

TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP - MONDAY EVENING - MARCH 16, 2020

PRESENT: Calouro, Sweeney, Teixeira, Parella and Ley (Present through speaker phone per Governor's Executive Order 20-05)

ALSO PRESENT: Steven Contente, Town Administrator
Raquel Pellerin, Town Treasurer

The Council met in workshop session on Monday evening, March 16, 2020 in the Town Hall, Council Chambers, beginning at 6:45 o'clock PM, Council Chairman Calouro presiding:

Prior to the commencement of this evening's regular agenda, Town Administrator Contente asked the Council to consider an emergency declaration.

Teixeira/Parella - Voted unanimously to add an agenda item as follows: Town Administrator Contente re Executive Order 20-03 - Declaration of State of Emergency - Presented for Council Consent.

The Council discussed and agreed upon the need for emergency action on this agenda item, as allowed under § 42-46-6(c) of the Open Meetings Act, as action on this item was deemed necessary to address an unexpected occurrence that requires immediate action to protect the public. Specifically, the coronavirus situation, and the Governor's recommendation that municipalities act to adopt emergency declarations and licensing restrictions, requires immediate action.

Sweeney/Teixeira - Voted unanimously to consent to Executive Order 20-03 - Declaration of State of Emergency, as written.

Also prior to the commencement of this evening's regular agenda, Town Administrator Contente asked Fire Chief DeMello to provide a brief update on local preparation, etc., concerning the COVID-19 epidemic.

Fire Chief DeMello explained that there have been 21 cases identified in Rhode Island and explained that the Town is doing its best to heed the advice of State government and emergency management officials.

Fire Chief DeMello noted that citizens are being advised to stay at home and that the Town has established an Emergency

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Operations Center with a hotline for residents to call with questions, etc. He added that there is a list of persons with special needs and that the town will maintain a hotline which may be used by residents in need.

Fire Chief DeMello noted that it would be helpful if initial help to those found to be in need would come from friends and neighbors, and that the Town will upgrade its level of service as this becomes necessary.

Council Chairman Calouro complimented the administration for its effort and congratulated all Town employees and departments for their work on this crisis thus far.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know if there have been any cases of COVID-19 identified in Bristol with Fire Chief DeMello responding that there was no official word. He added that information would be forthcoming.

Town Administrator Contente noted that the state of emergency will expire in April 8 and that it may have to be extended depending upon the circumstances.

It was noted that the Governor's guidelines indicate that there should be no gatherings larger than 25 persons.

It was also noted that the COVID-19 includes the Library Assistant Director, the Director of Parks and Recreation and the Human Service Director and that the call center telephone number is 401-253-2310.

It was also announced that all Town buildings have been closed to the public and that the public will be accommodated on an appointment only basis for the present time. It is suggested that these appointments should be for essential services only.

Town Administrator Contente explained that the Town is attempting to provide a uniform message and that he is in communication with the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns and also the Governor's office. He added that the situation appears to be evolving very quickly.

A discussion ensued concerning several of the aspects of the crisis and that Town's response.

Town Administrator Overview
General Budget Discussion

Steven Contente, Town Administrator

Town Administrator Contente provided an overview of his budget recommendations and explained the last week has been very hectic.

Town Administrator Contente noted that the budget recommendation contains a 3.56% increase over last year's budget which is slightly below the State cap of 4%. He added that this increase will likely result in a tax increase of \$.40 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation bringing the current tax rate of \$13.72 to \$14.12.

Town Administrator Contente reported that the budget recommendations for the Sewer, Composting, and Enterprise Fund budgets will result in an increase of \$9 to the Sewer Use Fee.

Town Administrator Contente reported that it is acceptable to use fund balance this year to offset the budget since the fund balance is growing. He noted that the budget includes an increase to the Town's contribution to the defined retirement fund for police of \$176,000 and that this amount will come from fund balance.

Town Administrator Contente reported that this year's budget assumes a collection rate of 97.9% collection rate and that this rate is based upon the Town's experience with collections in recent years.

Town Administrator Contente reviewed several details of those departments requesting increased budgets and the reasons for these. He noted that the proposed budget maintains services at current levels and that these increases are commensurate to the increase in costs.

Town Administrator Contente noted that his recommended budget includes no net gain in full time employees, but the Town Clerk's Office was reorganized to transfer a one-half person to the human resources function under the Town Administrator's budget.

A discussion ensued regarding the Town Administrator's recommendation for School District funding with Councilman Sweeney asking to know why the Town might not fully fund the school request.

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Town Treasurer Pellerin explained that fully funding the School District would exceed the State mandated spending cap.

Town Administrator Contente noted that he reduced most budget requests in order to provide an increase to the schools while remaining under the cap.

Town Administrator Contente stated the budget recommendations presented support essential services; all important to the safety, health, and welfare of the Town.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know if the department managers were being short-changed with Town Administrator Contente stating that he believes that the departments will be able to make-due with what is recommended for them.

A discussion ensued regarding salary increases overall with Town Administrator Contente explaining that he generally allowed a modest 1% increase to all non-union employees, with some exceptions due to special circumstances. He added that he will be shortly going into negotiations with most of the Town's unions.

A discussion ensued regarding the impact of the COVID-19 virus on the budget with Town Administrator Contente explaining that the budget was prepared before the current situation was apparent.

Town Administrator Contente noted that the Town must do its best to maintain its health of finance and operations in order to meet its future challenges. He added that there are many unknowns at this point.

701 - Police Department
Kevin Lynch - Chief of Police

Police Chief Lynch and Police Captains O'Malley and Burke appeared before the Council.

