

Council Member Farrell on behalf of the Committee on Finance, Assessment, and Taxation introduced the following:

Resolution Number 111.112.20R (MC)

RESOLUTION OF THE COMMON COUNCIL OUTLINING ITS ACTIONS AND EXPRESSING ITS FINDINGS AND INTENT CONCERNING THE CITY OF ALBANY 2021 BUDGET AS PROPOSED IN ORDINANCE 27.102.20

WHEREAS, on October 1, 2020, the Common Council received the Mayor’s proposed budget for the City of Albany for the fiscal year 2021 and the accompanying Mayor’s budget message; and

WHEREAS, after receipt of such budget, the Finance, Taxation and Assessment Committee and the full Common Council engaged in an extensive review of the proposed budget which included over twelve meetings, discussions with ten Department heads, two public hearings, and requests for additional information; and

WHEREAS, the Common Council has identified several areas of concern, needed amendments, and items requiring further action;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Common Council adopts the following statement outlining its findings, intent, and recommendations for future action concerning the Proposed City of Albany Budget for Fiscal Year 2021:

**Proposed 2021 City of Albany Budget
Statement of Common Council Actions, Findings, Intent, and Recommendations**

Pre-Budget Discussions

The COVID-19 Pandemic and its impact on city finances for FY2020 presented unique challenges to fiscal management and Council oversight. Early on, the Council engaged the Administration on the budgetary impacts of COVID-19 on the City’s finances and how revenue shortfalls were being managed. This was an important precursor to FY2021 budget discussions and understanding the fiscal challenges moving forward into the new year. Therefore, the Council's budget discussions with the Administration began before the formal submission of a proposed budget on October 1, 2020.

Council Priorities

Before the issuance of the proposed budget, individual Council Members met with the Mayor and her staff to discuss Ward specific initiatives and needs that should be addressed in the budget. During the Finance, Taxation, and Assessment meetings, Council Members highlighted several items, some of which will be more fully explained below.

In previous Budget Intent Resolutions, the Council has strongly advocated for a true Capital Plan as required by the City Charter. We note that the Capital Plan in the 2021 Budget has improved and appreciate the work to create this much stronger document. The Council notes that

this document should be further improved to include regular reporting of the progress of capital projects and expenditures.

The Council also notes the importance of ensuring infrastructure upkeep and improvement throughout our City. As a result of our northeast climate, roads and sidewalks are in continual need of upkeep and improvement. Priority should always be given to these items. Additionally, we note that parks have always been important to our constituents, but the challenges of COVID-19 have made our parks essential. Ensuring our parks are well kept, cleaned, and improved is essential. It was also noted in the 2020 Budget Intent Resolution the intention that the City would endeavor to improve services to assist with the maintenance of vacant and poorly maintained properties, we again highlight the importance of this item and look for improvements in 2021.

The Common Council Public Comment/Hearings

In addition to regular public comment at Council meetings, there were two public hearings held on October 19, 2020, and November 2, 2020, for residents to have input on the budget. The Council received no specific comments or recommendations regarding the 2021 budget. While this is unusual, the pandemic and presidential election likely contributed to the lack of turnout and comments.

Common Council Review of the 2021 Proposed Budget

During its review, the Finance, Taxation, and Assessment Committee and other Council Members identified the following issues and concerns, some of which can be addressed in amendments made by the Council, and others that the Council has no authority or ability to change that need further immediate attention by the Administration:

I. Support for Albany's Fair Share

The Mayor's proposed 2021 budget again includes \$12.5M in Capital City funding although the State only approved \$12M for Capital City Funding in 2018, 2019, and 2020. The COVID-19 Pandemic has affected the finances and has left the City on edge due to the State Budget Director now having the authority to cut the State's budget as necessary due to a downturn in revenues state-wide, the Common Council continues to fully support the Mayor's inclusion of this amount in the budget as it is not only necessary but a fair and reasonable request of our Governor and Legislature. Most of the Council continues to believe that even the \$12.5 million requested from the State is inequitable and insufficient, given that 63% of the property in the City is tax-exempt, our Aid to Municipalities (AIM) funding is disproportionately lower than other similar upstate cities, and the City provides essential services to tens of thousands of government employees and other commuters every day who do not reside in Albany. We, alongside the Mayor, will continue to push for this funding to become permanent because it truly is our "fair share" that should not fall on the shoulders of our taxpayers.

