

FINAL

**LEBANON CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL SESSION
MINUTES**

Thursday, November 30, 2021, 5:30 PM

Council Chambers or

Remote Via Microsoft Teams: [LebanonNH.gov/Live](https://lebanonnh.gov/Live)

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Tim McNamara, Assistant Mayor Clifton Below, Douglas Whittlesey, Jim Winny, Devin Wilkie, George Sykes, Karen Zook, Erling Heistad, Karen Liot Hill

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: City Manager Shaun Mulholland, Deputy City Manager Paula Maville, Executive Assistant Beth Beraldi, City Clerk Kristin Kenniston, Director of Planning and Development David Brooks, Human Resources Director Gloria Leskiewicz, Human Services Director Lynne Goodwin, Advance Transit Van Chesnut, Cyber Services Director Perry Eaton

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Mayor McNamara called the meeting to order at 5:33 PM.

2. **OLD BUSINESS:**

A. Review of 2022 Airport Budget: Not reviewed

B. Completion of Review of Capital Improvements Plan: Not reviewed.

3. **NEW BUSINESS:**

A. General Q & A – Proposed Budget:

The Q & A portion of the meeting began with questions from Council, followed by questions from the public. Councilor Whittlesey asked about the Miracle Mile improvements and whether or not they are general fund. City Manager Shaun Mulholland confirmed that some were written up for SRF loans. The water, sewer, and general funds are divided up. Assistant Mayor Clifton Below stated that with some major electric accounts, there were adjustments to raise the budget for next year. With many other accounts, there has not been an increase, though the intent is to try to manage anticipated increase in the overall budget. Assistant Mayor Below asked City Manager Mulholland if he was generally comfortable, at this point, with the budget levels for energy for current expenses. City Manager Mulholland indicated that the costs will be absorbed, and the budget will not increase.

Dialogue between Assistant Mayor Below and City Manager Mulholland continued. Assistant Mayor Below noted that the solid waste revenue year-to-date is lower than past years due to less volume. He succeeded that statement by asking if the landfill fund is well-enough positioned to continue to balance the budget, even with the reduced volume of waste and extra capacity reserves? City Manager Mulholland replied that though short-term, it hurts revenue, the less space that is used up now will leave the city better off and the city has planned accordingly. The next question from Assistant Mayor Below

was regarding the septage pilot project that was embarked upon a year or two ago and if it has proven to be successful. City Manager Mulholland clarified that it has been successful aside from a new competitor in Canaan with reduced prices. Despite the competitor, Lebanon is still bringing in revenue. No Councilor had further questions at this time.

The floor was opened to the public for questions and the following came forth to speak.

- **Sasha** (not a Lebanon resident but lives in the area). She is a co-chair of the Upper Valley DSA (Democratic Socialists of America). She was attending the meeting to discuss the DSA's budget proposal to reallocate funding from the Lebanon Police Department to health and human services. Part of her argument was that the police in America are part of a larger system that works to make the poor poorer and the rich richer. She said the current City Council is not representative of the most marginalized in the community and the budget should reflect values.
- **Helen (Ward 3)**: She was in attendance to voice that active members of the community have put together a proposal and have largely been disregarded. She indicated she feels insulted that the police budget is a 20% increase of what they are expected to spend and believes the community is ignored.
- **Rendi (Ward 1)**: Co-chair for the CareNotCops Campaign under the DSA. She explained she was there trying to gain support for their care of poor and marginalized people. She expressed that the group has brought adequate evidence to show how their proposal would be effective and asked if there would ever be anything they could for the Council to seriously consider their requests. The Council opted to respond to that question at the conclusion of public questions.
- **Katie (Ward 3)**: She was in attendance to discuss the "lack of adequate mental health resources in the community and how funneling money from the police department to mental health resources will be far safer for the community." She noted her view that when people are in crisis, law enforcement is called and violence results. She wrapped up her statement by saying the proposal should be taken seriously.
- **Rory (Ward 3)**: He spoke several times throughout this meeting. His first topics of discussion included his distaste for the process of the city's contract negotiation with the Lebanon Police Department, which he called "fundamentally corrupt". He expressed his animosity toward City Manager Shaun Mulholland being a part of the process due to his former employment as a police officer. His second topic of discussion was regarding the Lebanon Police Recruitment video. His issues with this video included its length, the tactical gear used, and the overall concept of recruiting law enforcement officials. He ended this portion of his commentary by stating that he is ashamed to be a part of the city and asked what the Council is going to do.
- **Mike Oeschger (resident)**: He spoke up to extend his support to the police departments of both Lebanon and Hanover.
- **Renee (Ward 2)**, She identified herself as the Director of the Grafton County Alternative Sentencing Program and a crisis clinician for West Central. She began by expressing that she works with various departments and has been honored to work with the Lebanon Police Department, calling them "one of the most trained and educated forces in mental health and de-escalation techniques." She explained that there is plenty of funding, and Council can allocate more, but the main problem is the lack of applicants. She called it a legislative and professional licensing issue coupled with burnout. She also expressed that as someone working in the field,

she would not be willing to enter the home of an individual in crisis without law enforcement there to clear the scene.

