

CITY OF STERLING HEIGHTS
MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF CITY COUNCIL
TUESDAY, APRIL 13, 2021
IN COMMUNITY CENTER

1. Mayor Michael C. Taylor called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.
2. Mayor Taylor led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and Melanie D. Ryska, City Clerk, gave the Invocation.
3. Council Members present at roll call: Deanna Koski, Michael V. Radtke Jr., Maria G. Schmidt, Liz Sierawski, Michael C. Taylor, Henry Yanez, Barbara A. Ziarko.

Also Present: Mark Vanderpool, City Manager; Marc D. Kaszubski, City Attorney;

Melanie D. Ryska, City Clerk; Carol Sobosky, Recording Secretary.
4. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**
Moved by Koski, seconded by Ziarko, **RESOLVED**, to approve the agenda as presented. Yes: All. The motion carried.
5. **BUDGET WORKSHOP DISCUSSION**
 - A. **Presentation of Budget**
 - Budget Introduction & Overview**
 - Boards & Commissions Update**
 - Fire Department**
 - City Development**
 - Facilities Update**

Mayor Taylor stated this is the first of two special City Council meetings for the budget. They will be going over a number of items this evening and will have another special meeting in two weeks.

Mr. Vanderpool stated he is pleased to present the fiscal year 2021/2022 budget for City Council's consideration beginning with this evening's meeting and continuing on April 27, with formal final budget adoption on May 4. He

explained the proposed budget includes the addition of seven police officers, enabling the Police Department to have a larger presence in neighborhoods and commercial areas, as well as the ability to focus more attention on speeding complaints. He noted that the City still has 128 fewer positions than they had in 2008, which saves an estimated \$12 million annually. The proposed budget also includes funding for the City's first ever full-time Social Worker, and the position will work with city departments to address growing societal needs related to mental wellness, drug addiction, post-traumatic stress disorder and other needs, as well as collaborate regularly with agencies at the county, state, and federal level. Mr. Vanderpool stated the budget continues to fund major infrastructure improvements, including \$105 million for major road reconstruction during the upcoming season, and over \$5 million to fund sectional repairs and full reconstruction of over twenty-one neighborhood streets. He informed that in spite of the extremely rough year with the pandemic, the financial position of Sterling Heights is healthy and includes a sufficient fund balance to weather any unforeseen expenditures over the next few years. He stressed that property values across the city are robust, and the proposed budget helps to maintain and grow the value of these assets by reinvesting in neighborhoods with improved sidewalks, enhanced water and sewer infrastructure, more trees, improved local park amenities, increased community-oriented policing, and strong code enforcement.

Mr. Vanderpool stated that, as in past years, they have a number of budget presentations planned. He requested that if City Council desires any budget amendments regarding tonight's topics, they should indicate such after the presentations and after the Ordinance introduction. Administration will then formalize any suggested amendments with motions to be considered at the second budget hearing on April 27. All motions for any amendments will need to be voted on at the April 27 meeting, and that includes potential amendments from that budget hearing as well so they can be incorporated into the final budget adoption on May 4. He assured there will be time for questions from the audience and Council after the presentations. He invited Budget and Finance Director Jennifer Varney to provide details on the proposed budget.

Ms. Varney provided an overview of the proposed 2021 / 2022 fiscal year budget with the use of a PowerPoint presentation. She provided an update of how the City will be impacted by the American Rescue Plan of 2021, which was signed by the President on March 11. As part of that Act, approximately \$130 billion was allocated to local fiscal recovery, and approximately \$45 billion of that amount will be allocated to metropolitan cities under a modified Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) formula. Sterling Heights is estimated to receive approximately \$20 million in funding through the American Rescue Plan, with half of that to be received about sixty days after enactment, and the second half one year later, for the purpose of assisting cities with the ongoing financial impact from the Covid-19 crisis. She added it does not have to be spent until the

end of the 2024 calendar year, and she reviewed the allowable uses as detailed in the Act, noting there are still a lot of unknowns at this point, similar to what happened with the CARES Act. She indicated the best practices for allocating these funds is to take their time because they have nearly three-and-a-half years to spend the money, they need to be transparent, and she cautioned that the funds should not be used to supplement any ongoing expenditures because it is "one-time money".

Ms. Varney explained the total proposed City budget for 2021/ 2022 is \$230 million, which is broken down into five major fund types. The largest fund, which is the General Fund, totals \$115.5 million, or 50 percent of the total fund budget, followed by the Water and Sewer Fund, at \$56.9 million, or 25 percent of the total budget. She added Special Revenues, Capital Projects, and Debt Service Funds make up the remainder. The budget decreased by 7.8 percent, or about \$19.5 million, over last year, and she reviewed the major changes, including a decrease of \$15.2 million in the Facilities Improvement Fund, with all renovations anticipated to be completed in the current fiscal year. There is also a decrease in the Capital Projects Fund of \$14.9 million, with \$11.6 million carried forward in the current budget for the construction of a new Public Works building, anticipated to be completed this year. The current budget included the exterior finishing of the Library, Police Department, and the Court for \$1.4 million, and the CARES Act funded the installation of automated doors for \$700,000. She stressed the Capital Funds budget includes only the most critical requests. There

is a decrease in Major Road Construction of \$6.2 million due to the completion of several large projects in the prior year, and \$3.3 million of new projects are included in the proposed budget. She explained a decrease of \$1.4 million in Parks and Recreation Fund is due to the completion of the construction funded through the *Re*Creating Recreation millage, with the only project remaining and included in the proposed budget is the bocce ball court. Ms. Varney stated the decreases are also offset by increases in the Road Bond Construction Fund of \$11.4 million to fund the first phase of the Mound Road Construction, scheduled to begin this summer, as well as an increase of \$4.2 million in the General Fund and \$2.9 million in the Water & Sewer Fund also offset the overall decrease.

She noted the City's largest fund, the General Fund, is \$115.5 million, or over 50 percent of the total fund budget, divided into the City's eight departmental budgets. Nearly 65% of the General Fund budget funds are for Police, Fire and Public Works. She advised the General Fund budget increased 3.6 percent, or \$4 million over the last year, and she outlined the main variances. She stated \$2.1 million of that amount is due to increased wages due to contractual wage increases, and the addition of twenty full-time employees resulting from the citywide manpower study that was presented at Strategic Planning. She added \$1.8 million is due to an increase in the required contribution to the Police and Fire Pension Fund, and \$950,000 is due to an increase of 9.3 percent in health insurance rates, and although it is anticipated rates may come down next year, this rate increase is slightly offset by continued implementation of employee

premium sharing. She detailed some of the other increases, including a larger General Fund transfer to the Capital Projects Fund, an investment to convert all streetlights to LED, an increase in contribution to the General Employees Retirement Fund, and an increase in liability insurance. She noted the reductions of a lower General Fund transfer to Major Roads, and a decrease in overtime with the addition of full-time personnel.

