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How Utica Works: The Board of Estimate & Apportionment

Last month, I told you that the Budget is the heart of the City - all services we provide flow through the Budget. The Board of Estimate & Apportionment (or "E&A" as I will call from now on) is the very important, central Board that meets weekly to make all the fine tune adjustments to the Budget that it requires. Remember, that the Budget is an estimate of the future revenues and expenditures of all City monies. Circumstances will change, estimates will not turn out to be perfect, and so E&A fills the central role of fine tuning and overseeing the Budget throughout the year. Moreover, given that E&A is an open meeting with public records, this Board and its meetings provides transparent and accountable access of the City budget to the public.



All of the E&A official Resolutions are bound together, year by year, and kept on a bookshelf for easy access in the offices of the Department of Legislation

The Who, When, What, and How of E&A

E&A is mentioned a total of 46 times on 24 separate pages in The Charter of the City of Utica. From beginning to end, the authority of E&A is embedded throughout the most foundational set of laws that make us a City.

Who is on E&A? The Board of Estimate and Apportionment is made up of five people: The Mayor, the Comptroller, one Department Head appointed by the Mayor (and who must live in Utica), the President of the Common Council, and one member of the Common Council, chosen by a vote of a majority of the Council. This means that E&A tends to vote with the Mayor - since she or he chooses the Department Head, the Mayor only then needs the support of one other member of E&A to be able to command a majority of the votes.

When does E&A meet? Every Monday morning, rain or shine, at 9:15 in Council Chambers. E&A is a public meeting, so anyone is invited to attend. Although we occasionally change the day or time, it is very much the first official business of the City every week.

What Does E&A do? E&A has a number of specific responsibilities:

Set the salary of every City Officer. - E&A sets the salaries of all City officers whose salaries are not determined directly by the Charter, including all Officers who are appointed by the Mayor.

Create and Abolish Positions within the City: All individual positions within the City Budget (in what we call the Table of Organization) have to be created and can be abolished by E&A. (Except for those within the Police and Fire Departments. Only the Common Council can increase or decrease the complement of those departments.) E&A has the authority to both set create/abolish those positions and to set the compensation for them. (For a recent example, I proposed a Budget amendment to increase the salary line for the Codes Department so that they could hire three new Codes Officers. Had that passed, it still would have been incumbent upon E&A to actually create those positions.)

Waive Competitive Bidding: When, for whatever reason, competitive bidding may be impractical or impossible, then the Common Council can waive such bidding, as long as it does so by a vote of 4/5 on a Resolution. E&A must then unanimously approve such a Resolution.

Approve the Budget: Every year, the Mayor is required to submit her or his proposed Budget to E&A no later than the first Monday in February. This is the first public presentation of the Budget. It must then approve its version of the Budget (either amended or not) no later than February 20th, after which it becomes the "E&A Approved Budget" and go to the Common Council to be reviewed, amended (or not), and passed (hopefully).

Transfers of Funds: Throughout the fiscal year, E&A authorizes, via Resolution, the transfer of funds. In other words, any time that money must be moved from one budget line to another, E&A must approve it. (And anytime that any transfer amount exceeds \$15,000 cumulatively for the fiscal year, then the Common Council must also approve the transfer.)

Settle Lawsuits: Occasionally, the City does get sued. E&A has the sole authority to approve settlements of lawsuits against the City.

So that's it, E&A in brief. I am really enjoying serving on this important Board. I am learning a great deal of exactly how our government works, and, in particular learning how Budgets are always, by their very nature, estimates that have to be constantly adjusted as they come in contact with the actual world, including such things as inflation and unexpected circumstances.

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