

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING – MAYOR’S ANNUAL BUDGET PRESENTATION**

**Meeting Minutes**

**July 21, 2022**

**9:00 a.m.**

**Location:** City Council Chamber, 1st floor, City Hall

**In attendance:** Council Members Terrance Freeman (President), Danny Becton, Michael Boylan, Matt Carlucci, Kevin Carrico, LeAnna Cumber, Randy DeFoor, Garrett Dennis, Al Ferraro, Reggie Gaffney, Nick Howland, Joyce Morgan, Sam Newby, Ju’Coby Pittman, Brenda Priestly Jackson, Ron Salem, Randy White

**Excused**: Council Members Aaron Bowman and Rory Diamond

**Also**: Kim Taylor and Phillip Peterson – Council Auditor’s Office; Peggy Sidman – Council Director/Secretary; Merriane Lahmeur – Legislative Services Division; Jason Teal, Paige Johnston and Mary Staffopoulos – Office of General Counsel; Brian Hughes, Charles Moreland, Leeann Krieg, Rachel Zimmer, Nikki Kimbleton – Mayor’s Office; Joey Greive – Finance and Administration Department

**Meeting Convened**: 9:04 a.m.

President Freeman convened the meeting. Council Member Morgan gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance. She introduced several representatives from Jacksonville’s Sister City of Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality in South Africa in attendance at the meeting. A roll call of the attendees was taken. President Freeman introduced Mayor Lenny Curry to give annual budget address.

Mayor Curry said that Jacksonville’s finances have never been stronger, and the city has tackled unprecedented challenges during his term, including the COVID pandemic. His proposed budget reflects the first property tax millage reduction since 2007 of one-eighth of a mill. Pension reform that took effect in 2018 has allowed $834 million to be invested in current city needs rather than paying pension liabilities. Outstanding debt has been reduced by over $500 million in the last few years and that reduced debt service costs by $30 million per year. Reserve accounts have been greatly increased to create a solid foundation for future mayors and city councils.

The proposed budget reflects a major investment in capital projects again this year of nearly $500 million, including new and relocated fire stations, resiliency projects, drainage, and river bulkhead improvements. The Northbank Riverwalk will be extended to the stadium complex and funding is included for the Museum of Science and History relocation to the Northbank. $50 million will be allocated to City Council for park projects to be determined by the Council, and a major investment is planned in downtown riverfront parks.

The mayor said that continued investment in public safety is vital. His budget includes $37.5 million additional to the Sheriff’s Office for additional hiring and technology acquisition and funding to provide at least one Fire and Rescue Department rescue unit at every fire station. JFRD is the largest full Advanced Life Support rescue service in the country. Jacksonville is also the largest city in the nation with an ISO Class 1 insurance rating, which saved property owners over $100 million in insurance premiums last year.

Downtown redevelopment remains a major emphasis. The budget allocates $100 million for downtown projects for the Riverfront Plaza, MOSH relocation and riverfront park projects. $36 million is earmarked for the Jaguars’ new performance center, and $25 million for improvements to 121 Financial Field.

The Kids Hope Alliance is spearheading a reading initiative to develop early literacy, and KHA has taken over the juvenile justice diversionary program from the State Attorney’s Office to great acclaim. The Full Service Schools program has gotten more mental health counselors and other service providers.

Jacksonville has a huge park system, and the budget includes $100 million for park renovations and upgrades next year. The budget funds increases and upgrades in access to the river and increases investment in public libraries, including a new branch library in the Oceanway area.

The mayor thanked the City’s employees for their hard work and dedication during the challenges of the last several years. He thanked his two Chief Administrative Officers, Sam Mousa and Brian Hughes, for their leadership during his term of office. He expressed optimism for Jacksonville’s future and thanked the citizens of Jacksonville for their resilience and optimism.

Questions and Answers

Council Member DeFoor asked about the dollar amount of the proposed millage reduction. CAO Brian Hughes said 1/8 mill equals about $10-11 million.

Council Member Carlucci said everyone’s job is made easier when there is sufficient revenue to apply to serving citizens’ needs. Good fiscal times are the opportunity to make substantial investments in long-standing needs, and he congratulated the mayor on the priorities in his budget.

Council Member Pittman said the proposed budget is good news for communities that have lacked equity and for tackling long-standing problems like septic tanks and sidewalks.

Council Member Boylan asked about the process by which the decision was made to substantially increase funding for the Sheriff’s Office. Mr. Hughes said a large part of the increase is due to collective bargaining raises already agreed to and to facility improvements. There is also additional investment in crime prevention programs.

Council Member Ferraro said finding enough contractors to do all the planned capital improvements will be challenging but important to put the money to work immediately.

Council Member Morgan said she would like to see some Ritz Theatre improvements while there is money available in the CIP for new work.

Council Member Howland said that the proposed budget appears to achieve 3 sometimes conflicting goals – capital investment, property tax reduction, and growth in reserve funds. Brian Hughes said that $70 million in federal funds is being set aside for the next mayor’s administration to use and to act as a buffer should there be an economic downturn or should FEMA reimbursement for Hurricane Matthew and Hurricane Irma expenditures not be received as anticipated.

**Meeting adjourned:** 9:45 a.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

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