

# Citizen Chalkboard Budget Workshop

## Student Report

May 3rd 2016 : William H. Bradshaw



## **Citizen Chalkboard Budget Workshop Results and Report**

On April 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> 2016 City staff and citizens of Hapeville engaged in an exciting hands on budget workshop aimed at expanding both groups knowledge called the Citizens Chalkboard. In an effort to both inform citizens of the budget process and present potential capital projects the city staff saw an opportunity to engage both sides of the equation. An information session and budget exercise was seen as the most efficient and engaging method, which would facilitate discussion with staff and the citizens and also inform citizens on important budget matters. In the weeks leading up to the budget workshop relevant capital projects were sourced, data on the history and state of the budget was created, and finally the structure and outreach for the workshop itself was implemented. When completed the budget workshop successfully sourced the preferences for capital projects and allowed the citizens voices to be heard. Much knowledge was gained from both sides during the session. The following report outlines the process results and conclusion of the citizen chalkboard budget workshop.

### **Process**

The process of gathering relevant information and implementing the Citizens Chalkboard Budget Workshop took approximately three months. It began with the department heads from each department assessing needed capital expenditures and then creating cost estimates of those expenditures using expertise and past spending. Those capital expenditures were then compiled and chosen by priority. Projects were also sourced from the maintenance department and the city manager. Projects that were seen as priority for city safety and continuation of services were of course determined by city staff and also included. That process took many weeks as cost estimates were calculated and the list of capital projects edited by the city staff and department heads.

Next a snapshot of the past five years of the budget was created as to give those in attendance a perspective of the budget history. The "budget snapshot" was compiled using information already utilized for past council presentations on the budget as well as information sourced from financial administration. Visual representations using charts and graphs to illustrate the budget deficit and rebound in recent years were utilized. Finally a rough analysis was done of the 2016 budget. This information was compiled using the budgeted amounts for both revenue and expenditures for fiscal year 2016. Some line items for revenue, which had already been collected, were utilized such as the cities property tax. The forecasted 2017 general fund expenditures were then subtracted from the forecasted general fund revenue to create the amount that was not tied up in fixed operating expenditures. The forecasted numbers for 2017 were utilized by an analysis of basic trends in the city and then adding a very basic and uniform two percent reduction or increase. The final net working capital used in the exercise was \$2.6 million.

The workshop itself was on a Wednesday and Thursday including both an evening and morning session. Both these culminated when those in attendance formed groups for a breakout session where they were tasked with spending the \$2.6 million dollars on what they considered priority items.

The session began with a presentation presented by Mr. Whitson the city manager in which, as stated before, included various budget topics. Those topics included a five-year history of the budget, ideas for increasing operating revenue and decreasing expenditures. Also discussed was the current state of the budget process in the city process, and finally relevant capital projects. The citizens in attendance then broke out into groups, two in the first morning session and four in the evening session. These groups then made decisions on how to allocate the \$2.6 million dollars that was allocated to them. This amount was represented by “Hapeville dollars,” a fake currency resembling monopoly money.



-Recreation Department Head Tod Nicholas Facilitating the Evening Session-

-Economic Development Department Head Allie Facilitating for the Evening Session-



### **Parking Lot**

The parking lot portion of the citizen’s chalkboard budget workshop was created to retain all questions and comments presented by the citizens. This is because some of the questions asked during the chalkboard did not fit into the format of the workshop, or the questions needed more information to be answered than what was currently available. That of course was predicted and as such the city staff and manager created a “parking lot” component of the budget workshop. The “Parking Lot” was used to record all questions and suggestions asked during the workshop. Participants of the workshop were asked to write down a contact method and name at the beginning of the session so that the city staff could then reach back out. After all questions and comments were recorded the city staff then took those questions and answered them. Comments that citizens made were also recorded for further evaluation by the staff. Approximately a week after the citizen chalkboard budget workshop was completed a master document including all answers and comments for the parking lot were posted on the City of Hapeville website. In addition individual emails were sent to groups by the facilitator of said group.

### **Results**

The following report will now show the results from the Citizen Chalkboard Budget Workshop. Table 1 and Table 2 show a breakdown from each breakout session group. The numbers represent the amount of the 2.6 million designated for each capital project.

