UNION GAP CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MEETING
Council Chambers, City Hall
Union Gap, Washington
May 23, 2011

Call to Order	Mayor Lemon called the Study Session Meeting of the Union Gap City Council to order at 6:00 p.m.
Council Members Present	Council Members David Butler (6:05 p.m.), Dan Olson, Dan Vanover, Dave Matson, James Murr and Chad Lenz were present.
Staff Present	Dave Spurlock, Development Coordinator; Chris Jensen, Fire Chief; Robert Almeida, Police Chief; Karen Clifton, City Treasurer; Kathryn Thompson, City Clerk; and Dennis Henne, Public Works Director (6:20 p.m.) were present.
Audience Present	Erin Snelgrove, Carla Woolen, Curtis Santucci, Erick Delp, Bob Northcott, Tim Whitehurst, Fred Thomson, Stephanie & Joshua Murr, Bob Wilson, Jo Collier, John Hodkinson, and others were present.

Discussion Regarding 2011 Budget

Fire Department. The Fire Chief reviewed a 5-Year Budget History of the Fire Department handout distributed prior to the meeting. He pointed out that over the last three years the Fire Department has returned budgeted money, which means they have delayed critical issues in the last three years. He stated personnel costs are 81 percent of the Fire Department budget, but usually that number is 90–95 percent. The Emergency Medical Services (EMS) levy is on the November ballot. The projected 2011 EMS levy is estimated to bring in $99,000.

Council Member Matson questioned if the EMS levy is part of the property tax levy.

The Fire Chief stated yes.

Council Member Vanover commented the budget shows $65,710 for EMS and questioned if the $99,000 can only be used for EMS.

The Fire Chief stated yes, but part of the operations, maintenance, and personnel costs for EMS are mixed into other categories. He stated he is reluctant to recommend cuts at this early date because of needs that have not been met in the last three years and unanticipated costs such as repair of the bay doors, additional maintenance for the 13+ year old engines, equipment replacement costs for new staff, and payouts due to a personnel retention issue. He reviewed comparisons with Toppenish and Selah and explained there are vast differences in how the agencies operate. He stated Selah and Toppenish do not have a transfer population; Union Gap has a daytime population that increases dramatically.

Council Member Matson questioned how the increased daytime population affects the Fire Department.

The Fire Chief stated the number of responses directly correlates to the number of people in the City. Vehicle accidents, medical emergencies, and fires increase with the increase in population.

He stated in Toppenish, they run a 1 person engine and wait for volunteers to arrive and Selah is similar with 3 fire chiefs, 2 fire fighters, and 1 twenty percent full time equivalent fire fighter that shares eighty percent of their time in administration duties. The Union Gap volunteers augment the career members and cover the station from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.

Council Member Vanover questioned if the 15 volunteer staff are active.

The Fire Chief stated yes, and explained that volunteers used to be members of the community, but there are currently no volunteers from the community. The volunteers come here for the program and training they receive because most

want to be career fire fighters. He stated he is concerned about the program and the ability to sustain the program.
He then explained implications of budget reductions:

1. Delaying the need for capital outlay in facilities, apparatus and equipment. He informed the lifespan on an engine is 10-12 years and then departments put them in reserve. Our engines are 13 plus years old and are requiring increased maintenance due to age.

2. Violation of WAC 296-305 – Firefighter Safety. He expressed concern about personal protective equipment that is outdated, health and wellness medical exams not being performed, testing of equipment not being completed, and mandatory training requirements not being met.

3. Reduction in service levels (EMS Levy $99,942 – support of our customers). He informed the EMS levy will be on the November ballot and people are not likely to vote in favor of the levy if they believe their level of service will be reduced.

Council Member Vanover questioned if it is still true that we respond to Yakima more than Yakima responds to Union Gap.

The Fire Chief stated that is still the case, but our response to Yakima is less than 5 percent of the calls and Yakima has many more calls than we do overall. He stated he is meeting on a regular basis regarding automatic aid, which is different than mutual aid.

4. WSRB/ISO rating reduction resulting in increased insurance premiums for residents as well as commercial and industrial uses. He stated we would run the risk of having our insurance rating go up from a 5 to probably a 7 and every point the rating goes up equates to an 8-10 percent insurance premium raise, on average.

5. Continued recruitment and retention issues which compound the problem. He stated the retention issues are not related to relationships in the organization, but rather are related to the heavy recruitment going on in the state.

6. Automatic Aid Agreements with neighboring fire departments could be in jeopardy – minimum staffing of three, which will increase the need for staffing and facilities if not maintained. He stated automatic aid will be in jeopardy if we reduce staffing levels; automatic aid requires a minimum of 3 people on an engine.

He informed the Fire Department is not a revenue generator. He stated fire prevention fees, response recovery, and development impact fees would bring increased revenue, but they would also impact our businesses heavily. He stated he would be more comfortable discussing options later in the year when we have a better picture of revenues and expenditures.

Council Member Vanover requested the Chief keep an eye on the budget, do things as efficiently as possible, and minimize costs if possible and commented hopefully we come out of this economic recession sooner than later.

The Fire Chief stated that is every department head's responsibility.

