

NORTH OGDEN CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

August 15, 2023

The North Ogden City Council convened on August 15, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. at the North Ogden City North View Senior Center located at 485 E 2550 North. And also available electronically at YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCriqbePBxTucXEzRr6felhQ/videos>. Notice of time, place, and agenda of the meeting was posted on the bulletin board at the municipal office and posted to the Utah State Website on August 9, 2023. Notice of the annual meeting schedule was published in the Standard-Examiner on December 16, 2022.

PRESENT:	S. Neal Berube	Mayor
	Ryan Barker	Council Member
	Blake Cevering	Council Member
	Jay D Dalpias	Council Member
	Charlotte Ekstrom	Council Member
	Phillip Swanson	Council Member via Zoom

STAFF PRESENT:	Jon Call	City Manager/Attorney
	Rian Santoro	City Recorder
	Jami Jones	Finance Director
	Scott Hess	Planning Director
	Dave Espinoza	Public Works Director
	Dirk Quinney	Chief of Police
	Jeremy Hindes	Lieutenant
	Clark Crowther	Lieutenant
	Jonathan Ungard	Detective

VISITORS:

Sandy Cochran	Reed Miller
Chris Pulver	Christina Watson
Brenda Ashdown	Alan E Giles
Blaine Richards	Merrill Sunderlund
Robert Meyer	Kerry Binton
K Judd	Susan Kilborn

Mayor Berube called the meeting to order. Council Member Dalpias offered the invocation and led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ACTIVE AGENDA

1. TRUTH IN TAXATION PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED PROPERTY TAX RATE

a. PRESENTATION BY CITY COUNCIL

Mayor Berube provided an overview of the process the City follows each year to develop its annual budget; this year, the City created a budgeting sub-committee, which was made up by a group of residents who reviewed the budget and provided recommendations to the City Council. The proposed budget did not include a tax increase, but subsequent to the budget being presented to the Council by the Administration, there were some changes to sales tax revenue. The City's two major revenue sources are sales tax (2/3) and property tax (1/3); sales tax has declined substantially, and the Council has discussed the option of increasing the property tax rate in order to replace the lost sales tax revenue. The increase is approximately three percent, which equates to \$9.90 per year on the average home in the City, which is valued at \$519,000. Some time ago, the City Council adopted an ordinance dictating that all revenues collected from property tax would be assigned to funding public safety in the community. This is just over 50 percent of the City's public safety budget. He emphasized that taxes have not been increased to build the new Public Safety building and he discussed the manner in which that project has been funded. He then used the aid of a PowerPoint presentation to provide information regarding changes in the City's budget that have caused the Council to consider a property tax increase. Operating costs in the City have increased – namely the cost of maintaining quality employees, including Police Officers. He discussed the property tax formula used to determine the amount of revenue the City will receive, noting that the total amount to be generated by the increase and new growth is approximately \$124,000; he also offered a breakdown of how that increased revenue will be used in the public safety area of the budget. The Mayor encouraged all residents to review their property tax notice to understand how their total property tax due will change due to adjusted property values and proposed tax increases; he also provided information about the process a resident can follow to appeal their property valuation or ask for an adjustment to their tax bill.

b. PUBLIC HEARING TO RECEIVE COMMENTS ABOUT PROPOSED TAX RATE

Mayor Berube opened the public hearing at 6:18 p.m.

Alan Giles, North Ogden resident, thanked the Mayor and Council for their service. He noted that last year, the City increased its property tax rate by 29.87 percent and before that, there was a 41 percent increase. The driver for past tax increases was to compensate for projected decreases in sales tax, but at that time there were no actual decreases. He would like to be able to understand what the actual decreases are this year. He added that he contacted the County Assessor last year and was told that property values were increased based upon a recommendation from the State of Utah and not an actual analysis of any property in the City. He asked if the reduction this year is also based upon a recommendation from the State.

He stated he does not understand limits on tax rates but noticed that when his property value was decreased, the tax rate was automatically increased, and he would like an explanation of how tax rates are calculated and how they fluctuate automatically.

Doug Anderson, North Ogden resident, thanked the Mayor for acknowledging the budget sub-committee. He would like to recommend that the City form an additional sub-committee on the Barker Park area; he invited anyone to join him next week at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers to volunteer to be part of such a committee.

Chris Pulver, North Ogden resident, stated that he understands the manner in which property tax rates adjust each year depending on property value, but it is important to understand that North Ogden residents have experienced a property tax increase each year for the last 10 years. The 'system' seems to be broken and should be fixed, but he understands the City is only operating under the laws that have been adopted. He stated that his biggest concern at this time is planning for the future of the City; if the City does not have a plan that projects revenues year after year, the Council can only 'wing it' each year when it comes time to adopt its budget. He suggested that the City create a plan that can be communicated to residents so that they understand and expect how their taxes could be increased each year.