**Table 1**

Table 1		Table 2	
IT	\$120,000.00	Reorganization of community development	\$700,000.00
Staffing	\$150,000.00	Relocate utilities behind the buildings downtown	\$500,000.00
Sewer (GIS/Testing)	\$350,000.00	Storm water study	\$500,000.00
Rec. Generator	\$50,000.00	Body cameras for police departments	\$100,000.00
Police Generator	\$50,000.00	Hoyt Smith Center Generator	\$40,000.00
PD body cams	\$80,000.00	Create city parking deck at King Arnold Houses	\$500,000.00
PD Radios	\$75,000.00	Van Rental	\$10,000.00
Rec Van (Airport used van)	\$30,000.00	IT-Live streaming for city meetings	\$30,000.00
Bucket Truck	\$35,000.00	Revamp website for city	\$100,000.00
Back Hoe	\$30,000.00	Emergency Fund	\$120,000.00
FD Ambulance	\$250,000.00		
Emergency Fund	\$1,380,000.00		
Total	\$2,600,000.00	Total	\$2,600,000.00

### Morning Session

The first morning session attracted six citizens and broke into groups of three. Table two came up with various ideas that are presented in the table. One was to not under ground utilities downtown and tear up recently replaced sidewalks, but instead to place the utilities behind buildings. Another was to rent a van when needed instead of replacing the rec van. Although the morning session attracted a small number the attendees of the morning session raised many questions and provided valuable input. As stated before citizens can reference the parking lot master document on the cities website for a complete readout of all questions and comments presented in the two sessions. The two groups in the morning session also reached consensus on a variety of capital projects. The morning session reached consensus in both funding IT upgrades and to invest in the city infrastructure through sewer GIS testing and creating a storm water study. Both groups also found the two weeks of emergency operating capital far from sufficient. A total of \$1.5 million was designated to emergency operating capital.

### City Manager William Whitson Starting Background Budget Presentation



**Table 2**

**Night Session**

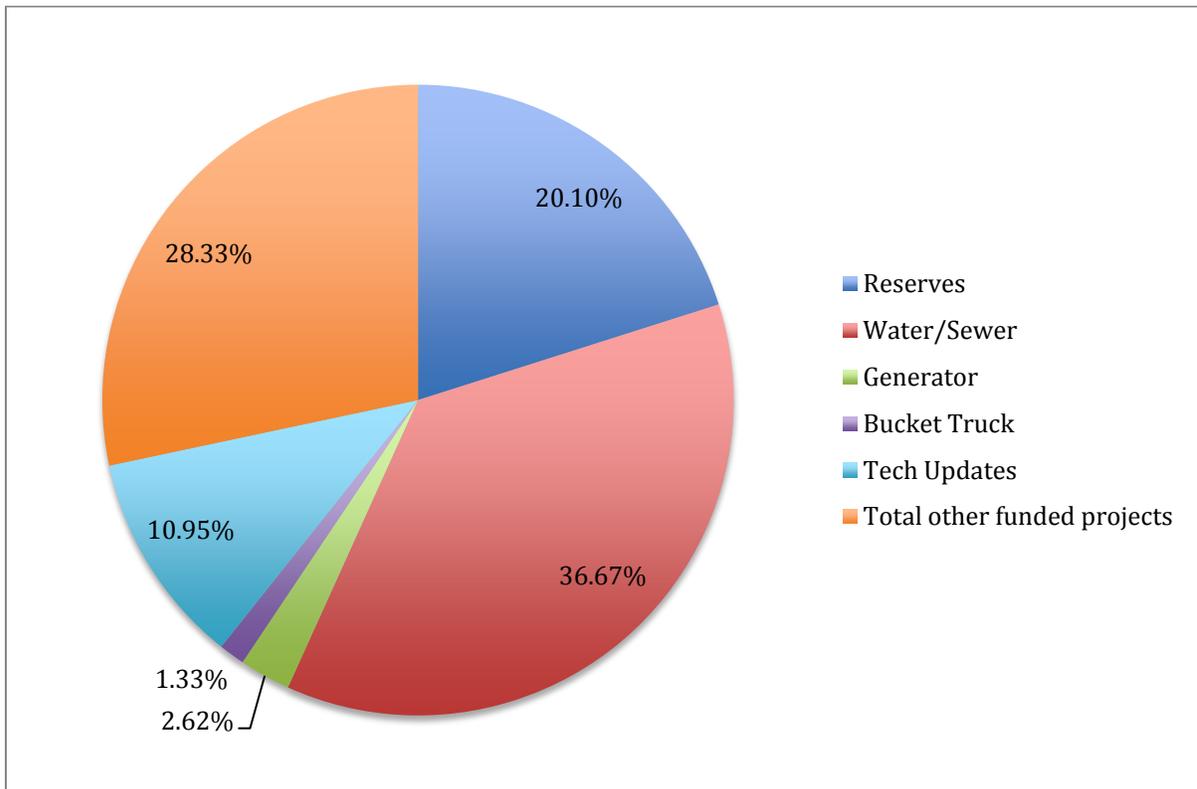
Table 1		Table 2	
Reserve	\$650,000.00	Both Generators	\$90,000.00
Water/Sewer Plan & Replacement	\$1,000,000.00	Reserves	\$585,000.00
IT	\$350,000.00	Tech Updates	\$350,000.00
City Truck Replacement	\$100,000.00	Bucket Truck	\$35,000.00
Security	\$150,000.00	Radios	\$75,000.00
Merit Salary Increase	\$240,000.00	Rec-Van	\$35,000.00
Bucket Truck	\$35,000.00	Data Management	\$80,000.00
Generator	\$45,000.00	Ambulance	\$250,000.00
Radios	\$30,000.00	Engine	\$400,000.00
		Replace 2" & 3" waterlines	\$700,000.00
Total	\$2,600,000.00	Total	\$2,600,000.00
Table 3		Table 4	
Rec Gen	\$50,000.00	For Salary Evaluation	\$15,000.00
PD Roof	\$45,000.00	Drainage Improvements	\$1,800,000.00
PD Generator	\$50,000.00	Security Cameras	\$100,000.00
City Hall Roof	\$100,000.00	Tech Updates	\$350,000.00
IT First Year	\$100,000.00	Econ Dev. Staff	\$150,000.00
Employee Raises	\$350,000.00	Both Generators	\$90,000.00
Reserves	\$815,000.00	Bucket Truck	\$35,000.00
Bucket Truck	\$35,000.00	For Emergency	\$60,000.00
Back Hoe	\$30,000.00		
Ambulance	\$300,000.00		
Engine	\$400,000.00		
Radios	\$75,000.00		
Water/Sewer System	\$350,000.00		
Total	\$2,700,000.00	Total	\$2,600,000.00

