

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, May 9, 2006

Council Chambers

PRESENT: Aids. Krill, Maher, Meaux, Purins – 4

EXCUSED: Ald. Stepaniak

ALSO PRESENT: A. Kesner, Interim City Admin./City Atty.; B. Aldana, Asst. City Atty./Personnel Admin.;
N. Kreuser, Health Officer; L. Murphy, Mun. Clerk II, Assessor

Ald. Purins as Chair called the meeting to order at 7:40 p.m.

Funding benefits for proposed half-time clerical position in the health department

Ms. Aldana introduced Ms. Murphy who is currently working in the Assessor's Office while her position is in transition. She explained that in the fall, the Assessor's Office made a number of staffing changes and Ms. Murphy was reclassified from a Municipal Clerk II to a Municipal Clerk I. Her hours were also reduced from full time to 20 hours part time. The Employee Relations Committee at the time encouraged the personnel department to find a way to mitigate the effect of these changes on this employee. The proposal for a half-time clerical position in the health department that is before the current committee is a possible solution. She stressed that the position is needed whether it is filled by Ms. Murphy or an outside hire.

Ms. Aldana said the question before the earlier committee was whether to create a half time clerical position in the health department with all the costs being covered by grant funds. It is clear now that there aren't enough grant funds available in the health department to cover this position so they have modified their proposal to include partial funding of the position through city funds. That change in the nature of the funding for the position brings this question back before the current committee. She said the amount of city funds required to partially fund this position varies depending on how the position is filled.

Ms. Aldana explained that under the scenario of the position being filled by the current employee whose hours will be reduced effective July 1st, the city would pay higher wages because the employee would be redlined. This means the city would continue to pay the employee at her current rate. There would be a shortfall of \$6,932.40 which would be covered by the Reserve for Contingencies. She said the committee may wish to consider that if the current employee does not fill the position and her hours are reduced, the city would pay approximately \$3,400 in unemployment benefits for that time period. Under the scenario that the position is filled by a new employee starting at a lower rate of pay, there would still be a shortfall of \$3,566. She explained that the benefits for all positions in the city, whether full or part-time, are calculated for budget purposes at 50% of salary.

Ms. Aldana said there are two scenarios for consideration: 1) for the Employee Relations Committee the issue is whether to recommend approval of a half time clerical position in the Health Department when the salary and benefits are primarily grant funded, but the position is partially city funded and 2) for the Budget and Finance Committee the issue is whether to recommend approval of a transfer from the Reserve for Contingencies to cover part or some of the costs of salary and benefits of a half time clerical position in the health department in an amount not to exceed \$6,932.40, but not less than \$3,566.

Ald. Krill asked if this would be resolved in the next budget cycle. Ms. Aldana indicated that it would be resolved and added that it would be the intent of the health department to continue the position into 2007. Mr. Kesner added that the health department has shown that they have a need for the increase in staff.

Ald. Maher suggested adding wording to the amendment that the position would be approved pending the continuation of grant funds.

Moved by Ald. Krill, seconded by Ald. Meaux to recommend approval
for the half-time position in the health department with partial city funding
contingent upon continued grant funding for this position --

Ald. Purins asked if it was common practice to use grant monies to fund salaries and the hiring of additional people. Mr. Kesner responded that different grants have differing levels of flexibility. Dr. Kreuser said that some of the grants are very large and they can hire staff through that type of grant, but others are grants in the \$2,000 to \$7,000 range. Mr. Kesner added that a lot of the grants before the health department are on-going annual grants.

Ald. Purins asked how many employees are currently redlined. Ms. Aldana responded that there is maybe only one employee in that position.

Ald. Maher asked why this request was coming up now and not during the budget review process. The only justification for the request seems to be to have additional hours for the employee that lost hours in the assessor's office. Ms. Aldana explained that the reason this proposal is being presented now is that part of the need will arise on July 1st when the new sanitarian starts in the health department. There has also been a cumulative build up of clerical needs in that department.

Dr. Kreuser said this is a new situation that has arisen in conjunction with a need for increased support for sanitarian position. She noted that the grants that have been awarded to the health department have benefited the city in a number of ways including paying for computers and office equipment, and partially funding a firewall and parts of the telephone systems.

Ald. Maher observed that the current cost is only for the remainder of the year so the cost will at least double for 2007. He asked if the city is allowed to eliminate positions with the phase out of the grants. Dr. Kreuser said there are no guarantees regarding the longevity of grants; however, over the last ten years there has been only one grant that seems to be fading out. She added that they diversify their grants in order to cover themselves.

Ms. Aldana said the new half-time position would be contingent upon the availability of grant funding. In discussions with the unions, the consensus seems to be that when there are no grant funds left, the city is not obligated to continue the position.

Ald. Maher asked if the employee were to be hired and the grant is gone in a year, what happens to the \$3,400 in unpaid benefits. Mr. Kesner responded that the cost of unemployment benefits is calculated into the employee benefit total.

Ald. Maher said he has been involved in grant funded situations and when the grant is gone the people are no longer employees of the institution. Ms. Aldana stressed that people working in grant funded positions for the city are considered city employees. Ald. Maher asked if it would make sense to have more of a discussion about how the city treats grant funded employees. Mr. Kesner said that type of discussion would depend on the nature of the employer and the university system which Ald. Maher was familiar with, has a different way of handling grant funded positions.

Ms. Aldana reiterated that they are not only requesting the half-time position with the current employee in mind, they are also asking for a possible new hire in that position if the current employee doesn't work out. Dr. Kreuser agreed saying that they would like to staff the position either way.

Ald. Meaux asked if there was contract language in any of the labor agreements that if grant funding levels decrease, the employees can be let go. Ms. Aldana said that they do have that language and it has been clarified. Ald. Meaux asked if that type of situation would have to go before the committee. Ms. Aldana said it wouldn't be necessary because the position will have been eliminated.

Vote on the motion was Ayes: 4

The meeting adjourned at 8:14 p.m.

Carla A. Ledesma, City Clerk
City of Wauwatosa

svh