Ms. Varney highlighted a few of the items in the proposed budget. She pointed out that the City has dramatically reduced full-time personnel over the past twenty years without a corresponding reduction in the level of public services being delivered. The City has undertaken many significant initiatives that has greatly benefited the community and a strong desire to take on more. The additional manpower recommended in this budget is critical to sustaining the success that has made Sterling Heights a leader amongst Michigan municipalities. She stated thirteen new General Fund positions are included in the proposed budget, funded through a small property tax increase that will cost the average homeowner about \$20 annually. She noted that four Water and Sewer positions are also included that will be critical in managing the proposed meter replacement project and the transition to monthly billing. These positions will add about \$6 annually to the average water and sewer bill. The proposed budget also includes the addition of seven police officers, funded through a proposal to transition jail services to Macomb County. Ms. Varney pointed out that, even with this increase in staffing, the City still has 128 fewer full-time

positions than in 2008, which saves an estimated \$12 million annually. She informed that, even with the new positions, the City's employee-to-resident ratio is 4 employees for every 1,000 residents, which is the lowest among the City's comparable communities. Ms. Varney talked about the project to convert the City's streetlights to LED, which is another step to a more sustainable community. The project has an initial investment of \$716,000, but is estimated to save \$175,000 annually in electricity costs, and with the rebates, it will pay for itself in less than four years.

Ms. Varney outlined the General Fund revenues of \$113.4 million, with 63 percent coming from property taxes. Total General Fund revenues increased by \$2.6 million, or 2.3 percent. Property tax revenue increased \$3.6 million due to an overall rise in taxable value of 3.5 percent; however, the inflationary increase most residents will see is only 1.4 percent, with the remainder of the increase coming from growth and home sales resulting in the uncapping of values. She explained the proposed property tax rate is increasing to fund the additional positions, as well as a return to the pre-covid operating millage rate. She advised the Police and Fire Pension millage is also increasing to cover the required contribution to the plan. Although state revenue sharing is projected to increase by \$580,000 from the current year, it is actually \$100,000 less than the amount the City received two years ago. Court fines are projected to be up from the current year, they will still be down over \$1.3 million from 2019 levels. She explained revenue decreases include \$4.1 million less in expected grant

revenue, due to the CARES Act money received in the current year, and continued reduction in investment interest of \$300,000. The proposed City millage rate for the 2021 tax year is 16.93 mills, and the average taxable value for a home in Sterling Heights is just under \$81,000, equating to a home with a market value of just over \$218,000. She added the annual city taxes on the average home would be \$1,371, which is an increase of \$58 annually, or less than \$5 per month. She showed a chart reflecting the City's tax rate as one of the lowest in Macomb County.

Ms. Varney stated the proposed General Fund Expenditures exceed the expected General Fund Revenues by \$2.1 million as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to impact expected revenues. She explained that property taxes are held to a 1.4 percent inflationary increase this year, and court fines, state revenue sharing, and interest income are trending below the levels anticipated prior to the pandemic. The City has worked to build up the General Fund Balance, and as of June 30, 2020 audited financial statements, General Fund Balance totaled nearly \$30 million, or 28 percent of expenditures. Due to the Covid-19 relief to the City through the CARES Act funding, about \$250,000 is expected to be added to fund balance in the current fiscal year ending June 30, 2021, and the proposed use of fund balance will reduce that fund balance to just over \$28 million, or 24.3 percent of expenditures.

Ms. Varney reviewed the Special Revenue Funds, involving nine funds totaling \$31 million, with the largest being Parks and Recreation, funded through

proceeds of the *Re*Creating Recreation millage and contributions from the General Fund. That fund totals \$8.9 million this year, which is a \$1 million decrease over last year. She explained that \$17.8 million, or 57 percent, of Special Revenue Funds are for the maintenance and repairs to the City's major roads and local neighborhood streets, and they receive funding from the Gas and Weight Tax Revenue (Act 51 Revenue) from the State of Michigan. She pointed out it has not increased at the rate expected prior to the pandemic. It is expected to be up \$600,000 from the current fiscal year but is \$400,000 less than projections made in February 2020. She explained the budget continues to prioritize investment in major road repair and reconstruction, and includes nearly \$17 million in expenditures, including the resurfacing of 14 Mile Road and Hayes Road, and the rehabilitation of Metro Parkway, as well as the first phase of the total reconstruction of Mound Road. Safe Streets Revenue continues to fund the repair and reconstruction of neighborhood streets, and \$7.9 million will be invested in neighborhood streets this year. She reviewed the remaining Special Revenue Funds, including CDBG, funded through federal dollars, Public Safety Forfeitures, the Local Development Finance Authority, the Indigent Defense Fund, and the Brownfield Development Authority, and she outlined the uses for these funds. Ms. Varney stated the Capital Projects Fund totaled \$19.1 million and includes the use of proceeds from road bonds, as well as \$5.5 million investment in capital projects, equipment, and vehicles. She outlined some highlights in the proposed budget. She stated the Debt Service Fund totals \$7.5

million and provides funding for the debt payment on outstanding road bonds, bonds for facilities renovations, and a new DPW building. She advised that voter-approved debt on the Fire Station is included and will be paid off in 2024. Ms. Varney talked about the three departmental budgets being reviewed this evening. City Administration is comprised of two divisions with 59 full-time and 9 part-time staff. Their budget totals \$11.4 million, and a slide was depicted showing the breakdown. This budget increased by \$1.25 million, or 12.3 percent, and she outlined the expenses, as well as their capital budget. The Fire Department makes up 20 percent of the General Fund Budget, and their budget includes 110 full-time and 6 part-time staff in three divisions. Their budget totals \$23.7 million, representing a \$500,000, or 2 percent, increase over last year, due to personnel costs. She outlined their capital budget expenses. The City Development Department comprises 5 percent of the General Fund Budget and is made up of five divisions totaling 46 employees. Their budget, which totals \$5.6 million and is comprised of five different divisions, increased \$380,000, or 7.3 percent, over last year, and she outlined the reasons for the increase, including the addition of a Civil Engineer, a Planner, and two part-time Code Enforcement Officers, as well as wage increases for members of the Planning Commission, the Zoning Board, and the Board of Ordinance Appeals. She added these commission members have not had pay increases in many years. She stated this concludes her overview of the proposed budget.

Mr. Vanderpool stated the next presentation involves the incredibly important volunteers who help run the organization. He explained they have a couple hundred volunteers who help in many events, activities, and initiatives. Approximately 140 of those volunteers are part of the City's formal boards and commissions appointed by the Mayor and City Council. They have been exploring ways to improve the administration of their volunteers, including training, recruitment of volunteers, more user-friendly software so they can keep their applications up to date, and new equipment for volunteers, etc. He invited Special Projects Coordinator Meghan Ahearn to give a presentation.

Special Projects Coordinator Meghan Ahearn provided an update on the City's Boards and Commissions Program. The City has twenty-six boards and commissions that are operated by staff liaison, along with volunteer members of the community. She explained their job is to advise and assist in carrying out functions of local government and to provide a critical reservoir of knowledge by community input. She talked about the influence these boards and commissions have on the community and outlined the specific benefits of each. She explained that City Council is responsible for appointing members to the twenty-six boards and commissions, and the City is also home to equally-important volunteer programs, which she briefly outlined. She stressed the work these boards and commissions do is important to continue to build a vibrant inclusive community that is safe, active, progressive, and distinctive. She provided some details of the makeup of their boards and commissions, which

involve 175 available seats, although there are currently approximately 9 vacancies. The current 166 seats are filled by 139 unique individuals, so some individuals serve on more than one board or commission. She stated they need to generate interest in the City's boards and commissions, noting the 225 applications currently on file only accounts for 0.3 percent of the eligible population of the City. Some of the problems include dated software, a lengthy application, the City website is not always consistent and up-to-date, and there is a limited member orientation program. She outlined some of the solutions to these problems, including the purchase of new software system, and to hire a part-time Boards and Commissions Management Service Specialist. She reviewed the benefits to the incorporation of the software and the hiring of a part-time position to oversee the boards and commissions and outlined some of the responsibilities of that position. She reviewed the timeline, adding they anticipate having that position filled in the next month, and they anticipate by August they will have the software built out and implemented. She concluded by pointing out that the Sterling Heights Boards and Commissions have a far-reaching impact on the community and provide a vast array of functions which improve the quality of life for all residents and businesses, so it is imperative they do everything possible to transform their current boards and commissions program into a more streamlined, efficient, and consistent model. She is confident that implementing the new software and hiring a boards and commissions dedicated staff member will provide them with the start of what

they need to properly and effectively organize the boards and commissions program. She added that the City generally recognizes the hundreds of volunteers annually at their volunteer banquet, which was canceled last year due to the Covid pandemic. She informed the City is making plans to hold it in October as long as the state guidelines allow for it.

