

TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP - TUESDAY EVENING - MARCH 19, 2019

PRESENT: Calouro, Sweeney, Teixeira, Parella (arrived at 6:44 PM), and Ley

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

The Council met in workshop session on Tuesday evening, March 19, 2019, in the Town Hall, Council Chambers, beginning at 6:35 o'clock PM, Council Chairman Calouro presiding:

404 - Town Solicitor

Michael A. Ursillo, Esq., Town Solicitor

Town Solicitor Ursillo explained that his budget request considers a 2% increase. He reported that this amount is consistent with the fee he receives in the other towns where he serves as Solicitor.

Council Chairman Calouro asked to know the status of the litigation line item with Town Treasurer Goucher explaining that the budgeted amount is trending according to plan.

Town Solicitor Ursillo noted that the Town resolved many cases in the last year and that the cost of litigation spiked during the school litigation which was extraordinary.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

603 - Department of Public Works

Kevin R. McBride, Director

Councilwoman Parella arrived at this point in the workshop (6:44 o'clock PM).

It was noted that the budgeted amounts attempt to resolve past shortfalls in grounds maintenance and snow and ice which have been problem areas in the past.

Public Works Director McBride noted that he budgets based upon a five-year look-back to understand the trends.

Council Chairman Calouro noted the tree care line with Public Works Director McBride explaining that the Town is attempting to do more tree maintenance on its own versus utilizing the tree maintenance contractor.

TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP - TUESDAY EVENING - MARCH 19, 2019

Town Administrator Contente noted that the Tree Warden makes the assessment and that the Town crew is dispatched to the less-perilous jobs, particularly those which do not involve power lines. He noted that this new practice represents a significant cost savings. He added that there is a blight which is requiring an increase in tree care projects.

Council Chairman Calouro asked about Grounds Maintenance with Town Treasurer Goucher reminding the Council that certain lines were reallocated from the former "Civic Services" account into the most closely related departments. She added that this was done to accommodate the rules of the State transparency portal.

Town Administrator Contente noted that the contract for Grounds Maintenance is DaPonte's Landscaping.

A discussion ensued regarding tree care and road repaving and the financing of road paving projects.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if the repaired roads remain in good condition with Public Works Director McBride explaining that he places a moratorium on utility cuts for five years.

It was noted that there may be a need to amend the current ordinance to provide it with "more teeth." It was suggested that Public Works Director McBride should bring forward a road-cut ordinance amendment for Council consideration.

A discussion ensued regarding the practice of coordinating utility work with road rehabilitation. Public Works Director McBride noted that the work done on Gibson Road is a good example.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

604 - Water Pollution Control

Jose DaSilva, Superintendent

Chris Cronin, Beta Group

A discussion ensued regarding previous EPA and Department of Environmental Management recorded violations for sewer system failures. Mr. Cronin reported that the Town was able to negotiate its fines down and that the fine amounts will be spent on system improvement projects.

TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP - TUESDAY EVENING - MARCH 19, 2019

It was noted that two employee positions from DWP will be reallocated to Water Pollution Control to address some issues that resulted in violation over the years.

Water Pollution Control Superintendent DaSilva noted that there is a plan to use the water jet daily with the goal of cleaning 17 miles of pipe per year. It was also noted that some of the problems in the system is caused by blockages resulting from the use of baby wipes.

Several projects were reviewed. Water Pollution Control Superintendent DaSilva noted that 16 of the 24 RBC units have been thus far replaced and that there is a plan to replace four more RBCs this year. It was noted that these units operate for 250,000 hours.

It was also noted that the sewer treatment system is 30 years old and that it requires an upgrade. Mr. Cronin estimated the cost of this upgrade at \$3 million.

Town Administrator Contente noted that the violations are not new and that the system operates under a consent decree from 2005. He noted that the most recent recordable violation was 2017 and that problems have not occurred overnight. He added that the Town recently spent \$2 million in repairs and that the controlling authorities agreed to a reduction in the fines and reallocation of the fine amounts due to the Town's commitment to make its system work more effectively.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

606 - Compost

Jose DaSilva, Superintendent

Water Pollution Control Superintendent DaSilva reported that all budget increases are the result of the cost of repairs since the equipment is aging.

A discussion ensued regarding the leaf-bags with Water Pollution Control Superintendent DaSilva explaining that new leaf bag bundles include 50 bags and that these are sold at their approximate cost of \$22 per bundle.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

607 - Enterprise Fund

Julie Goucher, Town Treasurer

Town Treasurer Goucher noted that this fund covers the Sewer and Composting Departments' overhead, audit, and debt.

Council Chairman Calouro asked to know if some of these bonds were ready for refinancing with Town Treasurer Goucher explaining that the bond market is not favorable for that purpose at this time.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

802 - Rogers Free Library

Joan Prescott, Director

Ms. Prescott reported that the Library Trustees wish to bring the minimum wage of the library employees to \$15 per hour. Town Treasurer Goucher noted that there is an agreement to have a tiered system with a range of \$13-16 so as to provide a higher salary to those with greater seniority. It was noted that the Friends of the Library will support the additional cost (\$15,500) for a period of three years. It was also noted that the Friends will provide \$10,000 in support of the Sunday hours.

Ms. Prescott also reported that Sunday hours are not consistently utilized by the public and that the response has not been "robust." She noted that it may take two or three years to catch on with the public. She noted that the library is gaging its success on circulation statistics. After a discussion concerning same, she agreed to take informal head-counts also since some patrons may not wish to check-out materials.

