Upon review of the published budget proposal, and in preparation for this meeting, Community Development created the document in front of you. It is also now published on our website, nf-cd.org. Its purpose is to provide a full scope of what we do and how we pay for it.

There has been some confusion about how the 2019 budget for CD and Code Enforcement interact. Some of that is caused by purposeful misinformation, but I think most of it can be cleared up through better communication. That’s why we are presenting the format in front of you.

You will see that several items are different in this version than in the published version.

First, we anticipate that a data clerk will be leaving the city workforce, and we do not intend to backfill that position. This saves a considerable amount of money in salary and benefits.

Second, our anticipated Zombie program costs and revenue are both significantly lower than we had anticipated when the budget was published. We were also awarded a $50,000 grant from the NYS Attorney General’s office just prior to the budget’s publication. Since then, we have received clarification from the funder that this funding can be used to fund the position originally created by the Zombie program. This position will be integral to the implementation of a data management strategy that I will discuss later. The $50,000 grant also decreases the need for an allocation of City funds.

Third, the revenue we receive to fund our Moderate Rehabilitation A voucher program out of our Section 8 office was not included in the published version of the budget, while the cost of the program was included.

In past years, CD’s impact on the City’s finances was shown as a transfer-in and transfer-out amount in the budget proposal.
The transfer out was required to fund the Department’s administrative costs. The transfer in has been an allocation of federal dollars provided to the Department of public works for clean neighborhood team personnel costs.

CD’s contribution to the Clean Neighborhood program remains in the budget at the same amount as in past years, $200,000. CD’s request from the city’s general fund, however, is smaller than ever.

We have been working with the controller to provide a complete picture of our funding sources and expenses in addition to these two figures. In 2019, we are presenting a $6.8 million budget that pays for community based projects and services throughout Niagara Falls, and pays the people who execute those projects and services.

$5.6 million of the $6.8 million budget goes directly to projects and services, not personnel costs.

$6.7 million of this budget comes from non-city funds. We have 8 funding sources from federal, state, and foundational grants in the 2019 budget. This is the most diverse set of funders in my tenure as director.

We are requesting, in the city’s budget proposal, $77,464, from the general fund for 2019. In 2012, the gap between departmental revenue and expenses exceeded $500,000. As the budget is presented, CD offers a 700 to 1 return on general fund investment.

Through aggressive fund raising and a cost cutting/attrition plan that was communicated with City Council, that gap continues to shrink. The Civil Service commission approved our attrition plan through modernized job specifications, and the process has not created any unresolved labor issues or animosity. In 2018, we were able to reduce our request to $0, as we will receive two large grants by the end of this year that will allow us to pay all of our 2018 administrative costs. As this is not the case in 2019, our costs were reduced through changes in personnel and staffing levels, and by changing job specifications to do more with the resources available to us.

We know that evaluating and possibly reducing the number of positions on city staff is important to members of the city council. Last year, two long-time
employees retired and we did not fill the positions, because we stuck to the attrition plan that we started in 2013. This year, we have a data clerk that is getting ready to leave city service for another opportunity. We are prepared to not fill that position, thereby reducing staff size and costs again, through attrition. It will change the way we do business, but we committed to continuing cost reductions in this manner.

It is also important to note that our ability to attrite and reduce the administrative funding gap comes at a time of a general decrease of the amount of HUD funds available to us. HUD funds have not sufficiently paid for CD administrative costs for well over a decade. But, the staffing model was kept the same, which created a large gap. In 2013, we set a course to change that through strategic attrition, and as you can see by this year’s requested amount, the process is working.

We had a conversation about my position and salary at the Code Enforcement budget meeting on October 3. In 2018, my salary was funded via CD's federal and non-federal funding sources. I was asked to assume acting management of code enforcement for a total fiscal contribution from the general fund of $1.

In response to a community need identified by both the city administrator and the city council, the 2019 budget includes increased staffing levels in code enforcement. We are also working on implementing a new data management system in preparation for a 311 service and changing our approach to housing court. I was also asked to be available to assist the city administrator with administrative tasks in the engineering department, including cross training of employees. To that end, as we discussed last week, the 2019 budget includes a transition of my role to maintain a greater focus on code enforcement, at the same rate of pay as in 2018. That includes my salary being funded by the code enforcement budget, with $1 being funded for my responsibilities for CD.

The practice of funding a position for $1, at least in my situations, allows me to have an actual role in a department while not creating a financial impact. As I stated last week, I am not leaving CD, nor do I want to.

I love working there, but more importantly, there are projects and programs that I have a managerial responsibility to, beyond January 1, 2019. This includes the administration of a grant for the implementation of a new data management
strategy that spans both code enforcement and Community Development. A shared director model between the two departments continues to provide for more efficient management of this process.

The job title change from Finance Manager to Community Development Manager ensures that the management of a department with a $6.8 million budget, and wide of range of responsibilities, services and projects, continues successfully while not increasing costs. CD is literally doing more with less every year. We have more funders, more projects, and are continuously redesigning program models and methods. All of that needs to be managed. The CD manager position does not include a salary upgrade from the eliminated Finance Manager position. Instead, it increases the scope of work that can be performed by the individual in that position, thereby easing the transition to a shared director model wherein my role at Code Enforcement is increased.

I know that this meeting and process is directed to expenditures, especially administrative expenditure, so I will describe the various community projects and services that we execute. They do, in many cases, save the city money because many of them are on public property and prevent the city for having to spend limited resources. We do have a multi-million impact on the Niagara Falls community. As I stated first, $5.6 million of our $6.8 million budget goes directly into projects and services, and not administrative costs.