T H E G E N E V A C I T Y C O U N C I L

JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS

SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING

OCTOBER 14, 2025 – 6:00 PM

City Hall – 2nd Floor Council Chambers
47 Castle Street
Geneva, NY 14456

Presiding – Steve Valentino, Mayor

1. ROLL CALL

Present: Clr. Whitfield (arrived at 6:01), Clr. Moracco, Clr. Petropoulos, Clr. Gillotte, Clr. Grimaldi, Clr. Pealer, Clr. Lavin, Clr. Brennan

Absent:

2. DISCUSSION – 2026 Budget

Mayor Valentino thanked City Manager and staff for all the effort they put into the budget, which he sees as fairly conservative. He explained the green sheet, showing the 2025 reductions, recalling some failures that occurred and had to be funded mid-year, as well as 2026 budget requests that weren't included in the City Manager's final budget presented to Council. He explained that he put forward his thoughts on how he wanted to impact the 2026 budget early in the budgeting process, recalling changes brought forward last week by Councilor Petropoulos and himself. He encouraged Councilors to make motions to add or remove items, with their explanations. Mayor Valentino addressed comments and information Councilor Grimaldi created. City Manager Hendrix explained staff efforts to provide feedback and considerations to Councilor Grimaldi's budget comments, which were provided to Council. Councilor Grimaldi explained City information related to population loss and resident income figures. Mayor Valentino noted that Councilor Grimaldi's information included a statement that the City provides water and sewer services at a reduced program cost, while Comptroller Blowers explained that the Town pays a higher rate. Mayor Valentino asked for examples of non-resident uses for City programs. Councilor Grimaldi explained that Town residents use recreation services and parks, stating that it's a fact that they do get services from the City. Councilor Pealer asked for clarity around Town water, wondering if their residents are metered, or if they pay a flat rate. Director Venuti explained Town sewer meterage, explaining that if they exceed a baseline volume their metered rate is increased, and that the Town has been under the baseline for several years. Councilor Lavin noted that the Town offsets charges to their residents with sales tax revenues, and are billed by assessed value, not use. He suggested that the Town uses a City asset to make it more advantageous to own a home in the Town rather than the City, noting that there are other places in the state where out of district water is charged at a higher rate.

Mayor Valentino moved on to debt review, noting that 18% of every dollar spent in the City goes for debt service. Councilor Grimaldi explained how he calculated this figure, and shared projections of debt service for the next 15 and 30 years, beginning in 2027. He explained that he'd rather not have future tax payers pay for what the City does today.

Mayor Valentino then turned to the Capital Plan. Comptroller Blowers explained that any realized savings for suspending the Capital Plan in 2026 wouldn't be realized until 2027 if there was a one-year moratorium, while other debt payment would still exist. City Manager Hendrix explained why municipalities use debt, to be proactive with projects, rather than relying on the General Fund when things break and require emergency repairs or replacement. Mayor Valentino clarified with Councilor Grimaldi that he's only looking to borrow no money in 2026. City Manager Hendrix explained that the five-year forecast for the Capital Improvement Plan would be impacted if no bonding occurs in 2026 to take on scheduled projects. Councilor Lavin explored reducing debt payments to pay for fire trucks, or other items, and suggested that Council could also come back next year to bond for projects. City Manager Hendrix explained that if Council rejects 2026 bonding, the Capital Improvement Plan goes in the budget cycle, and she would not recommend revising it mid-year due to the logistics of taking projects on. Councilor Pealer wondered how much of 2024's Capital Improvement Projects have not broken ground yet? He then reviewed several infrastructure projects, Director Venuti explained that several are in preliminary design and engineering phases. He shared that previous council decisions to not fund projects put the City considerably behind in getting projects out the door. For example, the Castle Street Reconstruction Project was slated for 2019, and is just getting started now, at a much higher cost. Discussion followed around the process of financing a capital project, and the phases of financing. Councilor Gillotte wondered how long before the City would have enough money to start paying for projects, if new debt was eliminated and the City saved to pay cash. Councilor Grimaldi explained that the City always needs the option to bond, if something happens that can't be put off and exceeds Fund Balance. Comptroller Blowers reviewed prices skyrocketing over the past several years, explaining that if the City waits until it has enough cash, it could be 10 or more years. The City would be faced with only reacting to emergent projects. Councilor Grimaldi shared that he would be agreeable to bond in those cases. He then suggested reducing bonding in 2026 and 2027 would yield enough savings to buy a firetruck with cash. City Manager Hendrix explained that a fund would have to be set up, for future specific uses. Director Venuti noted that if the City is going to build up a savings account, how quickly can $14 million be saved up to cover one project. Discussion followed, with clarification made by the City Manager around using money from different funds to cover projects. Mayor Valentino explored costs of emergency repairs if regular projects are deferred. Councilor Pealer wondered if the proposed moratorium includes the ATAD project, Councilor Grimaldi explained that he's not looking to stop projects that are underway. Director Venuti reviewed the Clinton, Cherry and Elmwood Reconstruction projects, for total reconstruction of these streets. He explained the number of water main breaks on these streets, explaining that the entire sanitary sewer, storm sewer and water services are replaced, in addition to the streets. He explained that survey, base mapping and beginning design has occurred for these reconstruction projects, and reviewed post pandemic inflation, increased material and increased labor costs. Director Venuti explained the challenge of aging infrastructure. Councilor Lavin wondered what waiting one year would cost, Director Venuti estimated a 15% increase. Councilor Pealer noted that the city has lost over 400 residents in the past five years. He noted that there will be less people to share in the debt if the trend of population decline continues, and sees the value in talking about this and future thinking. Pulteney Street was reviewed next, and City Manager Hendrix reminded Council that these projects that will improve stormwater systems was a recommendation of the Storm Water Task Force.

