

State of Rhode Island

County of Washington

In Hopkinton on the twenty-second day of February 2024 A.D. a budget workshop was held in the Town Hall Meeting Room, 1 Town House Road, Hopkinton, RI 02833 to discuss the proposed FY 24/25 budget.

PRESENT: Michael Geary, Scott Bill Hirst, Stephen Moffitt, Jr., Sharon Davis and Robert Burns; Town Manager Brian Rosso, Finance Director Elizabeth Monty, and Town Clerk Marita Murray.

Mr. Rosso noted that most of tonight's budgets were level funded other than contractual increases and health and dental insurance increases. There were no significant changes.

PLANNING

There are no department adjustments other than salary increases, impact of health insurance and a decrease in the pension rate. Mileage was taken out due to use of the vehicle donated by Velma Clinton. Mr. Rosso advised that currently there is an interim Planner and two part-time clerks, which is not how they wish to staff this office. Therefore, he budgeted as if there was a full-time planner and full-time clerk. They need someone in this office full-time and will be interviewing applicants in the near future.

BUILDING/ZONING

Anthony Santilli, Building Official was present. The only increase to this budget, other than contractual increases, was \$100 for dues and fees. Councilor Hirst asked how many hours the clerk worked, and Mr. Santilli explained that Pat Plante worked 30 hours per week, Tuesday through Friday. Councilor Moffitt asked why there were two-line items for inspectors, both at \$15,000. It was noted that one inspector was for electrical, and the other was for plumbing.

TAX ASSESSOR

There was a decrease in mileage due to the use of the town car. There was also an update from Vision, the cost of which is split between the Tax Assessor, Tax Collector and GIS, which resulted in contract service costs decreasing.

TAX COLLECTOR

Tax Collector, Mary Lynn Caswell was present. Mr. Rosso explained that tax bill expenses have increased. Ms. Caswell stated that she wished to stop sending out paper receipts due to the cost and start offering electronic receipts. She wished to add a buck slip (statement) into the tax bills which will explain to residents that if they would like to receive a paper receipt, they would have to supply a self-addressed stamped envelope with their payment and if they wished an electronic receipt, supply an email address. Ms. Caswell also explained that she sends out delinquent notices after every quarter, rather than waiting until they are two quarters behind. The cost for the buck slip to be added to the bills will be \$1,151.50 and she also asked that this notice be placed on the town's website. Lastly, due to the increased cost of postage, she wished to increase her postage line item to \$1,700.

EDUCATION

Councilor Moffitt noted that Chariho had added money back into their budget in an attempt to keep the Hope Valley School open, so this would be an increase to the Town's budget. Mr. Rosso advised that he would be adjusting the proposed budget to include that amount, which will result in be a big increase. Councilor Davis stated that it was proposed to leave Kindergarten in Hope Valley School for a cost of \$437,000 and wondered if Hopkinton would be responsible for 38% of that. Mr. Rosso believed the \$437,000 would just be an expense to Hopkinton. Councilor Davis noted that Ms. Picard said that this would be an increase of 4.67% just to Hopkinton and the other two towns were under 2%. Mr. Rosso stated that he had prepared a spreadsheet which he would share with the Council.

G.I.S./I.T.

I.T. Director, Jeff Frenette was present. Mr. Rosso explained that there was one large increase for Office 365 email for the Police Department who have not been updated to .gov. Mr. Rosso explained that they would be obtaining cellular backup (a/k/a hot spot) so that if the Town Hall lost power, a hot spot could be

used and there would never be a need to cancel a meeting. Mr. Frenette suggested that this USB hot spot could be moved from building to building and when there were no meetings scheduled at the Town Hall, he would leave this at the police station.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

G.I.S./I.T. was requesting \$8,200 in the CIP for the replacement of six outdated computers and two UPS battery backups, one for the town hall and the other for Crandall House. Mr. Frenette explained that four computers at the Police Department need to be replaced; one in the Planning Department; and, one in the Town Clerk's Office.

MUNICIPAL COURT

Monica Gordon, Municipal Court Clerk, was present. There was an increase in revenue of approximately \$12,000. Councilor Moffitt asked where the money came from when they had to hire an alternate Municipal Court Judge and Mr. Rosso noted that it came out of litigation.

Councilor Davis noted that she would not be present at the February 26, 2024, budget workshop meeting, so she wished to ask a few questions now.

TOWN MANAGER

Councilor Davis asked if the Clerk was part-time, and Mr. Rosso noted that she was at 30 hours per week. He also advised that in her new contract they skipped step 2 and raised her directly to step 3.

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Councilor Davis wished to know what the Zoning Board of Review's contract services was for and Mr. Rosso noted that it was a pass-through for any fees or expenses incurred for an applicant which they were required to reimburse. Councilor Davis asked who the clerk was of the Planning Board and what the stipend was for. Mr. Rosso explained that there was not a full-time clerk, so Ms. Murray has been typing these minutes at home and receiving a stipend. Councilor Davis asked if the town hired a full-time Planning clerk, would that person be taking over the preparation of the minutes. Mr. Rosso noted that historically they have; however, he felt that it would be in the best interest of the town to outsource

those minutes and pay a stipend because of the burden it is on the Planning Department. Councilor Davis wished an explanation of contract services under Planning Board expenses and Ms. Monty explained that this was for when the Planning Board requested services, such as engineering work. Essentially this was a pass through. Councilor Davis asked about the Clerk stipend for the Tax Board of Review, and Mr. Rosso noted that the Tax Assessor's clerk receives this stipend. Councilor Davis requested an explanation of the line item for Consulting Technical under the Conservation Commission. Mr. Rosso explained that this was when they were hiring people to do landscaping type work; however, this Commission is currently not active. Lastly, Councilor Davis asked about the Historic District Commission and Mr. Rosso noted that this Commission was currently inactive and there was a need to obtain volunteers.

The workshop was closed at 6:50 p.m.

Marita D. Murray
Town Clerk

Sydney Fernandes
Deputy Town Clerk