

CITY OF WHITEHALL
CITY COUNCIL BUDGET WORK SESSION MINUTES
May 19, 2025
5:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Tanya Cabala, Debi Hillebrand, Jeff Holmstrom, Steve Salter, Stephen Sikkenga and Tom Ziemer

ABSENT: Scott Brown

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Huebler, City Clerk Bourdon, Treasurer Seaver, DPW Director Armstrong, Chief Squiers, Lt. Detective Mahoney, Playhouse Manager Beaman

Mayor Salter called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Discussion Items

Fiscal Year Budget 2025/2026

City Manager Huebler provided highlights of the proposed budget for fiscal year 2025/2026 indicating that department heads were encouraged to trim due to the storm of 2024 and the financial impact. Funded highlights were presented in the General Fund: Fireworks Contribution, Senior Millage, MERS retirement funding. Items not funded included City Hall security cameras and ADA improvements; sidewalk repairs, park improvements, smart buoy request from White Lake Association.

Council discussed proposed changes related to police department staffing. Council Member Ziemer expressed strong concerns, referencing the City Manager's statement in last year's budget letter that staff reductions would be looked at starting with Chief Squiers' planned retirement in 2025. Ziemer stated he felt misled by the current proposal and objected to the wording used.

The City Manager clarified that evaluating departmental vacancies for potential efficiencies is standard practice. While the proposed budget does not eliminate a position, it reflects cost savings achieved through increased cost sharing with the schools for the School Resource Officer and lower salary costs associated with replacement positions. The City Manager also emphasized that any staffing levels are ultimately a Council decision.

Council Members Holmstrom, Cabala, Salter, and Hillebrand expressed support for the recommendations. Council Member Hillebrand added that regularly evaluating where the budget can be tightened is a sign of responsible fiscal management.

Cemetery Trust highlights included a new 60" mower that will be split with Parks. Major Streets highlights included the transfer to local streets; Marijuana fund included additional police audits. Brownfield highlights included due care reimbursement and Forest Hill Development; TIFA included West Colby, Tannery Bay Public access engineering, pass through and Lake St. sewer engineering. LDFA highlights included building reserve for street improvements and Playhouse sponsorship.

Capital projects included building reserve for street improvements and future street improvements which may change with the recent PASER recommendations.

The Playhouse Committee recommended \$50,000 for five years. The LDFA approved that amount in the current year and 90K for next year. TIFA has supported expanding the district to include the Playhouse in order to provide funds when necessary as it has done for the Marina. Huebler addressed a council member's recommendation to put Playhouse funding to a public vote, stating that such an approach was not advisable. He reminded Council that they were elected by the public to make policy decisions and allocate funding, and emphasized that it is their responsibility to exercise that authority on behalf of the community. Council member Cabala wanted to discuss more of the recommendations by the Playhouse committee such as more staffing and marketing.

Sewer fund highlights included pending capital needs and no rate increase; Water fund highlights included the water asset management plan, coating water tower #5, power washing tower #6, SCADA system, backup generator and service line replacements. A 10% water rate increase is proposed. Motor Pool highlights included the loader debt, a plow truck, sidewalk snowblower and 2 pickup trucks.

Council Member Cabala inquired whether any of the recommended energy efficiency measures had been included in the budget. City Manager Huebler responded that the more easily achievable improvements had already been implemented, while the costlier items were deferred to the capital budget. Cabala also requested that the City participate in the Senior Palooza with Fruitland Township for \$1,000; would like the City to donate \$1,000 to community garden; and student reps for \$2,000.

The Council made no recommended changes to the proposed budget.

Public Comment

Fire Chief Pete McCarthy spoke on behalf of Rebecca VanAntwerp and himself in support of keeping police staffing levels the same and commented on the excellent police staff Whitehall has.

Meeting Adjourned at 6:59 p.m.

Brenda Bourdon, City Clerk