Comptroller Blowers reviewed the Cellular Water Meter project, which is already under way. He explained significant failure, where the City can't get reads on meters. Reads can occur daily, rather than quarterly with cellular meters, making it easy for residents to identify leaks sooner. He explained that the City will lose out on potential revenue if it doesn't move forward, and Phase 1 is already under way, with multiple years of bonding having already occurred. Director Venuti explained that meters were replaced 10 years ago, and the batteries are failing. Discussion followed around meters, their transmitters, meter reading, life of units, and bonding for this project. Councilor Gillotte wondered if there is much revenue loss due to faulty meters now. Director Venuti estimates that there is about a 9% loss of water currently. Comptroller Blowers explained the challenges of reading meters that have failed.

City Manager Hendrix then addressed Fire Apparatus replacement, noting that there is a high chance of grant funding for this purchase. She explained that bonding shows the State that the City is committed to the project, making a stronger application. Chief Parrotta explained that if the purchase was pushed off three years, replacement will be delayed for other apparatuses, with three more up for replacement over the next five years.

Mayro Valentino stressed that if bonding will be paused for street reconstruction, communication with residents will be important, and reviewed Cellular Water Meter deferment and Fire Apparatus deferment. City Manager Hendrix explained that the budget would be changed to move $600,000 to fund balance with delayed bonding. Councilor Lavin suggested exploring the savings the City would experience by carrying less debt, rather than just looking at the increased costs of delaying projects. Discussion followed. Mayor Valentino clarified that bonding isn't frivolous spending.

City Manager Hendrix reviewed a Rink Improvement, which would increase visits to the complex, and grow sports visits as well. She recalled holding off on rink projects in anticipation of the feasibility study, and the three options the study offered, noting that there is potential grant funding, community funding, and bonding. Councilor Petropoulos noted that the rink needs new refrigeration, it would not carry over to a new facility. City Manager Hendrix explained the vision of a Community Center in the BRIX application. If Council chooses debt elimination, it may put grant funding at risk for this project, as grants like to see funding plans, dollars allocated since most grants are reimbursement, and up-front engineering costs for the project. Councilor Pealer explained that showing secured funding strategically looks good when communicating the city is serious about the grant. He wondered why the City can't bond upfront for engineering and study, and hold off on the rest. City Manager Hendrix explained that municipalities have to show that they have funding to see a project through to fruition when applying for grant funding. Mayor Valentino explained the importance of grant funding, and state representatives pushing for grant ideas in our area, noting that the State would like to see Geneva apply for another DRI.

The Sewer Maintenance Program was reviewed next. City Manager Hendrix explained regular, routine lining and repairs this program funds. Director Venuti explained the ongoing maintenance program in more detail, noting that annual bonding isn't for routine work, rather a responsible financial tool allowing the City to maintain, upgrade and protect essential sewer infrastructure in a sustainable way. Councilor Grimaldi expressed concerns about bonding for normal maintenance. Councilor Pealer noted that some of the debt the City has, has created a situation where the City keeps rolling over and increasing, creating rolling debt. He explored increasing taxes for projects forecasted in the future, saving ahead to fund regular projects, rather than bonding for some of these projects. City Manager Hendrix shared that staff has explored adopting a debt strategy, noting that as a small City there are challenges. She explained that the City doesn't take on debt for items that are one-time purchases like vehicles. She suggested a direction to not add more debt than is coming off or a similar strategy, without eliminating services.

Director Venuti explored street resurfacing, noting that CHIPS funds for these projects does vary, and some of that funding may not continue. He explained that CHIPS projects must have a ten-year life. He reviewed what CHIPS funding can and can't be used for.