Mr. Vanderpool thanked Ms. Ahearn for her hard work in putting this plan together. He felt this will make a big difference in how they administer, recruit, and train their board and commission members and their other volunteers. He stressed this has been a challenging year for the entire organization, but especially for the Fire Department. It took an enormous amount of work to get the vaccine centers up and running and making sure the community was in line with all of the Covid protocols. They also had all of the normal challenges, one of which includes dealing with the marijuana illegal grow operations in residential areas affecting cities across Michigan. He invited Fire Chief Kevin Edmond to make the presentation and added that Assistant Fire Chief Ed Miller will be contributing as well.

Fire Chief Kevin Edmond presented an overview of their Covid vaccination efforts and indicated they will be talking about the illegal marijuana grow operations they are experiencing. He stated he is proud of their members with regard to the Covid response, who have risen to the occasion. They have worked collaboratively with the Sterling Heights Police Department on the illegal grow operations to abate those issues. Chief Edmond stated they have increased both

antibody and antigen testing for Covid-19 to help keep their employees safe, and when vaccinations became available, they took the lead at the Senior Center, assisted living and nursing home facilities on the weekends, and the Lakeside Sears vaccination center. He explained the Senior Citizen vaccination center opened on February 24, and they estimate they have administered close to 5,000 vaccinations at that site as of this past Saturday. The vaccinations at the assisted living and nursing home facilities have been in partnership with the Macomb County Health Department. The Lakeside Sears vaccination center opened on March 31, and they have had great success. He stressed this has been a collaborative effort with the City departments, including DPW, Information Technology, Human Resources, County Health Department, and Silver Pine Medical Group. He added that Shelby Township partnered with them for the vaccination effort. He noted that from March 31 through April 10, they provided almost 3,400 vaccinations between their two vaccination centers. They estimate that between 15 to 20 percent of their population has been vaccinated, which equates to over 22,000 residents. He added they were able to do this with some of the CARES funding they received, along with another grant they received earlier in the year. Chief Edmond invited Assistant Chief Ed Miller to continue with the presentation.

Assistant Fire Chief Ed Miller reviewed some of the achievements they have had this past year, and the impacts going forward. They hired six firefighters with money acquired through the FEMA SAFER Grant. They have five ambulances

staffed 24 hours a day, although previously the fifth ambulance was only staffed by overtime. They also received a grant for health, wellness, and safety, so it allows them to put all firefighters through more health screening, as well as providing new exercise equipment to keep them in good shape. He outlined the capital purchases in process now are purchase of a fire pumper, replacing one from 1998 with 180,000 miles. He talked about their vehicles, gas monitors, and facility improvements, including concrete replacement at Fire Station No. 3, as well as maintenance and upgrades to Fire Station No. 5. He talked about their Fire Extinguisher Training Program, which will allow them to get into the business community and offer them fire extinguisher training without having to use current extinguishers that could cause damage or harm to the environment from the chemical powder. This method of training is much cleaner and can be done in all types of weather conditions and will be used at other events such as the Fire Department Open House. He discussed the MobileEyes Inspection Program, which enables electronic inspection reports, which saves a lot of time and paperwork and provides immediate feedback to the business owners about necessary corrective actions.

Assistant Chief Miller outlined the Safe Homes Initiatives, which they use for hoarding issues or marijuana grow issues, adding that having safe homes in the community is important to them. He stated the Fire Inspection Division is taking a proactive approach to address these problems. He informed that so far this year, there have been 340 homes that have been abated or mitigated for illegal

grow of marijuana, and that will impact the neighborhoods. He turned the presentation over to Chief Edmond.

Chief Edmond explained the process of replacing their Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA), noting they purchased 36 air packs in the last two years, and the remaining 25 air packs will be purchased over the next 18 months. He also outlined some of their other budget items, including cardiac monitors, the Stryker Power-LOAD system, the Fire Cadet / Explorer Program for juniors and seniors in high school, the Blitzfire monitor, and continuation of the accreditation process, and he explained the details of each. He concluded his presentation by reviewing a few of the maintenance issues included in the upcoming budget, as well as their performance objectives to help them move forward.

Mr. Vanderpool stated they appreciate the good work of the Fire Department. He explained they will talk about their City Development Department, focusing on their Safe Homes Task Force, which is all under the umbrella of their Sterling Heights Initiative for Neighborhood Excellence (SHINE). This initiative was developed many years ago, and the Code Enforcement Program is part of this. He stressed they want to make sure they are doing all they can to maintain strong property values in the community, and that their neighborhoods look neat, orderly, and inviting. He added they will also be talking about the social worker position, and he invited City Development Director Jason Castor to give a presentation.

City Development Director Jason Castor stated he will provide an update on some department changes they temporarily implemented and some that are still in place as a result of Covid-19, Small Business Relief Program, the Safe Homes Task Force, and also boards and commissions that assist the City Development Department. He stated that, while the staff maintains some presence in the office, they continue to work from home due to Covid-19. The remote desktop feature of those working from home allow the employees to have full access to their office computer, in addition to cell phones, allowing staff to receive and make calls from home as if they were sitting at their desk. Applications for permits can continue to be submitted digitally for Building, Planning and Engineering, followed up by virtual meetings with shared screens to discuss the project. He added that "Inside-Out" permits were a result of the restrictions allowing businesses to expand their presence outside their brick-and-mortar building, they have a quick turnaround, and can be submitted electronically to the Planning Department. He added that virtual inspections are also being done.

Mr. Castor addressed Code Enforcement, explaining the purpose is to eliminate blight, keep property values high and keep aesthetically-pleasing neighborhoods. He outlined the measures that took place regarding trash and debris in parking lots early in the Covid-19 pandemic, and as a result, 560 parking lot inspections were completed, with 154 conditions reports to owners, and 7 parking lots were set up for sweeping by Code Enforcement. The Board of

Ordinance Appeals meetings were canceled from March through June as a precaution against the spread of Covid-19, so the traditional violation notices and enforcements were replaced with warnings. He talked about tall grass violations and how they were handled. Through their effective process, about 97 percent of cases were resolved before the City contractor needed to abate the violation.

Mr. Castor explained the Small Business Relief Grant, which was created to help businesses struggling as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. He provided an overview of the program, which was open for applications from February 1 to March 5, 2021. He showed a breakdown of the 66 applications received, with the largest being the restaurant/dining/beverage category. He credited the aid of the Sterling Heights Regional Chamber of Commerce during the initial review and inspections. He added that about half are now in the grant agreement phase, and the goal is to help them with lost revenue.

Mr. Castor reviewed the Safe Homes Task Force, which commenced in late 2019 as the result of a dog hoarding case. They have handled 15 cases so far, with 10 of those still active. The hoarding cases require a lot of work from the Fire Marshall and Building. He stated they are not easily identified from the outside, and it is sometimes found by a medical event or brought to the City's attention by a concerned neighbor or friend. He explained the process and the different levels of hoarding, and emphasized the importance of social worker assistance, adding that hoarding is a mental illness, which is why the City is working on a

plan to form a public/private partnership for a full-time social worker to provide the assistance and follow-up to these cases, as well as assisting other departments in need.