II. Continual Communication with the Council on Revenue and Expenses

Although not specifically detailed in the budget, with the pandemic and the tremendous fiscal impacts of the budget, the Council notes how important it is to get regular and detailed

updates on revenue and expenses in 2021. With unknowns in State Aid, including the Capital City funding along with AIM funding, and potential Federal aid, the Council must get regular updates so that it can readily take any actions to accommodate necessary budget changes. The Finance Committee recommends monthly reports and is willing to work with the Budget Department and Treasurer's Office on exactly what that would look like. These monthly reports are in addition to and not a substitute for the more comprehensive quarterly reports from the Treasurer.

III. Tax Levy Increase

The budget contains a \$1 million property tax levy increase, from \$58,550,000 to \$59,550,000. This increase is not noted in the Mayor's budget message but it should be given its significance. The Council expresses concern with raising property taxes. As noted above, with 63% of properties in the City being tax-exempt, there is an undue burden on our homeowners and businesses. Raising property taxes is always of concern, but the Council is particularly concerned about how it will impact communities and businesses already hard hit by the pandemic. Given the uncertainty with other revenue sources we would view this increase as a temporary measure to bridge us to FY2022 at which time the increase should be re-evaluated.

IV. External Financial Audit

The Council approves moving the budget line for professional audit from the Auditor's Office to the Treasurer's Office. This funding supports the outside financial audit of the City's finances which is handled by the Treasurer's Office, therefore the budget line appropriately belongs in the Treasurer's Office. We recommend that the budget line be explained that these funds are for the annual independent professional audit in the budget book.

V. Police Reform

Although the 2021 budget does not include any major changes to the budget of the Police Department, the Council notes the importance of meaningful police reform while ensuring the continued safety of our residents. The Council expects there may be changes in the Police Department budget after the process of the police reform collaborative is completed and the Council's Public Safety Committee and the Council as a whole take action as part of this process. We encourage the Mayor and the Budget Office to begin looking at possible avenues for funding additional priorities for our residents.

VI. Summer Youth Employment Program

The pandemic had many negative impacts on the City's budget, and one of those was a necessary cut to the Summer Youth Employment Program. The Council notes that this program is essential to many of our youth and it should be prioritized to fully run above other budget items should there be a similar situation in 2021.

VII. Comparable Salary Analysis

The Council has repeatedly expressed concerns that lower-salaried, non-union employees' raises have not appeared to be consistent with their counterparts nor with the adjustments that some city employees and department heads have received. In our 2020 Budget Intent Resolution, we specifically noted:

“Council recommends the city retain an outside entity review of non-union employee compensation levels by job responsibility and department with regard to adequacy of salary levels, as well as a comparative review of salary levels for similar positions in neighboring municipalities. It is recommended that a Commission be appointed to supervise this analysis and make final recommendations to the Mayor and Council. Any one-time costs for this study should be determined through an RFP process and necessary funding found to cover this investment in employee retention and recruitment. Ideally, recommendations could be in place for possible implementation (or phased implementation) for the 2021 fiscal year.”

The Council emphasizes that salary impacts employee morale and the ability of the City to retain front-line employees who provide vital services and often have valuable institutional knowledge. The Council believes we need to create a culture in which all City employees feel valued for the work they do and the services they provide to our residents, businesses, and visitors.

Issues related to adequacy and uniformity of non-union salaries, especially for lower-wage workers, need to be addressed comprehensively. As a result of the pandemic, these efforts were stalled, but this issue's importance remains and we emphasize the need for the Administration to continue with this important process.

VIII. Violence Prevention Task Force Funding

In the Equity Agenda, Albany City Code § 183-2(B)(1) states:

“Funding will be allocated annually to violence prevention programming and initiatives in Wards with the highest incidence and prevalence of violence. The funds will be allocated based on prioritization through a community participatory budgeting process with involvement from the Violence Prevention Task Force. A separate budget line within the City of Albany's annual budget will be created and titled "Violence Prevention Task Force Funding.”

