

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE  
AMES CONFERENCE BOARD**

**AMES, IOWA**

**JANUARY 25, 2022**

**REGULAR MEETING OF THE AMES CONFERENCE BOARD**

The Regular Meeting of the Ames Conference Board was called to order by Chairman John Haila at 6:00 p.m. on January 25, 2022. Present from the Ames City Council were Bronwyn Beatty-Hansen, Gloria Betcher, Amber Corrieri, Tim Gartin, Rachel Junck, and Anita Rollins. Lisa Heddens, and Latifah Faisal represented the Story County Board of Supervisors. Other members in attendance were: Kelly Winfrey, Ames Community School Board of Directors, Allen Bierbaum, Ames Community School Board of Directors; and Joe Anderson, Nevada School Board of Directors. Gilbert School Board of Directors and United Community School Board of Directors were not represented.

**MINUTES OF DECEMBER 14, 2021:** Moved by Corrieri, seconded by Heddens, to approve the Minutes of the December 14, 2021, meeting of the Ames Conference Board.

Vote on Motion: 3-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

**APPOINTMENT OF NANCY HALVORSON TO BOARD OF REVIEW:** Moved by Anderson, seconded by Betcher, to adopt RESOLUTION NO. 22-015 approving the appointment of Nancy Halvorson to the Board of Review.

Roll Call Vote: 3-0. Resolution declared adopted unanimously, signed by the Chair, and hereby made a portion of these Minutes.

**DISCUSSION OF CITY ASSESSOR'S BUDGET PROPOSALS:** Assistant City Manager Deb Schildroth directed the Board's attention to the Tables on Page 3 of the Report. Finance Director Duane Pitcher explained that the value shown is as of January 1, 2021, and this amount is used to set the tax rate for the upcoming budget in FY 2022/23. He noted that on the "Assess Values by Class" table, each class except for the Railroads & Utilities less Gas & Electric, are all set by the Assessor. Each class of property had increased, with commercial having the highest increase of 12.5%. He pointed out that most classes showed an increase, but the multi-residential decreased. He explained that the multi-residential was a class that was created about seven years ago with a stair-step reduction in value each year, and this will be the last year. Director Pitcher commented that he is not sure how the Assessor will handle the multi-residential class next year, but that class will go away and move up with residential. There may be a big bump in residential next year, but this will be due to the change in class. As far as revaluation, there was a modest revaluation in commercial and residential properties. Commercial revaluation was up about 6%, residential was 3.4%, and multi-residential was 5.2%, and all of those are subject to rollbacks.

Ms. Schildroth explained that she will be reviewing the proposed budget for FY 2022/23. The information started on Page 12 of the Annual Report. She mentioned that the Mini Conference Board met on January 6, 2022, to review the Assessor's budget proposal. Ms. Schildroth stated that the

expense item for the Assessor remained unchanged from the last budget, but all other staff were budgeted with a 3% cost of living increase and a 2% merit pool, for a total of 5%. She highlighted that there was a 13% reduction in staff salary, due to the Administrative Assistant position being vacant since 2020. The Staff Report provided by the Iowa Department of Revenue recommended not including the Administrative Assistant position any longer and so that position was not included in the budget. The hourly rate for the Board of Review wages was doubled in 2022, to \$35, in the hopes of attracting and maintaining qualified members. Ms. Schildroth stated that the City had informed the Assessor's office to expect a 7% overall increase in health insurance for the upcoming fiscal year. The total proposed budget for FY 2022/23 is \$985,025, which is a 3.6% reduction from the FY 2021/22 budget.

Council Member Betcher pointed out that when the last City Assessor was hired the City had negotiated a salary based on moving to Ames and other factors. Ms. Schildroth mentioned that there were some negotiations and consideration was also given to the salary based on the Annual Salary Survey of Assessors. Ms. Betcher inquired if it was a possibility that the budgeted amount may not be the actual amount paid to the new Assessor. It was confirmed that it was correct.

Mayor Haila stated that salaries for the City Assessor's office staff are now being paid by the City and the City is re-calibrating the job descriptions to be paid at the City level. The hope is that the new Assessor can find and hire a Deputy Assessor and set realistic salary ranges. Currently, the proposed budget is the maximum, but does not have to be used. He said they need to set up a good management position, and they are starting to trim the budget to give exceptional value to the taxpayers while being fiscally responsible.

Supervisor Heddens wanted to know how the general compensation range would work for the new Assessor. She wondered if it would be at the higher range or at the midpoint range. Ms. Schildroth stated that all the positions in the Assessor's office were put into the City's classifications and compensation schedule. The City Assessor's salary is in the same range as Department Heads, and the Deputy Assessor salary is the same range as Assistant Directors. She noted that when taking those ranges and looking at the latest salary survey, it indicated that the \$140,000 does fit into the same range as other City Assessors.