Building/Planning Department. The Development Coordinator distributed a handout and informed he has two budgets, one for building and one for planning. He reviewed comparisons with Toppenish, Selah, Grandview, and Prosser by building development valuation. He pointed out that Union Gap is doing three times as much work with the same level of staff or less staff than the other jurisdictions. He explained that since he came last June all plan reviews are done in house so our revenue has doubled and we are looking to exceed that this year.

Mayor Lemon stated that does not include the sales tax revenue the new businesses bring in, that is just permit fees. He informed Fred Bruning wanted to meet with him last Friday to discuss the old Costco site, but Mr. Bruning called City Hall instead of his cell phone and he did not receive the message until Monday.

Council Member Lenz questioned if this budget is covered by permits.

The Development Coordinator stated yes, the building budget is covered by permits, but planning departments never generate enough revenue to cover the expenses. He informed there is 2.5 staff split between the two departments, but he could use the Administrative Secretary full time.

Council Member Vanover questioned if there is anything budgeted in planning that belongs in building.

The Development Coordinator stated it is not an exact 50/50 split, but you can't have planning without building.

Council Member Vanover questioned if appropriate fees are being charged on the planning side.

The Development Coordinator recommended the fee ordinance be amended, and stated the fees have not increased since 2000 and some of the fees are not covering the advertising costs.

The Council requested the Development Coordinator present a new fee ordinance at a future meeting.

Finance Department. The City Treasurer reviewed a memorandum that was previously provided showing the 2010 actual budget and the proposed 2011 budget. She informed the budget is really tight, but she will try to be more efficient and cut things if she can. She stated the budget should be okay because we usually have a Federal single audit and it does not look like we will need that audit this year.

Municipal Records Services. The City Clerk informed she provided a memorandum with the 2010 and 2011 budget attached. She stated there is not much in her budget and she could not find anywhere to cut without looking at staff and the Council committee asked the department heads not look at staff.

Municipal Court. The Municipal Court Judge stated he is reluctant to get too involved in the budget because of potential conflict; he does not want anyone to think he is ruling based on how much revenue it will bring into the court. He stated he knows this meeting is regarding cutting the budget, but he is concerned about insufficient security in the courtroom and is concerned about the two attorneys who have questionable people sitting right behind them. He stated the facilities are inadequate and the court is operating at a bare minimum. He commented a comparison was done with Selah, but you cannot compare Selah's court to Union Gap's court. He then reviewed some income figures and informed in 2005, 2006, and 2007 our cash income was $233,000 to $260,000 which was comparable to Selah. In 2008 a professional clerk was hired and our income rose to $333,000 and in 2009 when a second professional clerk was hired the income rose to $615,000. This year the court is projecting over $1 million cash, of which approximately 50 percent goes to the State. He stated there is more revenue to collect, but the clerks are so busy they do not have time to work the cases in order to send them to collection. He stated they need a ½ time person to work the cases and the money they collect would pay their salary. He stated he is also concerned about the clerks putting in long hours with no breaks and a short lunch on court days.

Mayor Lemon requested the Judge put something together showing the potential revenue from a part time hire.

Judge Northcott stated because it is collections the revenue will vary, but a flat quote from the court clerk was $1 million. He stated there are 500-700 new reports each day.

Council Member Vanover requested the Judge provide a proposal to the Council.

Parks Department. The Public Works Director informed the parks budget received a $1,500 grant to help with the summer youth program and improvements were made to the irrigation pump which should save about $8,000 in water bills. He stated they will be as diligent as they can with the budget.

Police Department. The Police Chief stated they have a lean budget, but they appreciate what they have and are trying to operate within the budget. He stated they have changed some of their procedures to reduce spending as much as possible and the officers have been cooperative and understand the need. He stated he appreciates the Council not looking at personnel cuts because we have dedicated devoted officers that are well trained and reduction of staff would have drastic impacts.

Council Member Vanover commented staff is not on the table; the Council is looking for cuts, but not staff.

Mayor Lemon questioned if the Police Chief is still applying for the COPS grant.

The Police Chief stated yes, but it is important that we put the word out that we are not cutting staff because that will have an overall affect on the community and safety of the community. He stated criminals tell each other not to come to Union Gap because they know they will be arrested and we need to maintain that level of service and support our officers. He also stated we have made some changes to how we jail people, but we do not want to keep that up long term.

Mayor Lemon agreed and stated otherwise this will be the place to commit crime. He also informed we have a faster response time than neighboring jurisdictions.

The Police Chief stated our response time is between 3 and 5 minutes most of the time, and reiterated he does not advocate losing any officers.

Mayor Lemon questioned if he mentioned losing officers because of the need to trim the budget by 5-10 percent.

The Police Chief stated yes, because cutting 5-10 percent of the budget would mean officers.

Mayor Lemon stated he is strongly against cutting officers also.

Adjournment

At 7:05 p.m. Mayor Lemon adjourned the Study Session meeting.

These minutes dated May 23, 2011 were approved at the Regular Council Meeting of June 13, 2011.

Jim Lemon, Mayor

ATTEST:

Kathryn Thompson, CMC, City Clerk