Ms. Prescott also agreed to compare weekend data to data collected during the week. Councilman Sweeney suggested that salaries should be tracked.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

803 - Parks and Recreation

Timothy Shaw, Assistant Director

Town Treasurer Goucher explained that there was an increase adjustment to both program revenue and expenditures since the two are related and that program activity has increased in recent years. She added that the result was net-zero.

TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP - TUESDAY EVENING - MARCH 19, 2019

Town Treasurer Goucher noted that this budget had been a struggle in the past.

A discussion ensued regarding playground maintenance with Assistant Director Shaw explaining that the previous focus was on the playgrounds on the westerly side of Town and that he is now focusing equally on those along the easterly side.

He added that many of these east-side parks had broken equipment which is being repaired and replaced and that the department made some improvements last year and plans to continue along the same track. He also explained the need to maintain the wood chips cushion for safety purposes.

Councilman Sweeney expressed concern that the Town was competing with business owners for activities such as Zumba and Yoga. Assistant Director Shaw noted that the Town is open to proposals for anyone who wishes to run programs in the community center.

A discussion ensued regarding the cost of Summer Camp with the Clerk noting that there is an ordinance proposal to allow for a more flexible method to change camp fees.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know if there was a family-cap to the fee structure with Assistant Director Shaw explaining that he is willing to work with those who cannot afford the fees.

Councilman Ley suggested that the Recreation Department might add a toddler program of some kind.

Council Chairman Calouro noted that the recreation center "flag" signage may be unnecessary and that the Zoning Board and Planning Board are considering new regulations regarding same. He suggested that these signs might be removed.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

501 - Finance

Julie Goucher, Town Treasurer

A brief discussion ensued regarding the ADP program, time and attendance, and the revaluation project.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

502 - Debt Service

Julie Goucher, Town Treasurer

TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP - TUESDAY EVENING - MARCH 19, 2019

Council Chairman Calouro asked to know when the next significant amount of debt will be retired with Town Treasurer Goucher explaining that the amount has been level and that there will be a \$220,000 increase next year.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know if the Town still utilizes the infrastructure bank with Town Treasurer Goucher explaining that this used for sewers only.

A discussion ensued regarding the refinance of bonds with Town Treasurer Goucher explaining that issuance cost is built into the bonds and that the budgeted amount is a "cushion" for any fees that may have been inadvertently omitted from the bond cost.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

503 - Fixed Charges

Julie Goucher, Town Treasurer

Town Treasurer Goucher noted that the OPEB trust is 50% funded which represents one of the better funded programs in the State and that the amount budgeted represents a reduction due to the good performance of the trust.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

404 - Municipal Court

Louis P. Cirillo, Administrator/Clerk

The Clerk explained the reduction in revenues, sharing that the revenues are the direct result of the amount of tickets written. He added that the Town is taking steps to convert unpaid parking tickets to "universal summonses" which will result in the Town's ability to suspend driver's licenses for unpaid parking tickets. It was noted that this effort will allow for a higher collection rate.

A discussion ensued regarding the Municipal Court software. The Clerk noted that the software company used is approved by the State.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

403 - Town Clerk

Louis P. Cirillo, Town Clerk

TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP - TUESDAY EVENING - MARCH 19, 2019

A discussion ensued regarding the Records Restoration line with the Clerk explaining that some recent projects have been entrusted to companies who use a "lighter touch" in their treatment of historic materials and that the previous practice was for aggressive restoration.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended.

402 - Town Council

The Clerk reported on those items managed by him on behalf of the Council. He explained that Town ordinances are now available on-line immediately after passage which was a change from last year. He also noted that the cost to codify supplements to the Town Code is directly proportional to the number of ordinances passed, and that the RILOCAT fee was directly quoted to him by the League of Cities and Towns.

Council Chairman Calouro noted that Town Administrator Contente currently provides plaques to Eagle Scouts. He suggested that the Council contribute from its contingency to support this plaque program.

Councilman Sweeney suggested that all Council documents should go completely paperless. Council Chairman Calouro stated that it may be necessary for the Town to provide tablets to those who do not have them already.

Councilwoman Parella expressed concern that she already has too many devices and that she would prefer to have paper documents. Council Chairman Calouro agreed to help Councilwoman Parella with her concerns.

Discussion of Town Administrator's recommended level of funding for Regional School District

Town Administrator Contente noted that the budget reflects a 2 1/2% increase over last year's allocation. He noted that he made this recommendation based upon the consumer price index along with the concerns relating to the revaluation. He noted that the increase proposed is \$662,000. He also noted that the municipal side of the budget is increased only by 1/7% and that he believes this to be affordable for the taxpayers.

Council Chairman Calouro noted that more than 50% of the local budget is allocated to the School District.

TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP - TUESDAY EVENING - MARCH 19, 2019

Several examples of the typical property owner's tax were discussed.

Council Chairman Calouro noted that there would have to be an exception if the Town is going to exceed the State-imposed spending cap.

Council Chairman Calouro noted that the Town provided an additional \$1 million to the School District last year.

It was noted that the School District requested an 8.48% increase.

A general discussion ensued with Town Treasurer Goucher agreeing to provide a spreadsheet with possible funding scenarios.

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 9:15 o'clock PM.

Louis P. Cirillo, CMC, Council Clerk