

TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP – MONDAY EVENING – MARCH 18, 2019

PRESENT: Calouro, Sweeney, Teixeira, Parella, and Ley

ALSO PRESENT: Steven Contente, Town Administrator
Julie Goucher, Town Treasurer

The Council met in workshop session on Monday evening, March 18, 2019 in the Town Hall, Council Chambers, beginning at 6:33 o'clock PM, Council Chairman Calouro presiding.

Town Administrator Overview

General Budget Discussion

Steven Contente, Town Administrator

Council Chairman Calouro noted that he spoke to Town Administrator Contente's assistant Carol Mello about converting the traditional budget book from paper to digital in 2020. He noted that the budget represents a "massive amount of work" and that it is "well presented"

Town Administrator Contente referred to his cover letter and explained the recommended budget adjustments as compared to the current fiscal year. He reinforced that he is sensitive to the concerns of the taxpayers, especially in light of the Town-wide full revaluation and that due to this he is requesting no new initiatives to save money.

He added that he is recommending that the proposed capital improvement plan to rehabilitate the Walley School into a Town Hall will be set-aside for one year and also that the Town will try its best to keep borrowing costs down in order to keep the tax rate as low as possible.

Town Administrator Contente reported that he completed labor contract negotiations with all of the Town's unions and that the Town Hall employees agreed to expand the Town Hall hours for one half hour per day beginning on July 1, 2019.

Town also reported that he plans to reduce the DPW work force by two individuals and at the same time increase the Water Pollution Control workforce by the same number. He noted that the planned automation of rubbish and recycling collection will allow for this change and that there is a need to add employees to the Water Pollution Control is in need of additional staff to reduce environmental compliance problems. He added that the Town will continue to invest in its wastewater system to also reduce compliance problems.

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Town Treasurer Goucher reviewed the organization of the budget book and drew attention to the tax rate calculation. She noted that 84% of the Town's revenue is derived from property tax.

Town Treasurer Goucher also noted that this is the second year of the budget modifications made necessary due to the rules of the transparency portal and also reminded the Council that explanations of the various expenditures are found on the yellow-paged narratives.

A discussion ensued regarding the automobile tax phase-out and the Town Administrator's school budget recommendation.

Council Chairman Calouro noted that his goal is not to find the need to use the "extra-day" meeting scheduled for Monday evening. He also noted that unresolved matters will be recorded by the Clerk so that the Council may deliberate on these before the workshops are concluded.

Town Administrator Contente introduced Brian Peters who is serving in the capacity of Interim Chief of Police. He noted that Chief Peters is a 20 year veteran of the Portsmouth Police Department and that he is a highly-respected law enforcement professional with a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice. He added that Chief Peters is the ideal person to shepherd the Town and its Police Department through its transition period.

Town Administrator Contente noted that the Police Department is in excellent shape since it has strong rules and regulations and that these rules and regulations are meticulously followed. He noted that the 2006 accreditation was voluntary.

Councilman Sweeney asked to know the current status of the accreditation with Town Administrator Contente responding that the department is in self-assessment at this time and that the State accreditation was revoked. He added that he is confident that the department will become re-accredited and that there will be a full report to disclose and that he has full confidence in the Police Department.

701 - Police Department

Brian Peters - Acting Chief of Police

Chief Peters reported that he reviewed the budget and that he is confident that the recommended expenditures will be adequate for the next fiscal year's operation of the department.

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Town Treasurer Goucher noted that each department's bottom line is being examined by her based upon a request made by Councilman Sweeney. She reported that the Police Department has not overspent its bottom line in many years, if ever.

Chief Peters reviewed several of the budget lines with changes over the previous years. He explained that part of the increase to the gas and oil line is to accommodate fuel for the new patrol boat and that training is becoming more expensive. He noted that the department has a full complement of officers so there is no plan to send cadets to the police academy next year.

A discussion ensued about detail wages with Town Administrator Contente noting that this amount covers the cost of special patrols for July 3 and 4 and for the Christmas Festival events.

Councilwoman Parella noted that there is over \$200,000 in in-kind expenses for police and DPW employees paid by the Town for the Fourth of July Celebration in addition to the annual stipend granted to the Committee.

Councilman Sweeney questioned the plan for the new patrol boat with Chief Peters explaining that he will have a meeting with officers tomorrow to formulate a plan for the boat and that he hopes that this plan will be put in place soon.

He noted that the boat will likely be used for special events and on weekends to promote safety on the waterways and that it will patrol to look for problems and hazards. He added that he does not anticipate that the boat will be used daily and that the role of the officers on this boat will be different than that of the Harbormaster.

