

State of Rhode Island

County of Washington

In Hopkinton on the fifth day of May 2020 A.D. the said Remote Financial Town Assembly was called to order by Moderator Pro-Tem Joseph Moreau at 7:30 P.M. in the Town Hall Meeting Room, 1 Town House Road, Hopkinton, RI 02833.

PRESENT: Frank Landolfi, Sylvia Thompson, Town Manager William McGarry, Finance Director Brian Rosso and Moderator Pro-Tem Joseph Moreau. Participating remotely, Barbara Capalbo, Sharon Davis and Town Clerk Elizabeth Cook-Martin.

ABSENT: Scott Bill Hirst.

The Financial Town Assembly was held remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Order of Business included instructions for participating in the meeting. Moderator Pro-Tem Joseph Moreau called the remote Financial Town Assembly to order with a moment of silent meditation and salute to the Flag. He introduced the Town Council Members and went on to read the following rules of procedure:

- There will be no votes taken as there are no conflicting warrant items or petitions filed by electors, making the requirements of a quorum unnecessary.
- Access to the proposed FY 20-21 Budget and Capital Improvement Plan is available to the public to view on-line on the Town website @[www.hopkintonri.org](http://www.hopkintonri.org).
- On May 13, 2020 at 7:00 PM the Town Council will make final revisions to the budget/warrants and adopt the same for placement on the ballot for the all-day Referendum.
- The electors of the Town will vote on the budget at the Financial Referendum scheduled for June 9, 2020 at the Town Hall. Polls will be open from 7:00 AM to 9:00 PM. The vote will be an approval or rejection of the municipal budget for FY 2020/2021 including the most recently approved Chariho budget - there are no warrant items proposed. In addition, the Town Charter requires the publication of an alternate budget comprised of the most recently approved Chariho School budget and the previous year's approved municipal budget and all approved warrant items. There is no ability to approve or reject individual budget line items. The deadline for receiving objections to individual line item(s) was by April 3, 2020 via the filing of a petition signed by 200 of the Town's electors submitted to the Town Clerk. None were received.

Council President Landolfi gave an introduction and summary of the proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2020-2021. The Town's FY 2020/21 overall budget is

\$27,207,421 which is an increase of \$1,068,550, or 4.1%, from last fiscal year's budget. He noted that education expenses are budgeted at \$20,092,924 which was an increase of \$755,059, or 3.9%, from the last fiscal year's budget. Municipal expenses and Capital Transfer are budgeted at \$7,114,497; an increase of \$313,491 or 4.6%. Departmental revenues are budgeted at \$2,590,851; an increase of \$640,946, or 24.7% from the last fiscal year's budget. As required by the State, the Town underwent a mandatory statistical property revaluation as of 12/31/2019 which resulted in an increase in the Town's net assessed property value by approximately \$151 million. As a result, the FY 2020/21 property tax rate is projected to be \$18.29 per thousand, compared to the FY 2019/20 property tax rate of \$20.68 or a decrease of \$2.39 per thousand. The proposed budget incorporated some of the following items of interest:

- 1) In FY19/20 the Town intends to use \$132,374 of Fund Balance to fund Capital Improvements.
- 2) The budget includes funding for capital projects in the amount of \$132,374 which is a significant reduction from previous years. The main projects include funding the purchase of 1 new police cruiser and 1 full-size plow for the Public Works Department.

Tax math example: FY 2019/20 – A typical home valued at \$300,000, at the current tax rate of \$20.68, per thousand, results in a total tax bill of \$6,204 (300 x \$20.68); FY 2020/21 – that same home, assuming the average increase in assessed value, would be valued at \$351,000 [ $\$300,000 \times (1 + 17.0\%)$ ] for FY 20/21. The total tax bill for that same home at next year's tax rate of \$18.29, per thousand, would be \$6,419 (351 x \$18.29), an increase of \$215 from \$6,204 to \$6,419. Education expenses represent 77% of the total FY 2020/21 budget. Municipal expenses represent 23% of the total FY 2020/21 budget.

#### **DISCUSSION ON PROPOSED BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2020-2021**

The expense line items and revenue line items were reviewed and discussed as follows:

Education expense – at the top of page 2, Councilor Davis asked if that was the final figure from Chariho. Council President Landolfi noted that this amount had been approved by the School Committee but had not yet been voted on.

Councilor Davis believed that because of the shutdown of the schools due to the Corona Virus, Chariho's expenses should be much less and questioned if some of that unspent money would come back to the town. Councilor Thompson stated that normally unspent money would end up in a surplus and they would use it in the next proposed budget. Mr. Rosso agreed and felt that it would be the following year's budget because they have to wait for their books to be audited and their financial statements are not due until December 31<sup>st</sup>. At that point they would know what their actual surplus or deficit was and this is when they would know their fund balance for the next budget cycle.