**Evening Session**

The evening session attracted 25 citizens and broke up into four groups of five. As with the morning session the groups were in agreement for increasing the emergency fund reserves. Comparatively the emergency reserves for the city received the most out of any capital expenditure. In total it achieved 2,110,000 dollars. IT also received a considerable amount of attention. All groups, except for table three who allotted 100,000 for the first year of implementation, fully funded the tech update. Generators for Hoyt Smith and the Police Department Head Quarters also received considerable funding with two of the groups funding both

generators and the other two funding one of the cities choice. The bucket truck was also fully funded in every group in the evening session. However all groups voiced the opinion that the city needed to look into leasing the trucks and determining which choice would be the most cost efficient for the city. Two groups also partially funded the cities salary increase. All four groups also voiced concern about the cities current infrastructure. All groups voiced that they would like to see both replacement and increased maintenance on everything from streets to water and sewer. Although the groups may have voiced it in different ways, there was consensus among groups to fund various water and sewer projects. One group in particular, group 4, voiced concern over the fact that APA compliance was not seen city wide and many of the aging sidewalks and streets made it difficult for those with a disability to navigate the city.

**Graph 1: Top five funded capital projects as percentage of total group spending**



The pie chart above does a good job of illustrating the extent to which the top five funding projects were funded as a percentage of the entire \$10,500,000 spent in the evening session. Although the generator and bucket truck represent small items compared to bolstering the cities reserves or a five-year tech update, every group funded both of those items considerably. As you can see these five items make up almost 75% of the entire allocation in the evening group. Indicating that all groups highly valued each of them and reached consensus on where the funds should be allocated.



Intern Hunter Bradshaw  
facilitating group discussions

Group 3 presenting.