Town Administrator Contente noted that the previous Chief obtained the boat with the idea that it would provide access to crime scenes by sworn, uniformed officers carrying firearms. He added that this is one of the tools necessary to keep the community safe. He noted that the Harbormaster's duties include moorings, docks, rights of way and limited enforcement.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if the Town of Portsmouth has a police boat with Chief Peters responding that the Harbormaster in Portsmouth is also a police officer.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know how the Town currently covers boating while intoxicated offenders with Harbormaster Marsili

explaining that these are currently passed-off to the Department of Environmental Management or the Coast Guard.

Council Chairman Calouro stated that he supports the idea of the safety aspects but also that he does wish for the Town to have redundant services.

Town Administrator Contente noted that sometimes there is no boat available through the Coast Guard or Department of Environmental Management and now the Town has the tools to respond. He added that this will improve the situation which had been somewhat imperfect in the past.

A further discussion ensued about the operation of the Town's patrol boats.

Chief Peters noted that he will look toward making improvements to the police department along with the command staff and reported that the Town has a great police department and that any negative press that it may have received of late was unwarranted.

Councilman Ley asked to know if the increase to gas and oil is mostly because of the boat with Town Treasurer Goucher explaining that the increase is also to catch up on the actual expenditures since the line item was overspent last year prior to the receipt of the boat.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended.

702 - Animal Control

Debbie DaSilva - Animal Control Officer

Town Treasurer Goucher noted that this department does not generally experience expenditure overruns.

Officer DaSilva noted that she has been in her position for four months and that she has experience caring for animals. She noted that she is also an experienced vet-tech and has served in the Army National Guard.

Officer DaSilva also noted that she worked for some time in the human medical field and came back to the animal field afterwards.

Chief Peters noted that some increases to building maintenance and security with Officer DaSilva adding that there is a

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considerable cost to replace the flushing floor drains which failed due to poor packing of the valve stems.

A discussion ensued regarding the possibility of increasing revenues through partnership with other towns and/or perhaps privatizing some of the building through the rental of space to a veterinarian.

Council Chairman Calouro stated that he was concerned that the Town might be acquiring other communities' problems and cautioned that before taking any such steps, the Town should secure an "iron clad" agreement to protect itself.

Councilman Teixeira stated that he was aware that the Towns of Tiverton and Portsmouth may be interested in partnering with the Town but there was a previous decision not to do this until the shelter operation was completely "buttoned-up."

Officer DaSilva noted that the Potter League does take in animals from other communities and most of Aquidneck Island partners with Potter League.

A discussion ensued regarding use of the shelter as a surrender shelter to accommodate those persons who may wish to adopt out their pets when faced with moving to a nursing home. She suggested that the Town should look into its procedures to possibly allow for this.

Council Chairman Calouro stated that he did not object to investigation of all opportunities for better utilization of the facility.

Town Administrator Contente expressed concern that the Town should not attempt to compete with private kennels and noted that there are facilities which gratefully accept animals for adoption. He expressed further concern that changing focus will result in higher operational costs.

Office DaSilva noted that she is able to handle these unusual situations on a case-by-case basis.

Town Administrator Contente noted that there is a replacement vehicle in the capital plan.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

703 - Harbor Patrol

Greg Marsili, Harbormaster

Harbormaster Marsili reported that part of the building has been rented on a limited basis to A & R Marine (operators of the Prudence Ferry). He noted that the limitations are due to ADA access.

Council Chairman Calouro suggested that the Council might wish to examine the Harbor Fees for next year during September or October. He further suggested that it would be advisable to review fees annually in September or October.

Harbormaster Marsili stated that he asked the Harbor Commission to look into the matter of fees.

Council Chairman Calouro asked to know about the reduction in Software License Fees with Town Treasurer Goucher explaining that she will speak to this issue in Town Hall Complex (504).

A discussion ensued regarding the harbor fees, use of Maritime Center, and the Maritime Center heating system.

It was noted that the narrative regarding utilities was outdated.

Councilman Ley suggested that Harbormaster Marsili may wish to budget for conferences. Harbormaster Marsili noted that he tends to attend those trainings that are offered at no charge.

A discussion ensued regarding pay rates with Town Administrator Contente explaining that he made strides toward "neatening-up" the salary and benefit schedule for all non-union employees.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

601 - Community Development

Diane M. Williamson, Director

Town Administrator Contente announced that he is changing the title of Economic Development Coordinator Vitale to Program Manager. He added that the job description will not change. Council members expressed concern that the title should retain the word and focus on Economic Development. Town Administrator Contente agreed to look into an alternative title.

A discussion ensued regarding the Tourism/Promotion line item.