Mr. Castor concluded his presentation with an update on the three boards and commissions that directly help them: Planning Commission; Zoning Board of Appeals; and Board of Ordinance Appeals. He explained their responsibilities and stated this year's budget includes pay increases for these boards, along with iPads and increased training for the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals members. The iPads will enable the members to review the case backup material and will be used at the meetings.

Mr. Vanderpool invited City Engineer Brent Bashaw to provide an update on the road program and the sidewalk program.

City Engineer Brent Bashaw presented the 2021 plan for road and sidewalk construction. He showed a map depicting the roads that will be under construction in 2021, as well as the five-year major road plan. He outlined the details of each road project, including the City's cost and the total overall cost. He stated the Innovate Mound project is the largest project of the year, which will start at M-59, south to 18 Mile Road. In 2022, the project is proposed to encompass the section from 18 Mile Road south to 14 Mile Road. In 2023, the project is anticipated to cover from 14 Mile Road south to 11 Mile Road, and restoration of non-paving items is planned to take place in 2024. He provided details on the local road reconstruction and outlined the areas involved, totaling

2.6 miles of local roads. He followed that with details on the sectional replacement program, where large sections of pavement are being replaced, and he outlined the areas involved, totaling 1.4 miles, noting that 4 miles of pavement will be addressed through both of these programs.

Mr. Bashaw provided an update on the progress that has taken place since the onset of the Safe Streets Initiative. He explained the number of roads in good condition has increased from 7 percent to 20 percent, and the positive trend will continue with the 2021 improvements. He showed a map highlighting the sidewalk network, and addressed the 2021 Sidewalk Construction plan, pointing out the areas that will be addressed this year. He provided statistics on the number of miles that have been completed over the last ten years, highlighting specific areas where sidewalk gaps have been filled. He explained that the City will be looking at improving pedestrian safety at a few locations, specifically at 15 Mile and Van Dyke, and at Dodge Park Road near Stevenson High School.

Mr. Bashaw informed that sidewalk costs have risen significantly over the last decade, with the low bid pricing in 2010 providing a cost of \$2.43 per square foot for four-inch sidewalk installation. In 2012, that cost rose to \$2.62 per square foot; however, in 2019, the low price rose to \$7.00 per square foot, an increase of nearly three times the 2010 cost. The cost for 100 feet of frontage rose from \$1,215 in 2010 to \$3,500 in 2019. He explained that sidewalk construction is the property owner's responsibility, and the City is proposing a policy change to the Safe Sidewalk Gap Program to serve the purpose of reducing the financial

burden on property owners. He outlined the proposed changes, including increasing the consent SAD loan term limit from a five-year period to a ten-year period, providing a low-interest rate on that term, providing low-income assistance program where nothing is due until the property is transferred, and providing an equitable financial cap on properties based on the increased cost seen over the last decade. He explained the cap is to ensure all property owners are treated fairly, and it would be set at \$5,000. He explained the City has another sidewalk program focused on the maintenance of the existing sidewalks, and recently interest was waived in the first two years of the loan. He added that will be offered in the Sidewalk Gap program as well.

Mr. Vanderpool stated they are excited about the roadwork being planned, and especially with neighborhood roads, when a new road is constructed, it vastly improves that street. He added residents take that opportunity to replace drive approaches, driveways, and sidewalks to further improve their properties. He stated the last presentation this evening is an update on all of the ongoing facility construction. He noted they completed the *R*ecreating Recreation Program just before the Covid pandemic, and all they have left is to construct the bocce ball court behind the Senior Center this year. They were just commencing the renovation project of the City Hall, the Police Department, the Library, and the 41-A Court Building, and in the first phase of constructing a new DPW building. He invited Purchasing and Facilities Maintenance Manager Jared Beaudoin to give a presentation.

Purchasing and Facilities Maintenance Manager Jared Beaudoin provided an update on the City Center Campus Renovation project, and he provided some of the history leading up to this point, including the issuing of the Capital Improvement Bonds to finance the renovation of the four facilities, to be repaid by the General Fund over a twenty-year period. The anticipated completion of all four buildings will be June 2021, with only minor punch list items to remain. He detailed the infrastructure improvements made during the renovation, including repair of structural columns, repair of loading docks, waterproofing and drainage systems added, metal siding, additional insulation, replacement of heating and cooling systems and controls, electrical improvements, LED lighting, plumbing improvements, technology upgrades, and security improvements at the Police Department and the Court Building. He showed photos depicting these improvements. He also outlined some of the final finishing touches added inside the buildings, as well as floor plan improvements. He added that the first phase of preserving and reinventing the City's Veterans Memorial has been completed with the relocation of the brick paver area to the Upton House walkway, and he outlined the improvements slated for the second phase to be completed before the Memorial Celebration this year. He explained the 2021/2022 improvement include a proposed five-year modernization project for the City's oldest elevators at City Hall, the Police Station, the Library, and the 41-A District Court Buildings, and he provided details. He concluded his

presentation, noting that the final phase of the three-year Senior Center roofing project will be completed this year.

Mr. Vanderpool stated this concludes the budget presentations this evening and thanked all of the directors and managers who presented and worked so hard to put their budgets together. He stated they are happy to address any questions the Mayor and City Council may have, and he reminded that the Appropriations Ordinance needs to be introduced this evening.

Mayor Taylor opened the floor for comments from the audience on the presentations, but there were no comments.

6. ORDINANCE INTRODUCTIONS

A. Mayor Taylor stated this is to introduce the fiscal year 2021/22 Appropriations Ordinance.

Moved by Sierawski, seconded by Taylor, **RESOLVED**, to introduce the Appropriations Ordinance for the 2021/22 fiscal year.

Mayor Pro-Tem requested that Mr. Bashaw explain the sidewalk gap program as it relates to the changes proposed.

Mr. Bashaw explained sidewalks are the responsibility of the property owners. The City has historically offered a Special Assessment (SA), payable over five years at a 6 percent interest rate. They are seeking to alleviate that financial burden through a series of steps, one of which is to provide a lower interest rate and increase the length of the SA to ten years. There was an option for those with financial hardship to not pay until the property is transferred, which has been offered in the past. The last step is to place a \$5,000 cap on the amount of

cost a property owner would be charged for sidewalk installation. He provided the example of a property owner that may be responsible for 300 feet of sidewalk frontage, and that cost would amount to over \$10,000 when using 2019 rates; however, that amount would be capped to \$5,000 for the property owner.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sierawski stated she appreciates that because she lives on a corner lot, so she would be in that situation.

Councilman Radtke questioned how many property owners would hit the hard cap of \$5,000 each year.

Mr. Bashaw replied that varies because with sidewalks along major roads, there are different sized parcels, so there is not a typical amount.

Councilman Radtke stated he has proposed in the past a plan that would generate a small tax to completely fund their sidewalk program, calculating that it would generate \$1 million per year at an average cost of \$20 per home. He pointed out that over a twenty-year period, it would cost the average homeowner about \$400. He understood that the City assesses about \$1 million per year.

Mr. Bashaw replied that is correct through the various programs, including the replacement program and the gap program.

Councilman Radtke felt if the City takes it over, they will not have to assess as much, adding that he receives calls from homeowners complaining about their

high assessments. He questioned a line item under the Capital Improvements budget for the M-59 Trail project.

