Development should not be excused from setting and meeting deadlines.
- **Business Diversity:** Develop a plan to increase the amount of diverse business operate in Plainfield. Conduct a survey on the type of businesses currently in Plainfield to identify and alter trends.
- **Shared Services:** Economic development is staffed only by the Director and one secretarial assistant. The Director should reach out to other city agencies/divisions to facilitate shared services to handle day to day activities.
- **Collaborate with local universities:** In addition to shared services within the city, the Director should reach out to NJ grad school and universities to solicit help from their economic business units. Recruit college students who have educational backgrounds in business development as interns. They will be able to handle more complex tasks other than administrative help. They will be willing and able for the opportunity to gain real-world experience.

Recommendations Regarding Office of the Mayor

- **Elimination of Chief of Staff position:** CBAC recommends that this position be eliminated due to budgetary and political concerns.
 - Budget concerns: The position of Chief of Staff has a salary of \$80K plus employee benefits. This position never existed before and its reported responsibilities seem redundant. It appears that the Chief of Staff will serve as a liaison and overseer of the various departments. CBAC feels the duties of the various agencies should be done by the specific agency and the city administrator and mayor have the responsibility of supervising the agency's work. It is unclear what unique job the Chief of Staff adds to the City of Plainfield. . The City Council must be strict with the motto that employees/divisions must prove themselves first before asking for increased budgets. What can the Chief of Staff really add to the city?
 - Political concerns: The city residents voted for Adrian Mapp as Mayor. The city expects Mayor Mapp to make the decisions that affect this city. The description of the Chief of Staff created a big concern that an unelected person would have an influence over the day to day decisions of this city. What oversight is there that the Chief of Staff's decisions fairly represent Mayor Mapp's decisions? What checks and balances are in place to ensure the public that the Chief of Staff will not abuse his power while the Mayor is unavailable. This is a bad precedent to take which could have ramifications for decades if this position is created. In essence, Plainfield could have unelected, unchecked pseudo-mayors in power under the Chief of Staff position. Further development of this position is greatly needed before implementing.
- **Absence of a proper representative from the Office of the Mayor.** Furthermore, the proposed Chief of Staff and the Mayor did not even show up to defend their budget. CBAC felt that this was a lack of respect for the process and everyone else's time. If the Chief of Staff position is so vital to the city, someone within the Office of the Mayor should have attended the meeting and defended that position. While the City Administrator did his best to explain the position, the explanation given was lacking in specifics and substance.
- **Confidential Aide:** The Chief of Staff position is unprecedented. The only position with any resemblance within the Charter is the "confidential aide" position. This is a part-time position with a salary of \$15k. The Mayor should first utilize this position before creating a new one.

Universal Recommendations

- **Grant Writer:** Plainfield should hire a full-time grant writer. This position should have the responsibility of overseeing the searching for and application of all available grants applicable to the various divisions/agencies. Relying on each division to apply for grants is too segmented and too dependent on a particular division's personnel. Currently, there is a lack of oversight regarding what was applied for vs. what is available.
- **Outside Consultants:** CBAC recommends a study on the merit of each division's outside consulting fees. It appears that many division's hire outside consultants. While this may be necessary in some cases, it is not necessary in all cases. Some of these responsibilities can be handle by the specific agency and, if not, the director should be forced to explain why. Outside consultants should only be used as a necessity and not simply used to reduce the workload of certain agencies.
- **Mandatory write-ups:** While some agencies provided write-ups for their budget which included last year's accomplishments and this year's goals, not all did. Write-ups specifying the division's accomplishments and its fiscal year's goals should be mandatory. This provides greater insight and accountability for the division. It will allow others to see if goals are being met over the years and if the divisions have a realistic plan in action moving forward. The budget numbers alone are not sufficient to evaluate the efficiency and merit of a given agency.
- **Transparency:** The Budget Booklet should be available online to the public to increase transparency and accountability. Information like this should be accessible and not hard to find for those looking for it.