Councilor Grimaldi reviewed the Business Improvement District, and believes that the City should not pay into BID, per their charter. He explained that the special assessment is allocated to keep downtown nice, and raised concerns about the BID hiring people to weed at the Lakefront. City Manager Hendrix pointed out that the Lakefront has been incorporated into the Downtown area, and explained that DPW works closely with the BID, and shared examples of grant awards the BID has received to maintain and improve the lakefront. She reviewed the reduction in City funding to the BID in the 2025 budget for Economic Development Services, and wondered what staffing would look like if the City took some of these functions at the Lakefront back. Councilor Grimaldi raised concerns about the expansion of the BID. BID Executive Director Sydney Schumacher reviewed BID efforts at the Lakefront, which is part of the BID assessment district. She explained programming, wayfinding, and beautification grant applications, as well as City partnership with the Lakefront space. Councilor Grimaldi explained that the 41 Lakefront Hotel pays for beautification, City Manager Hendrix reviewed the arrangement that is in place for beautification through the BID. Discussion followed around the benefits of personnel costs by contracting with the BID and avoiding prevailing wage rates, noting that the relationship with the BID is going smoothly. Discussion followed. Councilor Petropoulos wondered if the BID has discussed 2026 funding with the LDC and IDA. Director Schumacker explained that a month in, she is working on gaining a full understanding of that relationship. City Manager Hendrix reviewed the City's BID funding in the budget book, outlining the management of staff and volunteers. Discussion followed around the School and County taxing in comparison to the BID special assessment district. Councilor Lavin noted that the Geneva BID operates differently than other BID's in the State, that are more business-like in their operations. Discussion followed. Councilor Petropoulos wondered about BID funding and the City's total contribution, and what that looks like. City Manager Hendrix explained that there is a formula related to assessment, the City collects the tax and passes funds through to the BID. Councilor Pealer noted that BID doesn't participate in maintenance of park space at the Lakefront. City Manager Hendrix and Director Schumacker explained that the BID handles beautification between the tunnel to the Welcome Center landscaping beds, as well as trash pickup. Councilor Pealer wonders where BID funding landed in previous budgets. Comptroller Blowers explained that they used to fall under the Partner Agency umbrella. Discussion followed around bid functions, and their support of maintaining the DRI project, under City contract.

City Manager Hendrix reviewed City Attorney retainers and outside council. City Manager Hendrix explained that even with an in-house City Attorney and paralegal, it's more economical to contract as retainers for specialized council would still be necessary. Mayor Valentino recalled an in-house City Attorney in the past with pros and cons. He acknowledged the breadth of knowledge required, that still required outside council. He called reverting to a City Attorney a step backwards. Councilor Pealer recalled the selection process of the current firm, and benefits of having a firm that can cover some of what the City outsources for, at a slightly higher premium. City Manager Hendrix explained that an outside firm being utilized now, that has carried over due to litigation. She expects to see litigation costs increase again in 2026.

Chief Parrotta reviewed EMS coverage being provided by the Fire Department, noting that he has no data to support Councilor Grimaldi's comments about the Fire Department taking on EMS calls, when ambulances are under staffed. Chief Parrotta explained that in 2024 12% of call outs were for EMS. Councilor Grimaldi raised concerns about the Fire Department responding to EMS while EMS stands by their ambulance. Chief Parrotta wondered if the calls are Help Lifting calls. Councilor Grimaldi raised concerns that EMS is billing for the Help Lifting calls. Chief Parrotta explained that all career Fire staff are required to take EMS refresher courses on line, while on duty. Discussion followed around fire-based EMS billing, which the City is looking into, as it is a new law. Councilor Petropoulos wondered what a satellite ambulance station would look like in the City. Chief Parrotta shared that Finger Lakes Ambulance would like to contract with the Town or City for a station on this side of the County. City Manager Hendrix shared that the County is looking into what EMS and Fire looks like county wide.