Mr. Bashaw replied they had a study for the trail project from Dolby Road to Dequindre, extending to Utica Road, and the line item was for the City's share of that study, which is all they are doing at this point.

Councilman Radtke spoke to homeowners who abut Dolby Road and they indicated they would like sidewalks. He understands MDOT or the County is moving forward to make Mound Road a four-lane roadway to 17 Mile Road, and he questioned the reason. He added that he does not see the traffic patterns on Mound Road that would justify the four lanes. He claimed property owners on Mound Road are upset that it is becoming a four-lane road. He questioned what Mr. Bashaw's response would be to those property owners.

Mr. Bashaw replied it is a County decision. He clarified it is has been a talking point at their design meetings, and a vast traffic study was completed along the entire corridor, both for traffic now and anticipated traffic in the future, as well as safety improvements. They discussed how it will be laid out geometrically, and the traffic study came back indicating a fourth lane is needed to reduce congestion in the area.

Councilman Radtke stated he does not dispute it but questioned how much they are reducing congestion. He felt they are making it easy for people to drive through the community but he is more concerned that people come into the City to do business. Councilman Radtke questioned the Fire Chief on

clarification about having a Fire Extinguishment Division, but they only put out 240 fires last year. He questioned whether that is accurate.

Fire Chief Edmond replied affirmatively. He replied to inquiry the majority of their calls deal with crisis events that are EMS in nature, as well as auto vehicle accidents.

Councilman Radtke commented that he was surprised and pleased to find out from Ms. Varney that the City is receiving an 86 percent collection rate on EMS transport. He questioned whether they are offering the Cadet program to make it more of an Explorer program.

Chief Edmond replied that they are transitioning the program. Due to Covid and only offering this to four individuals, they would like to expand to high school students. Instead of having four people, they would like to expand to between twelve and twenty. They will be starting to advertise in Spring, and hopefully start something in August.

Councilman Radtke inquired as to whether they would like to keep all the funds budgeted for this item in their current budget, or whether they will be changing the line item.

Chief Edmond replied they would like to include the tuition reimbursement for the program and look at the \$65,000 that was in the part-time wages and see how much overtime it may cost to have instructors work with the Explorers.

Councilman Radtke commended Chief Edmond on doing a good job.

Councilwoman Ziarko questioned whether the Pension Fund is a voter-approved fund, and if so, when it was voted on.

Ms. Varney replied the Police and Fire Pension Fund is funded by Act 345 millage. The voters approved this in 1988 and it is not limited by the Headlee Amendment. The purpose is to cover however much the contribution to the Pension Fund cost, so it fluctuates with the required contribution.

Councilwoman Ziarko noted that the streetlights are being replaced, and questioned whether that is an agreement with DTE, or whether that is something contracted out through a bid process.

Ms. Varney replied DTE handles it, so it is a contract with DTE. They would come and replace all of the lights, and they will realize the electricity savings. She pointed out that DTE owns the lights so the City cannot contract that work out to someone else.

Councilwoman Ziarko commented that she knows the answers to a lot of the questions, but she felt the residents also need to know the answers. She noted the new software program being proposed to keep track of boards and commissions and questioned whether they will be able to transfer what they already have, or whether it will all have to be manually input.

Ms. Ahearn believed the contractor is going to help them transfer that information from their current file over to the new software.

Councilwoman Ziarko questioned how many boards and commissions are still meeting virtually.

Ms. Ahearn replied the majority of them are still meeting virtually.

Councilwoman Ziarko commended the Fire Department and the firefighters who stepped up to handle all of the vaccination centers. She hopes other people realize that this in addition to their other shifts, and although they are being compensated for their work, they could be doing something else. She found it remarkable that when they approached the firefighters about their willingness to do this, they had over seventy say they were willing, which speaks highly of the dedication of the Fire Department personnel. She recalled it being mentioned that approximately 22 percent of the Sterling Heights residents have been vaccinated, and she questioned whether that includes people who were not vaccinated at one of the City's sites.

Chief Edmond replied that number is an extrapolation of where the county and state are in different data metrics. He clarified that no one has an exact number, so they are looking at ballpark figures. They strongly believe they are at the 20- to 22-percent number.

Councilwoman Ziarko stated their firefighters are diligent, and it is amazing to see how they make calls to ask people to come in twenty minutes when they have additional vaccines, adding that people have been very cooperative in responding to those calls. Councilwoman Ziarko questioned what the City Council can do to help in the effort to suppress the illegal marijuana grows.

Chief Edmond stated they have about 340 houses they have abated, and another 160 that are in the process now. They have dedicated about \$1,200 since last

summer for that project, in collaboration with the Police Department. He added this is a problem all over the metro-Detroit area, and they are being very proactive. When they dedicate an inspector to that time, it is taking away from other responsibilities. He replied to further inquiry that is one of the dedicated inspector's primary functions. They get complaints from people in the area of these grow operations, and DTE points it out due to the high usage of electricity transformers that have malfunctioned in the area, adding that it has caused some brownouts.

Councilwoman Ziarko questioned whether there is a program they will be using as an example for the Fire Explorers or Cadets. She questioned whether it will be designed to be more theory, or whether it will be hands-on. She further questioned whether they would receive several weeks of training to know what a firefighter does.

Chief Edmond replied it is a model program across the country, and it provides the young individuals with limited education. They do not certify them for firefighting or EMS work, but they are exposed to it. They will work with the on-duty crews and ride-alongs. They will look into the possibility of them helping refill air bottles and change cylinders at the Fire Station as they go forward.

Councilwoman Ziarko understood it is a lengthy process, and she appreciates that they are undertaking that task. She commended Chief Edmond for doing a great job, especially in such a short time. She questioned how many Inside-Out

permits have been issued, and whether the same program is in place for this year.

Mr. Castor replied they had a handful of these applications last year, but they anticipate additional interest in the program this year. They have had some put them up and have already taken them down when restrictions were lifted. They have seen some high-quality work the businesses are putting into these outside areas. Mr. Castor replied the program is scheduled to continue while they are under these restrictions. It is currently active under the City Emergency.

Councilwoman Ziarko requested explanation of the grants for businesses and the fact that the City did not set up the criteria.

Mr. Castor explained the money provided is to the Community Development Block Grant Fund, and there are a lot of stipulations that go along with it. He indicated they have to be low- to moderate-income, so if the business retains low- to moderate-income employees, they would qualify. He stated the City does not have control, but they have to make sure once they provide the money to the business, there is no chance of the federal government auditing the City.

Councilwoman Ziarko requested that the Council be kept updated on how many of these businesses are awarded money.

Mr. Castor assured he will keep them updated.

Councilwoman Ziarko noted that northbound Schoenherr is going to be closed for a "short time", and she inquired as to an estimate of how long that will be in place.

Mr. Bashaw replied he has heard four weeks, but it could be less. He offered to get back with that information after he talks to the project engineer.

Councilwoman Ziarko inquired as to the coordination it takes between the City, County and State with regard to their road projects. She has been asked whether they talk to one another to see if they coordinate so all of the roads going in the same direction are not being worked on at the same time.

Mr. Bashaw replied they have an annual coordination meeting with the City, County and State. They try to forecast their road projects, and he cited the example of the Metro Parkway project, starting at Van Dyke and heading east toward Dodge Park, which was originally slated for next spring; however, because Mound Road will be worked on near Metro Parkway at that time, they did not want the double closure so they moved the Metro Parkway project up to this year.