The Council notes that the proposed budget fails to include a budget line as required by §182-2(B)(1) or to outline a community participatory budgeting process for these funds.. While it is understood that this process is on-going with the current formation of the Violence Prevention Task Force, we recommend the Mayor note this in her introductory letter the funding that will be directed or re-directed to this initiative and the process for allocation.

IX. Housing Vacancy Study

The Council noted this study in our 2020 Budget Intent Resolution. The importance of this study remains and we ask for the Mayor to find funding to conduct a housing vacancy study to determine the City of Albany's eligibility to opt into the Emergency Tenant Protection Act. With the pandemic further putting stress on tenants, this study is even more important.

X. Senior Services

The Council noted the need for increased senior services in the Budget Intent Resolutions for both the 2019 and 2020 budgets. We are pleased to see the Parks and Recreation Department expanding their senior programs, including a new program at the Arbor Hill Community Center and the new Community Center in West Hill. Realizing the vital importance of senior services, the Council asks the Administration to continue to expand offerings for our seniors to participate in a wide range of activities and services, along with communicating with seniors about such opportunities through a variety of means.

XI. South End Community Center

The Council passed Resolution 84.92.20R in support of a community center in the South End. While we applaud the budget allocations for a new and much needed community center in West Hill, we note that there are needs for the supports that a community center provides throughout Albany, including the South End. We hope the Mayor will look to build an additional community center in the South End.

Conclusion

With the adoption of this resolution, we complete action on the fiscal year 2021 City of Albany budget.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be transmitted to the Mayor, Chief of Staff, Budget Director and all other department heads; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of the “Statement of Common Council Actions, Findings and Intent” as herein adopted be printed in the final bound document constituting the “City of Albany 2021 Budget” immediately following the Mayor’s transmittal message.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that if the Administration ignores the Council’s request to include the Council’s Budget Intent Resolution in the printed adopted budget as herein specified, the administration shall be prohibited from using Council funds to print any proposed or adopted budgets or any other documents aside from costs needed to provide the Council with the 20 copies expressly needed for Council members, their staff and records.

TO: Danielle Gillespie, City Clerk
FROM: John-Raphael Pichardo, Esq., Research Counsel
RE: Supporting Memorandum
DATE: November 12, 2020
SPONSOR: Council Member Farrell on behalf of the Committee on Finance, Assessment, and Taxation

RESOLUTION NUMBER 111.112.20R (MC)

TITLE

RESOLUTION OF THE COMMON COUNCIL OUTLINING ITS ACTIONS AND EXPRESSING ITS FINDINGS AND INTENT CONCERNING THE CITY OF ALBANY 2021 BUDGET AS PROPOSED IN ORDINANCE 27.102.20

GENERAL PURPOSE OF LEGISLATION

To adopt an explanatory resolution to be read in conjunction with the actions of the Common Council concerning the budget.

MESSAGE OF NECESSITY

Under section 604(B)(c) of the Charter, the Common Council must “adopt the budget with or without amendments on or before November 30 of the current fiscal year.” This resolution is being added by majority consent because the November 16 meeting is the last regularly scheduled meeting of the full Council before the November 30 deadline.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

Passed by the following vote of all the Council Members elected voting in favor thereof:

Affirmative – Anane, Balarin, Conti, Doesschate, Fahey, Farrell, Flynn, Frederick, Hoey, Igoe, Johnson, Kimbrough, Love, O’Brien, and Robinson

Affirmative 15 Negative 0 Present 0

Clerk of the Common Council

President of the Common Council

Mayor

Date

I, Danielle Gillespie, City Clerk and Clerk of the Common Council, do hereby certify that Resolution number 111.112.20 (MC) was passed at a meeting of the Albany Common Council on November 16, 2020.

In Affirmation thereof, I hereto set my hand and affix The Seal of the City of Albany this _____ day of November 2020.

Danielle Gillespie, Clerk of the Common Council