Blaine Richards, North Ogden resident, stated that from what he has heard, it seems like the City Council is doing the right thing; if there is inadequate revenue to fund the City, it will be necessary to reduce service levels. The thing he does not understand, however, is why he is charged/taxed by Pineview Water and Weber Basin Water Conservancy for secondary water.

Reed Miller, North Ogden resident, stated he agrees with Mr. Pulver's recommendations to plan ahead for potential tax increases, but noted that will be hard to do. He stated that he understands that the proposed tax increase is only an average of about \$10 per year, but in his household, he has already had to find an extra \$100 to pay for increased costs and some people may not have the ability to find an additional \$10. Property ownership is one of the basic rights afforded to people through the Declaration of Independence and if money is coming out of one's pocket for their property, that is hard to take. The City needs to identify the wants and needs in the budget and if it is possible to reduce the wants in order to keep taxes low, that should be done.

Sandy Cochran, North Ogden resident, stated she attended the Truth in Taxation meeting last year and she recalled many people talking about the money that is wasted on the hanging flower baskets along Washington Boulevard. Recently, she has noticed people talking on Facebook who are furious that there are no flowers hanging along Washington Boulevard. She wished the Mayor and Council good luck trying to make anyone happy.

Linda Pipkin, North Ogden resident, agreed with Mr. Miller's recommendation to consider whether items in the budget are needs or wants; she knows the City is experiencing reduced sales tax revenue decreases and that is likely because all residents have had to tighten their belts and are not spending as much money in the community. Her income decreased this year, but everything she must pay for has increased. She would like to see governments at all levels tighten their belts as well and keep taxes low.

She also saw the Facebook posts about the flowers on Washington Boulevard and she does not feel that providing those hanging baskets is the proper role of government and could be classified as a want and not a need. She appreciates that the Council did not fund flower baskets this year in order to use tax dollars more wisely.

Christina Watson, North Ogden resident, stated she is grateful to live in a safe city where her kids can play outside and walk to and from school. She is grateful for first responders, and she supports increasing staffing levels in the Police Department to provide a 23rd officer position. She thinks that hard decisions have been considered and made and she is supportive of a small tax increase this year to keep pace with inflation rather than large increases every several years.

Brenda Ashdown, North Ogden resident, stated that it is her understanding property taxes are being increased because the City needs another Police Officer and because insurance costs for the Public Safety Building have increased; the City is not raising property taxes because more money is needed for the North Shore Aquatic Center. She asked if her understanding was correct.

Mayor Berube stated that is about 90 percent correct; he discussed insurance costs for the Public Safety Building but noted that it is accurate that the City is not raising property taxes to cover the Aquatic Center as that facility is funded through the Redevelopment Agency (RDA). Ms. Ashdown stated that any property tax increase must be directed toward Public Safety, and she asked if any of that money could be used for other operations. Mayor Berube stated that money would be taken from sales tax revenues for those needs, or costs would need to be reduced. Ms. Ashdown then noted that residents need to understand that if they want lower taxes, they must be willing to give up services that are provided by the City. She noted she was a member of the budget sub-committee, and it was very eye-opening to learn what it takes to run a City this size; the number of things that residents take for granted was astounding. She does not want the City to cut any public safety services, though she is on a fixed income and a tax increase impacts her. She would prefer to cut something else from the budget if absolutely necessary. She then noted that property tax revenue currently covers 56 percent of public safety costs, and she asked if the ultimate goal is for property tax revenue to cover 100 percent of those costs. If the answer is yes, she would like to know how much each household would be impacted.

Kerry Bitton, North Ogden resident, asked if anyone knew what the City's 2021 property tax revenue was. City Manager/Attorney Call noted it was just under \$2 million. Mr. Bitton inquired as to total revenue, to which Mr. Call answered just under \$8 million. Mr. Bitton asked for the same information for 2022, to which Finance Director Jones answered property tax revenue was \$2.3 million, and total revenue was \$11 million. Mr. Bitton stated that it sounds as if 2022 was a record year in terms of revenue and that was likely due to property values increasing dramatically. He asked what the City did with that money and why it was not possible to create a budget that came under projected revenues. He asked why the City always needs more money or feels it has to spend all the money it has. He stated he is not bothered by increased public safety service, but he is bothered by things like the increase of apartment units in the City and increased property valuations; he is also bothered that he is being forced to pay more taxes even when his property values go down.

There were no additional persons appearing to be heard.

Council Member Eckstrom motioned to close the Public Hearing. Council Member Cevering seconded the motion.

Voting on the motion:

Council Member Barker	aye
Council Member Cevering	aye
Council Member Dalpiaz	aye
Council Member Ekstrom	aye
Council Member Swanson	excused

The motion passed unanimously.

Public Hearing closed at 6:50 p.m.