- **Rory (Ward 3)** re-approached the podium to assert that the police protect capital, not poor people, and that instead of arresting the poor for crimes, they should help them. He also conveyed his dislike for personnel records of law enforcement being private.

Council Discussions:

Councilor Karen Liot Hill was the first to speak to the concerns raised. She told the people they have been heard and their frustrations are understood but she is not prepared to make any drastic budget cut to the police department. She said that despite that, she does not feel that mental health resources should not be added; it is not an either/or but instead a both/and, citing that public safety is one of the biggest responsibilities the City Council has. Councilor Liot Hill explained that typically when police department budgets are cut, the first thing to be done away with is training. She completed this segment of her responses by saying she supports adequate and appropriate funding for the police and a police department that is an appropriate size for the community and that democracy is a challenge, but it is a challenge she is proud to be a part of.

Rory (Ward 3) approached once again and told the Council he does not want to be heard, he wants them to do something and says that the situation is, in fact, an either/or by its nature. He also said that this is not democracy.

Councilor Devin Wilkie was the next to speak and said they are a data-driven Council. He suggests the submission of a proposal in a traditional budgeting system to see where, within a budget, the money can be deducted.

Mayor Tim McNamara asserted that he is not willing to slash the police department budget by anything near 50%. He wants the most efficiency in all departments of the city, not just the police, and feels as though the city has worked to put in mental health resources. He also noted that he does not believe City Manager Shaun Mulholland is a conflict of interest.

Councilor Erling Heistad spoke up to voice his understanding of care of the needy but that need will exist regardless of the existence, or lack thereof, of a police department. He told the DSA that their issues need to be addressed individually and suggested taking apart their budget to decide what to do. He concluded his explanation by stating he believes City Manager Mulholland was the best fit for the position and has done the best job in it.

Councilor Whittlesey told the group that he would love to see more mental health services as a whole and that does not just include licensed mental health professionals. He stated it includes inpatient and outpatient therapy, PhD. level professionals, etc. Similar to Renee, he explained that throwing all the money in the world at mental health services would not force applicants. He also brought up the licensing and education required for the positions as a large systemic issue. As City Council, he explained, they see both sides but must be cognizant of the needs of the community without downplaying.

Councilors continued discussion regarding mental health services in the community, as well as general health and human services. Council also briefly touched on internal and external personnel investigations and the privacy of those. *Sasha, Renee, and Katie* all respectively approached again to thank them for the discussion and to give their last thoughts and pleas. **Rory** once again approached to say law enforcement protects capital and that they give an illusion of safety. He expressed his feelings that burnout in mental health professions is due to inadequate pay, not the nature of the job. He asserted that the spending of the

city does not represent the values of the community. Councilors once again reiterated their ideas and inferences and the discussions regarding the Lebanon Police Department.

Discussion transitioned to the revitalization of West Lebanon, including the Westboro Yard, Greenway, the Seminary Hill School, etc. Councilor Liot Hill wanted to inquire on the progress that has been made and where the city currently stands with it. City Manager Mulholland briefly updated the Council on each topic and discussion opened regarding the standstill with the Seminary Hill School, which was determined to be administrative and out of the city's hands, at the moment.

The last two issues raised were the environment and affordable housing. Affordable housing was ultimately decided to be a better topic for the next budget year due to the construction of many new units and the changes they will bring. The discussion regarding the city's sustainability initiatives focused mainly on whether or not the city is meeting its climate commitments. City Manager Mulholland confirmed that the city is meeting those standards and reminded the Council that a Greenhouse Gas Reduction Report is issued every April. While the Council is pleased with the climate commitments being met, they conceded that the city can be more transparent and explicit to the community about the steps that have been taken and will be taken for achievement.

4. ADJOURNMENT:

A MOTION by Councilor Winny to adjourn the meeting.

Seconded by Councilor Whittlesey.

****The MOTION was approved (9-0).***

The meeting was adjourned at 8:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Megan Mraz