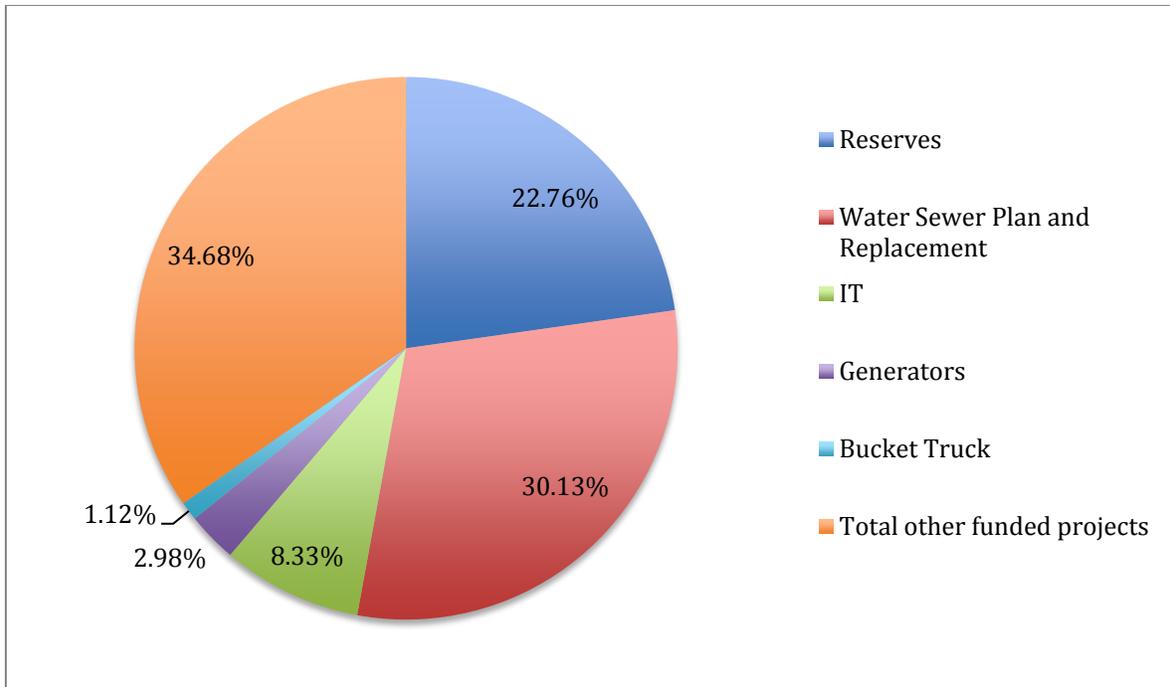
## **Summery**

**Table 3**

Top Projects	Amount	Notes
Reserves	\$3,550,000.00	
Water Sewer Plan and Replacement	\$4,700,000.00	
IT	\$1,300,000.00	
Generators	\$465,000.00	
Bucket Truck	\$175,000.00	Fully funded in every group save for group 2 morning session.

The takeaways from both sessions are that the citizens of Hapeville see reserves as far too low. A total emergency-operating fund capable of funding the city for four-six weeks is unacceptable. In total both sessions chose to allocate \$3,550,000.00 dollars to emergency operating capital. Both sessions also valued the cities infrastructure. In total both sessions spent a total of \$4,700,000.00 on a comprehensive water and sewer plan and replacement. It was also almost fully funded in every group. Showing concern about vulnerabilities in our outdated IT infrastructure. Finally a replacement for the bucket truck was fully funded by every group save for group two in the morning session.

**Graph 2: Top five projects as percentage of total allocation in both sessions**



The graph above illustrates the percentage of the top 5 capital projects as a comparison of total allocated dollars for both sessions. As can be seen the top five capital projects funded make up more than 60% of the entire allotment of funds. Clearly even though the two sessions were on separate days and attracted a very different number of attendees both groups had similar priorities and concerns.

### **T-SPLOST**

In addition to receiving the capital project list. Groups were also asked about preferences for the projects funded by the transportation special purpose local option sales tax, or T-SPLOST. When asked about preferences the groups unanimously ranked drainage and sewer projects as the most important to the City of Hapeville. The projects that followed in order of preference were sidewalk maintenance, traffic flow projects, and lastly silent crossings.

### **Conclusion**

The Citizen Chalkboard budget workshop was completed successfully and provided insight for both parties involved. Those who had questions not in the Citizen Chalkboard format have been reached out to and the questions answered by city staff. One of the comments heard time and time again during the budget workshop format was the benefit of cross conversation between the cities staff and the citizens. In fact the city staff even enjoyed the cross discussion between different departments. One of the most vocal opinions was that the city should in the future facilitate more discussion between the city staff and citizens via workshops such as the citizen chalkboard budget workshop. The format for this information workshop should be used in future workshops. Perhaps on a annual basis.