Councilwoman Ziarko questioned how often the roads get rated. She questioned whether there is anything they can do if residents are complaining that their road is not on the list.

Mr. Bashaw explained the roads are rated annually. He stated they have 289 miles of roadway, and each fall after the road construction projects are completed, they rate the roads. He stressed it is important to rate them each year, because while some may be deteriorating, they may still have a few years left before it will be redone. He added that they work with DPW so they can coordinate an intermediate repair when necessary.

Councilwoman Ziarko questioned when it is referred to as a “completion of a sidewalk gap”, whether that means it is all on one side of the street.

Mr. Bashaw cited the example of 18 Mile, between Van Dyke and Mound, which was completed last year, and he indicated that is only on one side of the road.

At some point, pedestrians may have to cross a road to complete their trip, but it may not always be on both sides of the road.

Councilwoman Ziarko questioned whether a sidewalk section can be adjusted in height if it is uneven but there is nothing else wrong with it.

Mr. Bashaw replied homeowners have the option of mud jacking to try to even it out; however, there are different opinions on how long it lasts. He replied to further inquiry they can hire their own contractor to fix their sidewalks. He replied to further inquiry that there is a five-year warranty if the City’s contractor does the work, and if there are tree roots pushing up that sidewalk, it is a ten-year warranty.

Councilwoman Schmidt noted that the presentation and information is for the Sidewalk Gap program. She understood the difference between the Sidewalk Gap and Sidewalk Replacement programs is that the latter is when a property owner has a slab or slabs of their existing sidewalk that need to be repaired or replaced. She questioned whether the same loan program is in place for those property owners.

Mr. Bashaw replied they offer a Special Assessment for either program; however, the length of the loan for the Sidewalk Replacement program is 5 years at the

current high rate, but they waived interest for the first two years. Homeowners have the option of joining in the Special Assessment District and joining a payment plan, or they can pay up front.

Councilwoman Schmidt questioned whether the ten-year loan at prime would apply to the Replacement program as well.

Mr. Bashaw replied the Replacement program is for five years, whereas the Sidewalk Gap program is proposed to be extended to 10 years. The Replacement program generally creates less financial burden on homeowners, at an average cost of \$833, whereas the Sidewalk Gap program can result in much higher costs.

Councilwoman Schmidt questioned whether those participating in the Sidewalk Replacement program still have the opportunity for a low-interest loan for five years.

Mr. Bashaw replied affirmatively. He replied to further inquiry that there is no cap on the amount for the Replacement program, but they are proposing a cap for the Gap program.

Councilwoman Schmidt inquired as to why they got rid of the Jersey turn on 14 Mile Road.

Mr. Bashaw replied that is under the jurisdiction of the State. They got rid of one on 15 Mile Road, and the City was supportive of that.

Councilwoman Schmidt requested more information on the Police and Fire Pension Fund and inquired who sets that amount.

Ms. Varney replied every year they have an actuarial, and the Police and Fire Pension Board contracts with that firm. She added they are currently using the services of Gabriel Roeder to calculate the value of the pension fund, how much is owed, and they take into consideration the assumptions. They come up with the liability, similar to a mortgage paid over a certain number of years. She pointed out that number of years decreases every year, so it is determined by an actuary. It is a required contribution for a pension fund.

Councilwoman Schmidt clarified that when residents see that on their tax bill, that is not an amount set by the City or Council, but it is set by the Pension Board through the actuaries, and the voters of Sterling Heights in 1988 gave them the authority to do that.

Ms. Varney replied that is correct. She clarified the City has some control over the growth of the liability, and the City has done a lot over the last five to ten years to reduce that liability, noting they have reduced the multiplier, and the portion of pay that can go into final average compensation. The actuarial determines the amount owed, but through labor contracts and negotiations, the City can have an impact on the amount of the liability and how much they owe on each person's pension.

Councilwoman Schmidt recalled board and commission applications were always processed through the Clerk's Office. She questioned whether the new part-time position will be through City Administration or Clerk's Office, and she further inquired as to why if it will now be through City Administration.

Mr. Vanderpool replied that historically, boards and commissions have been administered through the City Clerk's Office, and they still anticipate that will be the case; however, the Project Manager will oversee the overall program, and the position will report to her.

Councilwoman Schmidt stressed it is important that the members of the Planning Commission, Board of Ordinance Appeals, and Zoning Board of Appeals receive the extra orientation. She felt it should be for all members because laws and ordinances change. She questioned whether they intend to change the application before they switch to the new program.

Ms. Ahearn replied she has started working on the revisions they will be making to the application, but the new application will not be available until they have the new software.

Councilwoman Schmidt thanked Ms. Ahearn for all of her hard work. She commended the Fire Department's proactive approach to the marijuana illegal grow operations and the hoarder situations, in addition to having to deal with the Covid situation. She added she is excited about the Cadet program, and it will provide a great opportunity for the youth who want to pursue a career as a firefighter or paramedic. She also felt it will be a great aid in helping to recruit firefighters. She is pleased with the involvement of a social worker, and she commended the Fire Department.

Councilwoman Koski complimented Ms. Ahearn and felt the implementation of a new part-time position for the overseeing of boards and commissions will be a great program. She inquired as to whether it will start in August.

Ms. Ahearn replied they hope to have the person in place prior to August, and they are actually looking to have that person hired within the next month.

Councilwoman Koski inquired as to whether Ms. Ahearn will be rewriting the application.

Ms. Ahearn replied the applications will not be complete rewritten but they are being revised, noting there is a lot that can be cut out and streamlined. She replied to further inquiry that they will have about five choices listed on the application.

Councilwoman Koski inquired as to whether the application will include their personal experience and what they can bring to the table, as well as their interest if they do not have any background related to a specific area.

Ms. Ahearn replied they are hoping that they will be able to allow the applicants to add a resume. She noted that question will be on the application that will be fillable online.

Councilwoman Koski questioned whether this new part-time person will be soliciting board and commission members and volunteers.

Ms. Ahearn replied they are doing an overhaul on their recruiting efforts, so they will have more information coming out on that endeavor.

Councilwoman Koski commended Ms. Ahearn for doing a fantastic job. She is excited that they are going forward with the Fire Cadet program and she inquired as to whether they can add an EMT.

Fire Chief Edmond replied the first thing they want to do with the Fire Explorers is to bring in students that are already in an EMT program in other schools. They can grow in the future, but he would like to bring in the twelve to twenty students, reaching out for diversity, and use their younger staff to be role models for this program. He replied this will be like a social club, or after-school extracurricular activity, and as they are brought into the organization, they will be working with them on nights and weekends to experience the Fire Department and also participate in the EMS function. He added some of the students already enrolled in the EMT program at the different high schools will benefit from that experience in working with the staff.

Councilwoman Koski inquired as to whether there are other scholarships that may come from their Community Foundation Program.

Chief Edmond replied affirmatively, adding that part of the Cadet Program has some tuition reimbursement set aside, and they will look at the members in the program and who would like to go further with their education. He informed that to work in the State of Michigan as a career firefighter, Firefighters 1 and 2 are needed, and in Sterling Heights, they also need paramedic training, so they need to do the EMT training.

Councilwoman Koski questioned whether the Fire Department needs help on the illegal marijuana grow operations.

Chief Edmond replied that it is a big question and he is only thirty days into the job. He added they need to do more research, but they have 320 homes that have been abated since last summer, with another 160 they are working on in collaboration with the Police Department to resolve the issues. He assured he will let the Council know if he needs assistance.

Councilwoman Koski asked for information on the Power-LOAD system.

