

**BUDGET AND TAX MILLAGE RATE WORK SESSION
CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NASHVILLE
COUNTY OF BERRIEN
AUGUST 12, 2019**

ROLL CALL: Members of the City Council present included Mayor Michael Richbourg, Aldermen Scott Stalnaker, Eric Gaither, Antonio Carter and Alderwoman Mellisa Watson.

STAFF PRESENT: Mandy Luke, Jackie Jordan, Chief Edwards, John Reynolds, Peter Schultz, Henry Yawn, Mitchell Moore

The Work Session was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

Mayor Richbourg began by stating the Police Department is short six (6) patrol officers and the potential tax millage rate increase is for public safety and would be to hire four (4) new officers and raise officer pay to be competitive with surrounding agencies. Mayor Richbourg explained an increase of one mill [from eight (8) mills to nine (9) mills] per month on the following values: property tax value of \$25,000 would be \$0.83 per month; \$50,000 would be \$1.67 per month; \$75,000 would be \$2.50 per month; \$100,000 would be \$3.33 per month; \$125,000 would be \$4.17 per month; \$150,000 would be \$5.00 per month; \$175,000 would be \$5.83 per month; \$200,000 would be \$6.67 per month; \$225,000 would be \$7.50 per month; \$250,000 would be \$8.33 per month; \$260,000 would be \$8.67; \$500,000 would be \$16.67 per month.

Mayor Richbourg said they have also discussed the need for a full-time code enforcement officer who would be post certified and part of the Police Department, whether they take someone from Patrol or hire someone new.

Mandy Luke, City Manager, asked if there were any other figures or options they wanted to look at because they have looked at so many options.

Mayor Richbourg explained to hire six (6) new officers and raise salaries where they need to be would require an increase of about three (3) mills, which is not going to happen. He further explained they may be able to split the City Manager salary between General, Water and Gas Funds rather than General Fund only but it has to be researched through GMA (Georgia Municipal Association) and the auditors. Scott Stalnaker mentioned the hiring of additional officers would decrease overtime pay. Mayor Richbourg explained the hiring of new officers and raising salaries of officers would not happen overnight and may take a year or two.

Mrs. Luke also mentioned several Certificates of Deposit (CD) that were set up before she started with the City that could be cashed in. She explained a CD for the purchase of land for another cemetery, a CD for future recreation facilities and four CD's for improvements to Memorial Gardens. Scott Stalnaker said they have already begun looking for quotes for the additional pavement needed in Memorial Gardens to complete that.

Eric Gaither asked the number of officers in the budget. Mrs. Luke said only the current officers are in the new budget because there were no changes to the budget. Chief Edwards said there are ten (10) patrol officers and two (2) investigators and Mayor Richbourg said they are looking at hiring four (4) additional patrol officers and also need a full-time code enforcement officer. Mayor Richbourg mentioned the CD's, the possibility of splitting the salary between the funds, a savings in travel and training and a reduction in the LMIG participation from 20% to 10% due to TSPLOST stating he hopes these items would hold a possible increase in millage to no more than one and a half mills.

Chief Edwards said there are four (4) patrol cars available at this time and had requested two (2) new patrol cars since they are still using some that are 2005 models.

Mayor Richbourg mentioned a possible grant which has not yet been funded and Chief Edwards said that grant is only for personnel salaries for three (3) years.

Scott Stalnaker also mentioned the possibility of recouping some funds from the demolition of the Perkins Project upon the sale of the property.

Eric Gaither asked if the demand is greater for officers now than it was five (5) years ago.

Scott Stalnaker said the State of Georgia raised their salaries 20% approximately three (3) years ago and it hurt local City and County governments due to loss of officers going to work for State Patrol, Department of Transportation, Public Service Commission and other State jobs. He said he does not have the exact numbers but he thought the State decreased the amount invested in retirement to increase current salaries and the newer generation tends to look at what they are bringing home now versus retirement. He also mentioned population, crime and bills have increased. Mellisa Watson said there has not been a millage rate increase in twelve (12) years, not since 2007, although everything else has increased. Miss Watson said there has been mention of her living in the County and she said she has moved to the County but she still has a business in the City and cares deeply about what happens in the City and no one wants to raise the millage rate but there are times when it has to be done.

Mayor Richbourg spoke briefly on City services focusing on the need for public safety and clean water.

Janet Studstill said when you raise salaries, those salaries continue until the employees quit, die or retire and while they may be discussing the 2020 budget, would cashing in CD's or these other options make it sustainable. Mayor Richbourg said that is why they are discussing a range. Mrs. Luke mentioned factors such as increase in sales taxes and revenues or property tax revenues from more people moving into the City or if someone bought the Beetree property and built another complex such as Griner Apartments and insurance premium taxes.

Scott Stalnaker also mentioned the loss of funds due to training officers and then losing them to other agencies for more money which is another reason to adjust the pay scale.

Taylor Scarbrough asked if there is a reimbursement from the State of those who attend the Police Academy and Chief Edwards replied no.

Mayor Richbourg explained the City's starting patrol officer is currently \$1.67 per hour lower than the average of the surrounding agencies naming Adel PD, Berrien County, Cook County, Fitzgerald PD, Lanier County, Lenox, Ocilla, Tifton and Tift County.

Antonio Carter said Nashville PD is short so these officers are working a lot of hours and some are working with only two (2) officers per shift. He said they stay tied up with calls and everyone wants an officer available and able to respond quickly when a call comes in.

Chief Edwards reminded the Mayor and Council the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police (GACP) recommendation is nineteen (19) patrol officers based on our population to cover calls, reports, training, sickness, etc.

Mayor Richbourg said it had been suggested to share services with the County and he spoke with the Sheriff but he was told it would require a complete consolidation to make it work.

Janet Studstill said she recently attended a Citizens Review Panel regarding TIA/TSPLOST and according to the figures released for October 2018 to June 2019, TSPLOST is up. Mrs. Luke reminded everyone that SPLOST is completely separate from the General or other funds and has specific purposes. Studstill said according to DOT, if SPLOST is up, then everything else should be up but it is hard to budget based on how people spend their money.

Randal Milton asked about recruiting officers from the military and Chief Edwards said he is retired military, visits the base weekly and routinely speaks with them.

Janet Studstill mentioned this is a problem nationwide and does not think any law enforcement is paid enough.

Scott Stalnaker said he has the utmost respect for the military, we would not be here without them and they have a dangerous job but there are more law enforcement officers being killed now than those in the military. He said he attended the Police Academy in 1985 and people respected law enforcement then and would even help them if need be but not now. He said he does not have the current figures but the number of law enforcement officers who are shot and killed now are staggering. He also mentioned the required training and continuing education to retain credentials in law enforcement.

Mayor Richbourg and Mrs. Luke explained the requirements and there will be three (3) Public Hearings concerning the millage rate which will be August 26th at 5:30 p.m., September 9th at 5:30 p.m. and September 16th at 6:00 p.m. so it can be voted on at the September 23rd Council meeting, if necessary, in order to get the tax bills mailed out on time.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Mayor Michael Richbourg

Alderman Antonio Carter

Alderman Walter Steward

Alderman Billy Retterbush

Alderman Mellisa Watson

Alderman Scott Stalnaker

Alderman Eric Gaither

ATTEST

Jackie Jordan, City Clerk