Assistant City Manager Youngs responded to two abolished Police Officer positions, and the new Community Vitality Coordinator. She shared that Planning and Economic Development and Recreation have 5 FTE's, supporting community engagement, growth, year-round recreation programing, and more. She highlighted the discussion around grants in Economic Development, emphasizing what that looks like day to day for her team. The cost of not getting the coordinator position will be that several key tasks related to grant administration may fall by the wayside, in addition to daily on the ground support for Recreation in Geneva. City Manager Hendrix noted that this would put Planning and Economic Development below baseline, down a position, recalling when two department heads resigned, she added the Assistant City Manager position, and a coordination position for on the ground day to day management. She explained that some programs may need to be reevaluated for administration like the Farmers Market and downtown events. She called it a conversation not around a coordinator or police officer, but what do we want to see around our community. City Manager Hendrix recalled a resolution of support Council passed this summer for these two new positions. She then addressed additional position requests for the 2026 budget, noting that the Police Chief has asks that didn't make it into the final budget, but he did not request funding for any new positions in 2026. Chief Eveland explained the parameters of the budget request with a reduction of 5%, so he didn't ask for new positions, and that moving forward, he will advocate for new positions. He explained efforts to keep overtime low to avoid burnout and be mindful of the budget. He acknowledged that the Police Department did lose a buffer to provide more services with the loss of two positions. Councilor Pealer recalled that there was a different Chief when these positions were abolished, he wondered if the removal of those positions had an impact beyond those two positions? Chief Eveland shared that morale was tough when those cuts were made, as he worried about the future, which did push some officers to transfer out of the Police Department. Councilor Lavin complimented both the Fire and Police Chief, noting the struggle to maintain the quality of services when population was higher. He recalled the City offloading basketball to the Boys and Girls Club, and wondered what the long-term sustainability of the work first responders are doing now may be. Chief Eveland acknowledged the tough budget decisions Council has to make for the community. Councilor Petropoulos shared that two businesses left downtown because there isn't enough patrol, and that he'd like to see a beat cop downtown. He wonders why recreation is tied in with Economic Development, not with Events. City Manager Hendrix explained that Economic Development and Events are tied together, and explained the benefits of Recreation tied in, making Geneva a place families want to come and grow. Supporting Recreation supports residents being involved in the community. She explained that the Rink complex is an Economic Development driver, bringing those who visit the rink to downtown and the lakefront. She explained that the only reason the coordinator position is still vacant is because of the new title being moved through civil

service. Councilor Petropoulos explained that the status quo won't do. He wondered what assurance Council has that the city will be back on the map. City Manager Hendrix recalled success and the restructuring of these two positions to do more.
Mayor Valentino shared a lack of confidence based on how last years and this year's budget are going. He commended Chief Eveland and retired Chief Passalacqua navigating the loss of positions with a vindictive council. Mayor Valentino apologized to the City Manager and staff for this budget session that they have worked hard as professionals to meet Council's limited thought process. He voiced disappointment that nobody asked for three fire fighters, or two grant writers. He believes that deferring costs and short-sighted thinking will cost double digit increases or seeing the city deteriorate and services eliminated. He raised concerns about staff turnover when they are handcuffed. He acknowledged there will be a lower tax levy and tax rate with deterioration of streets and equipment. He asked staff to evaluate where we are, with tax rate and levy. Councilor Grimaldi urges doing something now.

Councilor Grimaldi made a motion to eliminate bonding in the 2026 budget, in the amount of $15,350,000. Councilor Grimaldi explained that he believes it won't hurt the City, and that everyone is only speculating that it will cost more money next year, or the year after that to pay for projects. He went on to say that the City needs to rein in spending. Councilor Pealer asked for clarity on what bonding will be put off, wondering if this motion includes water and sewer bonding. Councilor Grimaldi confirmed that it does. Discussion followed around updated fund balances. Comptroller Blowers wondered how the City will bill for water and sewer if the Cellular Meter Project can't be completed. City Manager Hendrix said that she will notify grant partners for the Fire Apparatus and Rink Improvements, that the City will have to withdraw due to the lack of ability to bond. Councilor Gillotte expressed frustration that this motion wasn't brought forward weeks ago, rather than at the last minute. He raised concerns about the impact on residents, especially on Cherry Street. City Manager Hendrix called out projects at the water plant as well, noting she's unsure what how this motion will affect them. Councilor Lavin expressed frustration with the budget process, and recommended standing committees so Council could be more engaged. He suggested that in a couple of weeks council can return and reconsider some items, and take a rational look. Councilor Petropulos wondered if an exception could be made for the Fire Truck and Recreation Complex bonding. Councilor Grimaldi suggested a more refined resolution for next week.

ACTION TAKEN by Clr. Grimaldi; seconded by Clr. Lavin
MOVED THAT the 2026 budget be amended to eliminate $15,350,000 in bonding
ACTION TAKEN by Councilor Petropoulos; seconded by Clr. Grimaldi
MOVED THAT this motion be tabled
ROLL CALL VOTE: Aye - Clr. Whitfield, Clr. Moracco, Clr. Petropoulos, Clr. Gillotte, Clr. Grimaldi, Clr. Lavin, Clr. Brennan
Nay - Clr. Pealer, Mayor Valentino
MOTION TABLED (7-2)

3. <u>ADJOURNMENT</u>

ACTION TAKEN by Clr. Grimaldi; seconded by Clr. Lavin
MOVED THAT the meeting be adjourned at 8:55pm
MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Nicole Tillotson
City Clerk