Chief Edmond replied it is a device that goes on the floor of the ambulance, and the cot engages into it; as a result, firefighters do not have to lift the patient. He explained the biggest risk they have is loading and unloading patients, referred to as "cot drops", although they have not had too many in their organization. He clarified their stretchers are called Power-Stretchers, and they have batteries and motors in them that hydraulically lift and lower those units. When they are placed in the ambulance, there are wheels and a hook mechanism that catches on the floor in the back of the ambulance. The individual at the foot of the cot has to hold the weight of the patient and push the button to retract the wheels to put the patient in. The Power-LOAD system allows them to engage into that system, and they no longer have to support the patient's weight.

Councilwoman Koski inquired as to whether each ambulance will have one of these lifts.

Chief Edmond replied that will not occur in this current budget, noting they only have two in the upcoming budget. The two vehicles that will have this equipment will be the two highest units, although he would like to see them in all five units.

Councilwoman Koski inquired as to how long the vaccination centers will remain. She additionally asked whether the vaccines are strictly for Sterling Heights residents.

Chief Edmond replied they know that for the next eight weeks, they will be in operations, and are looking at the possibility within the next couple of weeks to do some upscaling to provide more vaccinations at that site, although that is based on vaccination supply. It was originally anticipated it would be in place for a six-month window of operation; however, that was speeded up so more people were vaccinated sooner.

Councilwoman Koski inquired as to whether they are concentrating on Sterling Heights residents at the Senior Center.

Chief Edmond replied that has been their primary mission. He replied to further inquiry that the vaccines are still by appointment and they work diligently to not waste any doses. They have no-shows because people will place themselves on multiple wait lists, so they try to use all of the doses they receive every day. He credited Parks & Recreation for the great job they have done assisting in this. He advised that any Sterling Heights resident who wants to be vaccinated still has to go to the Macomb County website to schedule their appointment at either

the Senior Center or the Lakeside Sears site. They can call SMART if they have a problem.

Councilwoman Koski inquired as to whether they talked about partnership with any other organization as far as the social worker and the Safe Home Task Force. Mr. Castor replied the idea would be to partner with an entity that specializes in social workers so they can help with the follow-up phone calls and assistance to these residents.

Councilwoman Koski questioned if Mr. Castor has been involved with the Planning and Zoning training.

Mr. Castor replied he is familiar with it.

Councilwoman Koski questioned whether they have sidewalks leading to the five major parks.

Mr. Bashaw replied that is something they target when they look at gaps for completion. Parks and commercial areas can be points of destination.

Councilwoman Koski noted that is her major complaint is the south side of Clinton River, from Hayes to the Hanson Trail leading to Dodge Park. She noted there is a sidewalk gap along a couple of properties. She stated the typical lot widths are sixty feet, eighty feet, and one hundred feet. She inquired as to what it would cost to put in a 100-foot sidewalk.

Mr. Bashaw replied that, based on 2019 pricing, it would cost about \$3,500 for construction.

Councilwoman Koski felt the largest lot would be 100 feet, so she felt the cap should be no more than \$3,500. She felt it would be easier to complete the gaps. She felt the cap should be based on the average largest-sized lot. She liked the idea of lower interest rates and spreading the payment out over a longer period of time. She emphasized she would like to see the sidewalk gaps done.

Councilman Yanez questioned whether the revenue-sharing of \$580,000 is statutory.

Ms. Varney clarified it is \$580,000 more than the current year; however, it is \$100,000 lower than two years ago. She replied to further inquiry they still get personal property tax reimbursement but it is compared to the 2013 amount, so the growth has not been captured since that date. She noted the millage rate is also capped, so it is based on 15 mills.

Councilman Yanez questioned whether they are still receiving personal property tax reimbursement to help pay for emergency services.

Ms. Varney replied affirmatively, noting they get reimbursed based on their loss. She explained the process, noting that occasionally they will receive extra, and that comes in May; however, it is not guaranteed so that money should not be budgeted because it is questionable. The personal property tax reimbursement is around \$4 million a year, and that is budgeted.

Councilman Yanez inquired as to the percentage of statutory revenue sharing they are receiving from the State.

Ms. Varney replied that she does not know that percentage.

Councilman Yanez stated he is pleased with the amount they are collecting for ambulance transport. He inquired as to the amount collected and how that equates to profit and loss.

Ms. Varney replied they collect approximately \$3.5 million in revenue. She explained that, including the six firefighters they hired, they are breaking even, and for the current year, she is forecasting a net return of approximately \$300,000 to the good. She noted that as firefighters pay increases and costs increase over a ten-year period, they basically break even. She explained the vast amount of this money billed comes from insurance companies, and the City has heard from Accu-Med that their collection rate is so high because their firefighters do a very good job filling out the required reports.

Councilman Yanez felt it is great to hire a social worker, and he inquired as to whom that person will be reporting.

Mr. Vanderpool replied the social worker will be centralized in the Police Department, likely reporting to a lieutenant. He added the position will be highly collaborative, and there will be a lot of interaction with many different city disciplines, including Code Enforcement, Fire Department, Police Department, Parks and Recreation, and others who deal with challenging situations. He replied to further inquiry that they have a dedicated revenue source for this position, so although it will be budgeted in the Police Department, it will not displace existing funding from the Police Department.

Councilman Yanez inquired as to whether that individual will be determining their own duties and responsibilities.

Mr. Vanderpool replied they have a job description that will evolve as time goes on because it is a new position. He explained they know what they are dealing with on the Safe Homes Task Force, and he provided examples.

Councilman Yanez stated he receives occasional complaints from people that they have to dodge branches when walking on city property. He questioned who reviews the City's properties, adding that if it were a private property, it would be a violation.

Mr. Castor replied that if they are notified of a city sidewalk path that has overhanging branches that are of a concern, either DPW or Parks and Recreation has the equipment and manpower to go out and trim the branch.

Mr. Vanderpool explained that DPW routinely inspects retention ponds and fencing, and if there are areas with dilapidated fencing, it is added to a schedule to be fixed. Parks and Recreation has a similar process where they go through the trailway system, and if there is anything that needs to be done, they schedule it. They also have a tree-trimming program in rights-of-way, and that abuts City-owned property as well. In most cases, they have programs, but in some cases, they appreciate residents bringing it to their attention.

Councilman Yanez appreciates the work Mr. Castor's team does to keep the City looking nice. He complimented the Fire Department for the good job they are doing with the vaccinations. He questioned how much the Power-LOAD weighs.

Fire Chief Edmond replied it weighs approximately 55 to 60 pounds, including the hydraulics. He explained how the lift works.

Councilman Yanez understood they are placing these lifts on the two ambulances that have the busiest runs, but he expressed concern about back injuries for those firefighters on the ambulances that do not have these lifts. He questioned whether they have had reports of back injuries lately.

Chief Edmond replied they have had back injuries but he cannot provide specifics because he has not looked at it closely in the 35 days he has been in his position. He replied these loaders aid personnel in reducing injuries, and most EMS agencies that have put them in place have small reductions in workers comp claims. He agreed that it can be costly to have someone off for a back injury, depending upon the type of injury and the extent.

Councilman Yanez understood that the majority of the marijuana grow operations are in residential areas.

Chief Edmond confirmed the majority are in residential areas. He replied that they know there are more, but he cannot provide a set figure because it is something they are chasing. He replied they have had three fires within the last twelve months that were strictly related to the marijuana grows. They have had fifty electrical incidents, or fires, for DTE equipment that has been related to the grow operations. He replied to still further inquiry that he would have to do some research as to whether anyone was injured or died in any of these fires.