Town Administrator Contente noted that the budget for this department increased by 6% and that there are no new personnel considered. He noted that the cost of a police vehicle is approximately \$54,000 each.

A general discussion of the operational changes ensued.

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Police Chief Lynch noted the addition of a software program to track assets with Councilwoman Parella asking to know if this might be expanded to include the assets of other department.

Police Chief Lynch explained that the system was "robust" and that it may be expandable for additional departments, adding that the provider would likely charge additional fees for this.

A general discussion ensued regarding several of the budget lines with significant changes. It was noted that the increase to the police pension line is due to the change in the actuarial tables and the predicted future cost of benefits.

The Council agreed by consensus to place an asterisk (*) at the Motor Vehicle Replacement line item (2334-404) so that the Council might consider this line at a later time.

The Council also agreed to place an asterisk (*) at the Salary line to consider the salary increase for the Chief of Police at a later time

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended.

702 - Animal Control

Deb DaSilva - Animal Control Officer

Officer DaSilva explained that some of the increases in the budget are due to maintenance issues and rate increases.

A discussion ensued regarding the possibility of accepting for boarding, etc., animals from other municipalities. It was noted that the animal shelter has a capacity of 37 canines and 75 felines and 5 other smaller animals and that the current occupancy is 1 canine and 19 felines.

Police Chief Lynch noted that the Town is speaking to two other towns concerning this possibility. It was explained that there may be a need to amend the current ordinance to allow the Town to accept animals from out of town.

Police Chief Lynch stated that he was amenable to a policy that would be acceptable to the Council and Council Chairman Calouro noted that the Council would be willing to discuss opportunities that might provide revenue to support shelter operations.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended.

703 - Harbor Patrol

Gregg Marsili - Harbormaster

Harbormaster Marsili reported that the Town's revenue from transient moorings and piers is increasing and that this does not include telephone and radio requests received. He added that the Harbor department has undertaken many repairs to the Town's docks.

It was noted that the Maritime Center use is increasing resulting in a need for additional time for maintenance personnel.

Town Administrator Contente noted that the department is now struggling to keep the building clean and that the budget considers an additional \$2750 for this purpose.

A discussion ensued regarding the possibility of expanding the scope of allowance for alcoholic beverages at the Maritime Center without resolution.

It was noted that increasing events at the Maritime Center may complicate the already difficult parking situation in the area. It was noted that it may be possible to consider seasonal changes that would avoid the summer months when the marina area is already busy.

A discussion ensued regarding the proposed salary increase for the Harbormaster.

The Council agreed by consensus to place an asterisk (*) at the salary line for the Harbormaster so that the Council might consider this line at a later time.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended.

601 - Community Development

Diane C. Williamson, Director

Director of Community Development Williamson appeared before the Council and indicated that the departmental budget requests are as previously considered in other years.

A discussion ensued regarding Tourism/Promotion including an explanation of the role of Lou Hammond. It was noted that the funds are provided to Explore Bristol and that the Explore Bristol group has the direct relationship with the public

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relations services offered by Hammond. It was also noted that the Explore Bristol website will be upgraded to allow for better data collection.

Councilman Sweeney suggested that Economic Development Coordinator Vitale might speak to Roger Williams University since the University seems to have an appetite for helping promote the Town. Economic Development Coordinator Vitale agreed to do this.

A general discussion ensued regarding the Providence-Bristol-Newport Ferry. Councilman Ley asked to know if the \$2000 allocated to promote this ferry was sufficient to "move the needle" on ferry ridership.

Economic Development Coordinator Vitale noted that the decision to run the ferry to Bristol was made "late in the game" last years and that this year it will be earlier. He noted that "Discover Newport" may participate in the promotion of the ferry.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended.

602 - Building Inspection

Richard Pimenta - Building Official

It was noted that the new e-permitting system will allow the Department of Community Development to eliminate one secretary.

Town Administrator Contente noted that the Building Official and the Secretary plan to retire.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended.

402 - Town Administrator

Steven Contente, Town Administrator

Town Administrator Contente noted that he added a human resources "team" consisting of a consultant and part time coordinator. It was explained that these two individuals receive a combined salary equivalent to the half-time Senior Clerk salary, re-appropriated from the Town Clerk's department.

Town Administrator Contente noted that he will be negotiating 5 contracts this year.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended.

504 - Town Hall Complex

Steven Contente - Town Administrator

A discussion ensued regarding the preparation of a new Town website by Economic Development Coordinator Vitale. It was noted that this website will be managed in-house.

Councilman Teixeira noted that the recent financial report indicates that the IT budget was overspent.

Economic Development Coordinator Vitale explained that the Town was in a difficult situation since it learned that many of the Town's computers were using an obsolete operating system and it was necessary to upgrade these to Windows 10. He added that this necessary upgrade caused the cost overrun.

Council Chairman Calouro noted that there has been a plan for a long time to install television monitors in the Council Chambers for presentations, etc. He explained that he obtained a small legislative grant for this purpose several years ago.

It was agreed by consensus to place an asterisk (*) on the Town Hall Complex budget page so that the Council would discuss the matter of television monitors at a later date.

402 - Town Clerk

Louis P. Cirillo - Town Clerk

The Clerk explained that the budget request is similar to those allocated in previous years and that, with the exception of salary increases, there have been little changes to the overall amount requested during his tenure.

The Clerk noted that this year's salary line was reduced due to the elimination of a one-half position and other lines have been maintained due to increased efficiencies.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended.

There being no further business, upon a motion by Councilman Sweeney, seconded by Councilman Teixeira and voted unanimously, the Chairman declared this workshop to be adjourned at 9:52 o'clock PM.

Louis P. Cirillo, CMC, Council Clerk