Elections – Councilor Davis questioned the amount of money needed for elections due to the fact that a lot of voters would be voting by mail ballot. Clerk Cook-Martin answered that there would be some savings concerning the Presidential Preference Primary because they would only have one polling place open; however, she expected the September and November elections to be held as usual.

Debt Service – Mr. Rosso explained that there was an increase due to the first principle payment being due on the Land Trust bond; everything else had been in the budget previously.

Building & Zoning Department – Councilor Thompson asked Mr. Rosso to explain how much of the revenue line item was due to solar and Mr. Rosso explained that of the \$330,000 revenue line item, \$230,000 is estimated for solar projects and \$100,000 from building permits, foreclosures and other sources. Councilor Thompson noted that the solar revenue was actually more than \$230,000, but some of that money had to be accessed to meet the budget expenses in the current budget due to the fact that last year's budget was rejected. Mr. Rosso stated this was correct.

Police Department – It was noted that this was the largest department of the budget with an increase of 8.3% for FY 2020/21. Councilor Thompson noted that this was partially due to last year's budget having failed and the need to add in all of the expenses for two years.

Dispatchers – Councilor Capalbo noted that this budget is actually \$11,000 less than three years ago.

Animal Control – Council President Landolfi noted that this budget was \$93,286,

an increase of 37% from last fiscal year. He noted that the part time person had left and Mr. McGarry noted that they had advertised for another part time person and received three applications.

Town Council - Council President Landolfi noted that this budget was \$17,151 and hadn't increased in over 14 years. Councilor Davis advised that there had not been an increase since 2005 and it was actually decreased in 2012. She believed that it was time to increase that budget by \$1,000 per councilor or a total of \$5,000 which could be taken from the amount that the Land Trust would receive based on the fact that the Land Trust was receiving money from a solar project. Council President Landolfi suggested that at their next meeting this matter would be up for discussion and vote. Councilor Thompson wished to note that the amount listed in the Town Council budget was not entirely for salaries; there was \$5,000 for contingencies such as emergencies or unexpected items and in the past it had been \$10,000 for contingencies. Overall, the bottom line budget was less; however, the councilors did not receive less money. Councilors Thompson and Capalbo both believed they were similarly paid as other small rural towns in the state. Council President Landolfi agreed with Councilor Davis and felt that with the amount of work that is required, they did deserve a raise.

Zoning Board – This budget decreased by almost half. Clerk Cook-Martin explained that the Zoning Board had previously had several matters before them that required them to hold additional meetings and noted that those matters had been completed and the Zoning Board was back to their normal meeting schedule.

Grants & Contributions – Council President Landolfi noted that this was up slightly by 3.1%. Councilor Thompson wished Mr. Rosso to note where the grant monies were going and he explained that Ashaway Ambulance and Hope Valley Ambulance were each receiving \$52,000; Ashaway Free Library and Langworthy Public Library were each receiving \$68,000; Wood River Health Service was receiving \$10,000.

Capital Improvement Projects – This budget is proposed at \$132,374 which is a decrease of almost 71% from the prior fiscal year. Councilor Thompson noted that last year the Land Trust had received \$15,000 from the tax stamp revenue account of the Town Clerk's budget and the Council was planning on reducing

that amount for the upcoming year to \$10,000 based on the Land Trust receiving \$20,000 a year for the next twenty-five years from one of the solar projects. She wished someone from the Land Trust send the Council an email accepting the \$10,000 being offered instead of the \$15,000. Marilyn Grant of the Land Trust was present via telephone and noted that the Land Trust had developed a budget and with the solar money and the \$15,000 received from the town, they would be just about level-funded. She noted that in the current state of affairs, open space had become more and more important and the Nature Conservancy properties were closed, as well as many parks. The Land Trust properties have become extremely important and she wished to extend their need for \$15,000. Council President Landolfi noted that he was disappointed. Councilor Capalbo noted that this matter would be discussed further on May 13, 2020.

**PROPOSED WARRANT ITEM**

There is one proposed Warrant Item for the June 9, 2020 Budget Referendum Ballot:

- To restrict the unspent balance of the Salt & Sand Budget Line Item #5350-6000 and Overtime Pay Budget Line Item #4060-6000 in the 2019/2020 Fiscal Year Public Works Department Budget to be placed into the Legal Fees Restricted Account.

Council President Landolfi noted that the Department of Public Works had underspent on the Salt & Sand budget and Overtime Pay budget because of the mild winter and they wished to allocate this money toward legal expenses.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The Moderator Pro-Tem declared the Financial Town Assembly adjourned at 8:44 P.M.

Elizabeth J. Cook-Martin

Town Clerk

Marita D. Murray

Deputy Town Clerk