Chief Edmond replied that illegal grow operations can be hazardous to their personnel.

Councilman Yanez inquired as to the ratio of extinguishment versus inspection with the 110 full-time personnel in the Fire Department.

Chief Edmond replied that their Inspection Bureau is currently staffed with five Inspectors and the Fire Marshall.

Councilman Yanez inquired as to whether they were able to do all of their city inspections last year.

Chief Edmond replied no and added that he does not have the exact number but noted they fell short "by quite a bit". He explained that since they have collaborated with the Police Department on the residential marijuana grow operations, they have had 1,200 hours invested in an individual dealing with these grow operations since June or July 2020. He replied to further inquiry that it is the equivalent of a full-time person, and he can provide that dollar figure once he talks with the Finance Department.

Councilman Yanez understands that when someone modifies a home for a marijuana grow operation, it takes a lot of power.

Chief Edmond replied that is true because they have additional lighting equipment, as well as cooling devices. He replied to further inquiry that there have been occurrences of those individuals stealing electricity, and in three of the cases, they were stealing water for their cooling operation.

Councilman Yanez questioned who is responsible for the stolen water.

Mr. Vanderpool thanked the Mayor and City Council because they have authorized the City to go to Circuit Court on a lot of these cases under a blanket resolution. They go directly to Circuit Court, and he thanked the City Attorney and his legal team who are very involved with these cases. If they can substantiate the stealing of electricity and/or water, they work with DTE and their Water Department to pursue the appropriate criminal charges in those cases. He stated it is a very collaborative and intensive program and is a model in the State. Mr. Vanderpool replied to further inquiry that the City pays for the water initially but they seek criminal charges to recoup their costs.

Councilman Yanez questioned how much this process costs in legal fees.

Mr. Vanderpool replied that they can provide Council with another comprehensive update on their costs to date, but they have provided some updates. He stated there is a lot of costs involved to shut down 300 illegal grow operations, and it is an inherent problem across the region. He agreed there is a cost for them being very proactive, but it is critically important for the community.

Councilman Radtke questioned whether they can hold property owners responsible for leasing the residential homes where there are illegal marijuana grow operations.

Mr. Kaszubski provided some information about the program, acknowledging that, while Circuit Court action is involved in the more serious situations, the City has taken a unique approach to attacking this problem, and other communities

are starting to model this approach because of its success. They work with DTE to identify the high electrical usage, and DTE has been good at assisting them in shutting off the power in these homes. Without power in these homes, the issue goes away because they cannot grow the plants. Through the Fire Marshall, they have been able to modify the code so they limited the amperage to a home to 200-amp panels as opposed to the 320-amp commercial panels they have been seeing. This limits the ability to have the electrical power going to the home to run the lights, fan systems, and cooling systems. There is an appeal process if someone can show the need, but other than that, they have taken away the ability to have the optimum grows. He clarified they do not want to infringe on anyone's rights to grow under the recreational marijuana laws, because anyone in the State over 21 can grow twelve plants in their home, and that cannot be stopped. He indicated they want to stop the mega-grows, which destroys the houses. He advised that of the 300 homes they shut down, they only had to file 50 lawsuits, and of those, almost all of them have been resolved before they went to court. Each home they have shut down has had a dramatic positive impact on the residents of Sterling Heights. Other communities that have tried to do it in a different way have not found success, even those that have legalized it, because black market marijuana grow operations are not impacted and they continue. He cautioned it is difficult to enact ordinances that take away rights under the 2008 law because it is preempted, so all they can do is deal with the secondary effects which is what they are doing under this program. He added

that Shelby Township, Macomb Township, and Warren are all looking at the City's program. He expressed confidence in their program, and he felt it is having a major impact.

Councilman Radtke questioned what is being done about habitual offenders operating a black-market marijuana business and whether they can pursue charges.

Mr. Kaszubski replied that the former prosecutor had indicated they would not be taking the marijuana cases so they would have to be prosecuted locally. He explained that Mr. Lucido is currently looking at the program and what they will do in the future. He is hopeful in their meetings with the prosecutor's office that they will start giving some parameters as to what can be brought to them. Mr. Kaszubski emphasized that it is a county- and state-wide issue that is not getting fixed.

Councilman Radtke compared it to fireworks, where the problem is put upon the local communities with no guidance. He inquired as to the maximum penalty the City can assess for someone constantly violating the City's ordinance.

Mr. Kaszubski replied he believes it is \$750, but he would have to check it.

Councilman Radtke questioned whether that amount could be raised.

Mr. Kaszubski replied affirmatively.

Councilman Radtke stated he hopes that, without objection, Mr. Kaszubski can come back and give them some tools to go after the habitual offenders and help the City recoup some of their costs. He pointed out it is costing a lot if they have

one Fire Inspector devoted to this. He agreed peace in the neighborhoods is important, but it is also important to get their costs back. He questioned whether they will be hearing from the Planning Commission in these presentations.

Mr. Vanderpool recommended if there is a specific question, it can be asked tonight because Mr. Castor is the Director, and the City Planner is the direct liaison.

Councilman Radtke thought it was proposed but not yet budgeted to look at all of the City's zoning laws and Master Plan. He questioned whether they could use the same consultant who worked on the North Van Dyke project. He would like to see this done soon because he felt their ordinances do not quite relate to how things are currently done, and he provided the example of a zoning for parking that only affects one parcel in the City. He felt that update may result in fewer Zoning Board of Appeals cases.

Mr. Castor explained that when hiring a company to review the Master Plan, the City went through an RFP process for selecting the consultant for the North Van Dyke plan. They could look to modify the current agreement to add additional work, noting they have been very good to work with. They can look at zoning changes and master plan upgrades.

Councilman Radtke recalled talking about looking at their ordinances. He cited some examples.

Councilman Yanez questioned whether they reviewed the manpower study for the Fire Department, and whether it looked at how many Fire Inspectors a city of this size should have.

Chief Edmond replied he has briefly reviewed it, but the manpower study looked mainly at operations for Fire and EMS. He stated they can look at through the accreditation process.

Councilman Yanez inquired as to how many retirements are anticipated this year.

Chief Edmond anticipated they will be looking at two retirements and possibly a third. They will have to replace two firefighters, so that will be a total of four replacements. He replied to inquiry that the maintenance contract for the Power-LOAD is similar to an extended warranty, which extends the warranty out seven years.

Councilwoman Ziarko inquired as to whether SAFER Grants are renewable after the three years.

Ms. Varney replied they are not renewable to her knowledge, but she added the City received a second one through a second application process.

Mayor Taylor thanked all of the directors, managers, and employees for putting these presentations together, and he appreciated all of the questions asked by his colleagues. He also thanked Mr. Vanderpool and Ms. Varney for the information. He informed there will be a second budget meeting two weeks from tonight, on April 27, 2021, at 6:30 p.m.

Yes: All. The motion carried.

7. **COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITIZENS**

There were no comments from citizens.

8. **REPORTS FROM CITY ADMINISTRATION AND CITY COUNCIL**

Mr. Vanderpool stated he had nothing further to add this evening.

9. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

There was no unfinished business.

10. **NEW BUSINESS**

There was no new business.

11. **CLOSED SESSION**

Mr. Kaszubski stated there are no items for Closed Session this evening.

12. **ADJOURN**

Moved by Ziarko, seconded by Schmidt, to adjourn the meeting.

Yes: All. The motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 9:52 p.m.

MELANIE D. RYSKA, City Clerk