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Councilwoman Parella suggested that the amount should be raised by \$2000. She noted that there appears to be a direct correlation between the food and beverage tax and this line item.

Town Administrator Contente explained that he did not wish to fund any new initiatives for the reasons stated previously.

The Council agreed, by consensus, to place an asterisk (*) on this line item so that it may be discussed further at a later time.

A discussion also ensued regarding Stormwater Phase 2, GIS mapping and Historic District Commission. Town Administrator Contente stated that it is a case of tightening the belt. Director of Community Development Williamson added that the Town Solicitor attends all Historic District Commission meetings for a fee. She suggested that the use of the Solicitor's time may be better served if routine matters are resolved without a solicitor present.

Council Chairman Calouro suggested that Solicitor fees would be well spent in avoiding bad decisions.

Town Treasurer Goucher explained the various levels of salary adjustments denoted by asterisks in the budget documents.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

602 - Building Inspection
Richard Pimenta, Building Official

Council Chairman Calouro noted the increase in fees with Building Official Pimenta responding that this appears to be attributable to a good economy.

A discussion ensued regarding mileage allowance with Town Administrator Contente explaining that he no longer wants employees to obtain gasoline directly from the Town but would rather provide a mileage stipend.

Building Official Pimenta also explained that he wishes to obtain tablets for the part-time inspectors. He also provided an explanation of temporary inspectors who fill in when he or the other regular inspectors are on vacation, etc.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

402 - Town Administrator

Steven Contente, Town Administrator

Councilwoman Parella noted that the Labor Negotiations line item is reduced with Town Administrator Contente explaining that all contracts have been settled. He added that negotiations will begin anew in 2020.

A discussion ensued regarding the Administrator's salary with Council Chairman Calouro stating that he would like this matter to be taken up by a Charter Review Commission.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

806 - Municipal Observances

Steven Contente, Town Administrator

A discussion ensued regarding the Last Night Concert with Town Treasurer Goucher noting that the cost to the Town for the last night concert, exclusive of in-kind services, is \$30,000. Several possible fundraising initiatives were discussed including the sale of flags flown over Town Hall.

Town Administrator Contente agreed to look into this.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

504 - Town Hall Complex

Julie Goucher, Town Treasurer

Christian Vitale, Economic Development Coordinator (and Projects Coordinator)

Town Treasurer Goucher explained that the Town formally requested proposals to consolidate the majority of its information technology (IT) program with a single vendor. She explained that the current (Town Hall) supplier is a small company which does not appear to have the minimum capacity to serve the entire Town. She added that the Police and Fire Departments currently have their own individual suppliers.

Economic Development Coordinator Vitale explained that the company selected provides an all-inclusive rate and utilizes a ticketing system which will help identify areas which should be

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addressed. He noted that the Town has been underserved with its current system since it utilizes three suppliers.

Council Chairman Calouro asked to know if the new supplier is well versed in ransomware with Economic Development Coordinator Vitale responding that it is.

Town Administrator Contente noted that the budget increase for this new direction will be approximately \$30,000 and that the entire Town will be brought up to the same high standard currently enjoyed by the Police Department.

Economic Development Coordinator Vitale explained that vetting process and explained that the search committee recommends Freedom Tech.

Town Treasurer Goucher noted that the new company will be upgrading the Town's servers, some of which are at the end of their service life.

Councilman Sweeney asked to see copies of the architectural flow charts.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know if the amount to be paid will be \$86,000 with Town Treasurer Goucher explaining that the actual amount is \$89,000 since the Sewer Enterprise Fund will pay an additional \$3,000 over the budgeted amount in Town Hall Complex.

Councilman Ley asked to know if the chosen company would be competent to deal with disaster recovery with Economic Development Coordinator Vitale explaining that the company has a comparably large staff and that it guarantees a response time.

Town Administrator Contente also reported that the parking lot transition in preparation of the Prudence Ferry Dock rehabilitation is complete and that there will be sufficient room for general parking without the need to rent the seasonal parking lot at the northeast corner of Church and Thames Streets.

Town Administrator Contente also noted that the hours have been increased for the custodian at the Byfield and Reynolds School buildings and that the building manager's hours have been reduced.

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Council Chairman Calouro noted that the Town received a grant some years ago for television monitors in the Council Chambers and he asked if this project may be re-energized since the plan to consider an alternative site for the Town Hall has been postponed.

There being no further business, upon a motion by Councilman Teixeira, seconded by Councilman Sweeney and voted unanimously, the Chairman declared this workshop to be adjourned at 9:36 o'clock PM.

Louis P. Cirillo, CMC, Council Clerk