Supervisor Faisal asked what salary range the current City Assessor job posting was set at. Ms. Schildroth stated that the range ended at \$162,000. The Mayor explained that if a new Assessor was hired at \$162,000, they would already be maxed out on the amount they could make. Supervisor Heddens stated that the City advertised with the salary range up to \$162,000, but if any potential City Assessor looks at the proposed budget, they will see the \$140,000, and she is concerned about the difference in salary being shown. Ms. Schildroth commented that typically when the City budgets for salaries it is budgeted at mid-point, hoping they are going to get someone with experience and then there will be room for negotiations. Ms. Faisal inquired what the salary range would be. The Mayor noted they would like to start at \$140,000 and negotiate from there.

Ms. Schildroth went over "Other" office expenses and highlighted a few items. She explained that

for: “Employee Mileage & Expenses,” there was a reduction because the City Assessor, Deputy Assessor, and the two residential appraisers receive a mileage stipend. This amount is provided every month for the expense of using their personal vehicles for City business and the employee mileage was moved into the Taxable Fringe Benefits category. What is paid out for mileage in the “Employee Mileage & Expenses” category is any mileage that is incurred when any staff member is attending any training or education event. She explained that the “Data Processing Services/Major Software” had a 4% increase. She explained that the Harris Computer Systems (ProVal) is the current software that the Assessor’s office is using for its property information. That software will be phased-out and switched over to the new Vanguard software. She noted ProVal was budgeted for FY 2022/23 because the conversion will take some time. The “Utilities” had a 16.8% increase; this number is provided by the City. The “Equipment & Machinery (Purchases)” is for the replacement of computers and other equipment that needs to be phased out. The last line item “Management Services/Contingency” was increased by 1302.9%, for services that were included in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was approved by the Conference Board last March that directed the transition of the City Assessor office payroll from Story County to the City of Ames effective January 1, 2022. The breakdown is \$9,762 for Human Resources and \$3,267 for Finance, which will cover payroll, and recruitments. These services were provided before, but now with the payroll being handled by the City, those services can now be paid for, and will be an ongoing expense. The charges are based on the number of employees per office. Ms. Schildroth stated that the total payroll and related expenses for FY 2022/23 is \$300,756, which is an 8% increase. The total payroll and office expenses for FY 2022/23 is \$1,285,781, which is a 1.1% reduction from the previous fiscal year.

Assistant City Manager Schildroth reviewed the “District Court Case Concerning Northcrest Exemption (Assessment Appeals/Court Courts), and because it was a non-evaluation year, the line item dropped to \$15,000, which is a 40% decrease. The last line item is the “CAMA Conversion Project.” On June 16, 2021, the City Assessor’s Office entered into a five-year contract with Vanguard to purchase software, implementation, training, and consultation services in the amount of \$165,732.50. The City Assessor’s Office was notified by Vanguard in September 2021 that the amount was on the low side and was advised to budget an additional \$40,000 into the FY 2022/23 budget to cover additional costs. There is also a one-time set-up fee in the amount of \$3,200 for the Beacon database connection to the Vanguard system. The overall total expenses for FY 2022/23 will be \$1,343,981; this is an overall 1.4% increase.

The Mayor asked for more information about the contract with Vanguard. Ms. Schildroth commented that the software was purchased in June 2021 in the amount of \$165,732.50, plus the additional \$40,000 will cover the Contract through 2026. She noted that they may need to budget more money for the FY 2025/26 budget for continuing maintenance of the software. She is not sure if it will be an annual or multi-year contract. She mentioned that so far, the software is robust and will hopefully offer a lot of efficiencies for the office.

Moved by Beatty-Hansen, seconded by Bierbaum, to approve the recommendations of the City Assessor’s Report.

Vote on Motion: 3-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

Moved by Heddens, seconded by Junck, to receive the proposed budget.

Vote on Motion: 3-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

Moved by Betcher, seconded by Faisal, to set 6:00 p.m. on February 22, 2022, as the date of public hearing on the proposed FY 2022/23 City Assessor's budget (adoption of budget will occur after hearing is held).

Vote on Motion: 3-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

Ms. Schildroth introduced Lisa Henschel, Database Manager from the City Assessor office. Ms. Henschel has taken the lead on the Vanguard conversion project. Ms. Henschel explained that the representatives from Vanguard provided training. Each employee was set up with a log-in for the testing portion of the software. She noted that for a conversion from a different software package the conversion was remarkably clean. Ms. Henschel noted that there were a few issues and were "crippled" by the lack of staff time and commercial appraisal experience. Staff is hoping to begin the second round of testing within the next month or so. Ms. Schildroth mentioned that the City has an Agreement with Mel Obbink who has been providing the commercial appraisal expertise. Mr. Obbink is familiar with Vanguard. Vanguard is used by Assessors throughout the state. The conversion will take three education rounds.

**CONFERENCE BOARD COMMENTS:** Council Member Betcher thanked Assistant City Manager Deb Schildroth, City Clerk Diane Voss, and staff for helping out in the Assessor's Office in the interim and helping with the transition.

**ADJOURNMENT:** Moved by Bierbaum, seconded by Betcher, to adjourn the Ames Conference Board at 6:30 p.m.

Vote on Motion: 3-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.