2. MAYOR/COUNCIL/STAFF COMMENTS

Mayor Berube thanked everyone who commented; he stated he feels it is a misunderstanding that the City does not plan for the future. He discussed the long-range planning efforts of the City including things like capital projects and property acquisition responsive to growth. The Council is trying to save money and is building its General Fund to pay for those future needs. He invited any resident to sit down with him and review the City's five-year plans as well as the commitments tied to General Fund savings. He noted that it is important for the City to have a rainy-day fund, especially in years like 2022-2023 where the snowfall was much higher than normal, and which resulted in an increase in the cost of snow removal services; there was also flooding this spring and responding to those floods was costly. The City is faced with many needs year after year and the Council does adopt long-term plans for addressing those needs. For any excess funding that is put into the General Fund, 20 percent must be used for the maintenance of parks and the purchase of land for future parks. In the past, the City deferred maintenance of its facilities and did not raise taxes for nearly 17 years, and now the City is trying to catch up to respond to the problems that created for the current Council. He added that inflationary pressures impact the City just like they do a household. He does not want any resident to walk out of this meeting and blame public safety for this increase; Police Officers deserve every dime they are paid and probably more. The City cannot pay its officers at the 25th percentile of other cities and expect to retain quality employees. There was a substantial debate about public safety in the City and just recently, there was a situation where Police Officers were under fire; they responded to that situation in less than three minutes and if they had not responded, there would have been another death in that incident. He stated no value can be placed on a person's life and each day that Police Officers report to work, they do not know what will happen.

He then addressed Mr. Giles' questions about the manner in which property valuation is determined and noted he would be willing to sit down with anyone and try to help them understand that process. He then addressed the comments about the need for residents to offer suggestions for services they would be willing to cut in order to reduce taxes, and agreed with that comment.

Council Member Dalpiaz also referenced Mr. Giles' comments and noted that what actually occurred last year was that the City advertised the ability to consider up to a 41 percent increase, but the Council only approved a 23 percent increase. He added that the numbers mentioned in Mayor Berube's presentation did not reflect adding a 23rd Police Officer, but they reflect increased salaries in the Department across the board.

Council Member Ekstrom thanked everyone for participating and providing input as that is very helpful to the Council as they navigate the budget process. It is important for residents to understand that the taxes they pay to North Ogden will stay here and be used for services directly to them. The Council has tried to determine the quality of life that residents desire and then develop a budget responsive to that determination. The State has developed a taxation law that requires the tax rate to automatically adjust each year to ensure that a taxing entity will receive the same amount of tax revenue; if a taxing entity wants to capture revenue associated with growth, it must adjust its tax rate. The City's Department Heads regularly come in under their budget each year and said she welcomes the examination of the City budget records to understand how money is being spent.

Council Member Cevering agreed with Mayor Berube's comments about the failure of past Councils to increase taxes for a 17-year period, which forced the hand of the Council last year and they had to increase taxes to provide desired levels of service. The Council is sensitive to the impact of a property tax increase, but inflation has impacted North Ogden and it is important to responsibly fund the City.

Council Member Barker agreed with the comments that were made by his fellow Council Members.

Council Member Swanson thanked everyone who shared their thoughts tonight over Zoom.

Mayor Berube noted the Council will be acting on their final budget during their next business meeting scheduled for August 22. He then invited input from Police Chief Quinney.

Chief Quinney stated that he appreciates the support of the North Ogden Community, the Mayor, and the City Council. He stated that the City has seen substantial population growth and calls for service and the addition of a 23rd Police Officer is responsive to that growth. He added that it is necessary to increase compensation for the Department in order to recruit and retain quality Police Officers. He stated his staff is great and he appreciates the service they provide to the community.

Mayor Berube stated he is proud of the Council for the way they have reacted to the need to adequately fund public safety in the City. He added that the Council has considered implementing a Public Safety Impact Fee that will be charged on new residential units in the City so that the increased population is paying for some of the increased public safety demand.

3. **ADJOURNMENT**

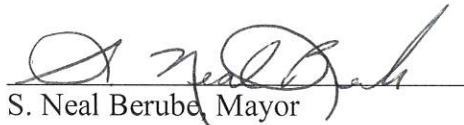
Council Member Ekstrom motioned to adjourn the meeting.

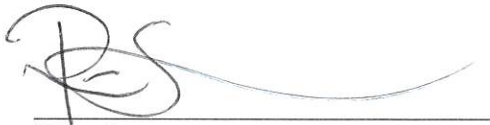
Voting on the motion:

Council Member Barker	aye
Council Member Cevering	aye
Council Member Ekstrom	aye
Council Member Stoker	aye
Council Member Swanson	excused

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 7:16 p.m.


S. Neal Berube, Mayor


Rian Santoro
City Recorder




Date Approved