

**24-045**  
**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**  
**MEETING REPORT**  
**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 2024 @ 6:00 P.M.**

Attendees: Council President Isaac “Zac” Bears; Council Vice President Kit Collins; Councillor Anna Callahan; Councillor Emily Lazzaro; Councillor Matt Leming; Councillor Justin Tseng; Annie Kelly, City Clerk’s Office; Chief of Staff Nina Nazarian; Pam Kelly, Director, Council on Aging; Medford Community Media Director Kevin Harrington; Veterans’ Services Director Veronica Shaw; other participants as noted in the body of this report.

President Bears called the meeting to order at 6:14 p.m. on April 17, 2024 in the Medford City Council Chambers on the second floor of Medford City Hall, and via Zoom. The start of the meeting was briefly delayed by technological issues. The purpose of the meeting was a preliminary budget meeting (Paper **20-045**).

President Bears thanked participants for attending. President Bears went over the calendar for the budget process. He also highlighted previous budget work. He said that this is the first-ever preliminary budget meeting. Tonight, several departments will present their budgets. He thanked the Administration for this new process. He said the Council also received Budget-to-actuals for quarter 2. He said we have had difficult budgets every year and this year is very challenging with the expiration of some federal funding looming.

Chief of Staff Nazarian thanked the Council. She said three department heads are here tonight. She said we are excited but we are still working on the budget. She said that there were no limitations placed on department heads. She said ARPA comes to a close on December 31. She said we are in a good place, all things considered. She said we are where we hoped we would be at this stage. She said it is reachable to close the budget gap. That presentation will come next week.

Councillor Tseng thanked the Chief of Staff and the Administration. He said he was looking forward to the discussion.

Director Kelly presented her budget. Her budget request is for \$275,226.29. She said this covers payroll and ordinary expenses. She said that there was a slight increase because of the increase for the clerical union and an increase in the RICOH contract and for office equipment. She said that there are almost 13,000 seniors in Medford. She said a goal is to reach younger seniors. She said over 191 days, she averaged 177 people per day, almost 34,000 participants over the year. She said that nutrition was the biggest focus. She highlighted her agency’s work over the year. She said she

wants to expand initiatives over the next year. She said her goal is to reframe aging to be about the journey and not the destination. She said she sees a need for future staff.

President Bears asked about an outreach coordinator job. Director Kelly said that this is a state-funded position. She said the office manager oversees the volunteers in the office.

Councillor Tseng said that there are so many good things happening at the Senior Center. He mentioned a recent birthday party. He said that there seems to be a lot of food donations coming in, and some donations coming in through grants. Director Kelly said she thought we could keep up with the level of food donations in the coming year. She said Mystic Valley Elder Services provides the congregate meal every weekday. She said Mystic Valley represents a number of different communities as well.

Councillor Leming said he enjoyed a recent birthday party at the Center. Director Kelly said that as people age out, she wants to have people to fill those spots.

Vice President Collins thanked Director Kelly. She said she hopes that the Council can remain supportive.

President Bears said it looks like about an \$8,000 increase from last year because of fixed costs in the union contract and equipment costs. He thanked Director Kelly for her work.

President Bears invited Medford Community Media Director Kevin Harrington to present his budget. Director Harrington said his budget is \$204,427.37. He said most line items are the same. He said that there is one increase from increased subscriptions. He said people can create programming on virtually any topic. He said the mission is to give access to community members. He thanked his team, especially Shane Colbert and John McLaughlin. He said we have co-op students from the high school as well. He said he lost Catherine Darnell to another position down the hall in the schools but that Sara Pandanza has been excellent. He thanked members and viewers. He said that the station is there for members. He said the station covered a number of community events, including the mayoral debate, which was a highlight. He said additional highlights were the MLK Day celebration and last year's commencement. He said the station updated equipment and other items. He said he was able to cut down the cache of items stored on its server and purge some unnecessary electronic goods. He said he hopes to upgrade the audio in the Chambers soon. He said he also hopes to upgrade some of the equipment in the Chambers.

President Bears asked if there were any requested items that might be requested in the future. Director Harrington said he would like to have an additional either part-time or full-time role. He said he would also like to upgrade the lighting in the studio. President Bears thanked Director Harrington for all his work.

