



City of Fort Wright

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City of Fort Wright Caucus Meeting

Wednesday, February 16, 2022 – 6:00 PM

South Hills Civic Club – 10 Bluegrass Avenue, Fort Wright, KY 41011

CALL TO ORDER

The Caucus Meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Mayor Dave Hatter. Mayor Hatter led the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence. City Clerk Maura Russell called the roll.

Councilman Abeln	Present
Councilman Feinauer	Present
Councilman Wall	Present
Councilman Weber	Present
Councilman Wessels	Present
Councilwoman Witt	Present

Also present for the meeting were:

City Administrative Officer Jill Bailey
City Attorney Tim Theissen
Fire/EMS Chief Steve Schewe
Police Chief Ed Butler
Public Works Director Jeff Bethell
City Clerk Maura Russell

CITIZEN COMMENTS/GUESTS

Mary Kenning – 527 Montpelier Court – Ms. Kenning addressed Council requesting a refund of the penalty and interest fees she paid with the 2021 Property Taxes. She said the payment had been sent to a PO Box in Covington that is no longer used by the City of Fort Wright, but she sent it on time so she felt she should get a refund.

Mayor Hatter advised that Council sets the Ordinance for tax payments, and he does not think Council will change the Ordinance. Ms. Bailey said she has heard this issue come up a couple times and thinks the City should waive the penalty and interest charges for Ms. Kenning. She was advised that Ms. Russell would handle the refund request.

Ms. Kenning also presented her niece's late property tax notice, saying she also mailed her payment in prior to the December 31st postmark deadline. Ms. Bailey advised because there was no proof of postmark or address showing where the payment was sent, the City would not be able to waive the penalty and interest fees on that account.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

South Hills Civic Club – Ms. Bailey recapped a conversation that Council participated in during a June Council

Meeting, saying there are options the City can take with the South Hills Civic Club and Battery Hooper Park. She said Council will need to decide if they want to be in the event rental business if they want to build something at Battery Hooper Park.

Ms. Bailey pointed out that there is some maintenance that needs to be completed inside South Hills Civic Club, including painting, new flooring, new key entry system, adding Wi-Fi, and addressing other cosmetic issues. She said she provided Council with a list of possible improvement areas, as well as updates to the policies and rental pricing structure.

Council discussed options and their personal opinions. It was agreed that the following measures will be taken:

1. Council approved a budget of \$30,000 for cosmetic upgrades and enhancements to South Hills Civic Club.
2. Council agreed to bring in CT Consultants to review options for consultants to address any long-term issues for South Hills Civic Club, including heating/ventilation/air conditioning, electrical, and drainage systems, at no more than \$10,000 initially.
3. Begin working with a consultant to develop a land-use plan for Battery Hooper Park, at no more than \$10,000 initially.

ARPA Funding – Ms. Bailey said she has been working with Ben Harrison (interim City Treasurer/contract City Accountant) to review the parameters for spending the City's ARPA [American Rescue Plan Act] funding. She said it is believed that there is just over \$2 million in funding available to the City, which includes \$584,000 in CARES Act [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security] funding which has been used as a reimbursement for salary expenses already incurred.

Council agreed to provide \$225,000 to the Police Department to upgrade their body and car dash camera systems, as this had been previously approved. Ms. Bailey advised \$120,000 has already been committed to Volunteer Park for those upgrades, and now \$50,000 will be allocated for South Hills Civic Club enhancements and consultants for Battery Hooper Park.

Ms. Bailey asked Council if there was any interest in providing a premium pay for staff, including reviewing the existing longevity pay scale to create lump sum payouts for retention. She recommended this proposal go to the Finance Committee but explained that the City is falling behind on salaries and longevity pay could offset the growing wage disparity. Ms. Bailey said the City has a great staff and she wants each employee to stay for a long time.

Mayor Hatter said the NKADD [Northern Kentucky Area Development District] annual salary survey shows that the City of Fort Wright is not competitive with salaries, and this would be a great use to retain current employees. Councilman Feinauer said he is not opposed but wants to review the facts and data before deciding.

There was discussion about other local communities' efforts toward compensation increases and employee retention. Mayor Hatter said that, as a taxpayer, he is willing to spend more to retain and incentivize employees to stay with the City.

There was additional discussion about other uses for ARPA funding, including fencing at Battery Hooper Park. Ms. Bailey suggested residential property enhancement grants that could reimburse residents up to \$500 for

property improvements such as new windows, painting, or landscaping. Council agreed Ms. Bailey could move forward with exploring this option, along with tax incentives for gateway improvements.

CDBG COVID Utility Assistance Grant – Ms. Bailey advised that this Utility Assistance Grant program was announced in March 2021 and Council approved the City of Fort Wright’s participation to allow residents of the City to receive assistance if they fell behind on their utility payments during the pandemic. She said there were many steps to the process and the final piece was a financial agreement that had never been completed or provided to the City. Ms. Bailey advised she received a call from DLG [Kentucky Department for Local Government] recommending the City of Fort Wright withdraw from this program for a number of reasons, including that the City would only receive \$1,500 instead of the promised \$120,000 and that Fort Wright residents would fall into the Kenton County pool of money and claims could result in the City being forced to refund the program.

Ms. Bailey recommended to Council that they formally withdraw from the grant process and allow DLG to reallocate funds to other purposes in the Commonwealth. Mayor Hatter recommended Ms. Bailey put this item on the next City Council Meeting agenda for Council to take action and return the funds.

COVID State of Emergency Status – Mayor Hatter said the City is still theoretically in a “state of emergency” and he is ready to get rid of this executive power, which he would like to do at the next Council Meeting unless there is a legal reason it should be maintained. Ms. Bailey advised there may be an issue with rescinding the state of emergency based on the State and County’s position. She said she has reached out to Steve Hensley, Kenton County Director of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, for more information and is awaiting a response. Mayor Hatter asked Mr. Theissen to reach out to the Commonwealth’s Attorney General for information as well.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Ms. Bailey advised Council that she provided a Calendar of Events at their seats for upcoming events in the City. Councilwoman Witt asked if the Tree Lighting and Santa and Mrs. Claus’ visit could be the same day so the Claus’ could attend the Tree Lighting. Ms. Bailey advised she would work on rescheduling.

ADJOURNMENT OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

Councilman Wall made a motion to adjourn the Caucus Meeting. Councilman Feinauer made a second. Ms. Russell called the roll.

Councilman Abeln	Yes
Councilman Feinauer	Yes
Councilman Wall	Yes
Councilman Weber	Yes
Councilwoman Witt	Yes

MOTION CARRIED

The Council Meeting adjourned at 8:27 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dave Hatter, Mayor

Attest:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Maura Russell".

Maura Russell
City Clerk