Councillor Callahan asked how much funding comes from cable companies. Director Harrington said cable money is built into the budget and comes directly to the City. He said that Comcast alone contributed more than \$236,000.

Councillor Tseng asked about the Verizon domain used for the website. Director Harrington said that the Verizon site allows for live-streaming. He detailed other hardware and software used in broadcasting. He detailed requested upgrades related to these items. The total increases are about \$3,000.

Councillor Leming asked if any expiration to portions of the Open Meeting Law would impact Director Harrington's job. Director Harrington said that we would still be having these meetings in essentially the same way. He said that some of the meetings that are not on Zoom might have to go on Zoom and that this might present challenges.

President Bears said that the Council has its own rules about public meetings, as does the Administration, and said that the only thing that would change under state law is that virtually present Councillor would not count toward the presence of a quorum if that law were to expire, but they could participate remotely, and the Council could keep virtual access in its rules.

Vice President Collins thanked Director Harrington. She said that there have been a number of benefits. She asked what fund the cable fees come in through. Director Harrington said he would look into that. President Bears said it may be a question for the Finance Department.

Vice President Collins moved to request numbers on the PEG fees paid to the City by Comcast and Verizon (Councillor Callahan second)—approved on a roll call vote of six in favor, zero opposed, and Councillor Scarpelli absent.

Eunice Browne, Greenleaf Avenue, thanked Director Harrington, Ms. Pandanza, and Ms. Darnell. She asked when Council meetings will go to YouTube. She asked if it could be determined how many people are watching Video on Demand. She also asked if there was any thought given to outfitting other places across the city with technology so that more meetings could happen virtually or through technology if the

Council Chambers are occupied. She said that Rooms 201 and 207 were outfitted with technology at one point, as are rooms in the schools.

President Bears said that there can only be one YouTube account for each Zoom account. He said that this is his understanding of that bottleneck. Director Harrington said that President Bears was correct. He said that there is a way to determine who is watching VOD. He said he would reach out to other stations. He said he would try to get the most accurate number possible. He said that there are work-arounds in Room 207 to allow for technology. He said he would look into improving that.

Chief of Staff Nazarian introduced Director Shaw. She said that Department Heads are working on their budget narratives. President Bears welcomed Director Shaw.

Director Shaw presented her Department's Budget. She has only been here a few weeks and this is her first Medford budget. She said that there was a small increase in the personnel budget and everything else stayed the same. The total budget, expenses and personnel, is \$443,552.

Director Shaw says she has been here since the end of January. She said she is working to make the office completely ADA compliant. She said we lost 4 veterans last year but have gained 5 so far this year. She said she has been working with the Senior Center and MassHire. She said she is part of the Massachusetts Women's Veterans Network. She spoke about replacing flags at cemeteries.

Councillor Leming thanked Director Shaw. He asked what the biggest concerns are that veterans bring to her. She said that the top concern is money. She said she is working with several veterans who are or are about to be homeless. She said that housing is a huge problem and remains so. She said money and housing are the biggest concerns.

Vice President Collins thanked Director Shaw. She said she had no specific questions at this point. Councillor Callahan asked if there is a sense of how many veterans there are in Medford, and a breakdown by age. Director Shaw said that there were 1,982 veterans in Medford as of 2022. She said she would try to find the breakdown. She said we don't have as many older veterans. She said she has been helping younger veterans get their GI Bill benefits. She said she enjoys outreach to the community. She said that there is Veterans Cash Aid from state funds, which also includes funds for flag replacement.

Councillor Lazzaro thanked Director Shaw. She said she has particular interest in affordable housing and homelessness. She said that these are concerns in Medford.

Councillor Tseng thanked Director Shaw. President Bears said that the budget request for the Department was about \$7,000 more than last year. He said that at the very least it is our baseline.

Chief of Staff Nazarian said that the Administration is working on the Elections Department budget. She said that we are presently in a deficit. She said she is anticipating that we are in a deficit. She said that the recount was one of the reasons for that deficit. She said that the City had to pay for the recount. President Bears asked when the Council would get the Quarter 3 materials. Chief of Staff Nazarian said she hoped it would be this week.

Councillor Callahan moved to adjourn at 7:33 p.m. (Councillor Leming second)—approved on a roll call vote of six in favor, zero opposed, and Councillor Scarpelli absent.

President Bears adjourned the meeting at 7:33 p.m.