

State of Rhode Island

County of Washington

In Hopkinton on the twenty-fifth day of February 2021 A.D. the said remote budget workshop was called to order by Town Council President Stephen Moffitt, Jr. at 6:00 P.M. in the Town Hall Meeting Room, 1 Town House Road, Hopkinton, RI 02833.

PRESENT: Scott Bill Hirst and Michael Geary were present in the Meeting Room at the Town Hall; Stephen Moffitt, Jr., Sharon Davis, Robert Marvel; Acting Town Manager/Finance Director Brian Rosso; Town Clerk Elizabeth Cook-Martin attended remotely.

The Workshop was held to continue budget discussions re: proposed FY 21/22 budget.

EMA

Ronald MacDonald, EMA Director was present. Mr. Rosso explained that fifty percent of the phone bill for EMA, as well as the salary, is reimbursed through a grant. Councilor Marvel noted that the revenue budget was the same as the expense but questioned if we expected the actual to be half of that amount. Mr. Rosso indicates yes that has been an ongoing issue that the town has never addressed. They do have extra funds that they could allocate from other grants, but unless the town is in a tough financial position at year end he will just allocate half. If they ever were in a deficit they would be able to allocate 100% of it. Councilor Marvel felt the budgeting of the entire amount was a little confusing because it was State reimbursed; however, the State was never going to reimburse the town the entire amount.

Public Welfare

Joseph Moreau, Public Welfare Director was present. Mr. Moreau indicated that there has not been a lot of awareness about the programs available for our residents in need. He noted that Councilor Marvel had suggested sending out postcards to residents alerting them to some of the information that is available and he offered to donate his \$50 stipend toward the mailing. Councilor Hirst

wished to add another line item to the Public Welfare Director's budget for a discretionary fund of \$100, which was agreed to by all Councilors.

Education

Mr. Rosso noted that there is not much discretion over this page. Councilor Hirst asked how much of our tax rate is attributed to the school and how much to the town. Mr. Rosso indicated that education was estimated at 67% with the rest being municipal. The direct tax rate for education of our \$18.66 proposed tax rate, \$14.20 goes directly to education and \$4.46 goes to the municipal budget. Councilor Hirst noted that he wished an outside management study performed which was where they look at the operation of the school district. It would review the labor costs, the staffing needs, the number of people employed, everything from equipment to facilities.

Police/Dispatch

Chief Palmer was present. Mr. Rosso noted that Chief Palmer had suggested moving some money out of the education reimbursement line item, shifting it into the training line item. Council President Moffitt noted that this was a contract negotiation year and Councilor Davis questioned the increase in training and asked Chief Palmer what training they intended on doing. She noted that she just joined the steering committee of Healthy Body Healthy Minds and they said that Chief Palmer was involved in training the officers to handle behavioral problem calls. Chief Palmer noted that this was part of the training, but they also have mandatory training for mental health issues, firearms, Taser, breathalyzer, domestic violence among other things. He noted that they would also like to include in the training: diversity training, crisis intervention, sensitivity training, fair and impartial training and increase our use of force training. Councilor Davis asked Chief Palmer about traffic details and Chief Palmer explained that every police officer was eligible to put in for a traffic detail and if no officer wished to do so, a traffic officer would be eligible. The benefit to the town was that every hour that a police cruiser is used they receive approximately \$25 from the vendor and they receive approximately \$550 in administrative fees. There were no questions regarding the dispatch budget.

Animal Control

Samantha Bowen, Animal Control Officer was present. There was no discussion concerning the Animal Control budget.

Recreation

Mary Sawyer, Recreation Director was present. Councilor Geary asked why part time wages outweighed full time wages. Mr. Rosso noted that this was a combination of several people. Ms. Sawyer noted that the full time wages was for the clerk and the part time wages were for all other Rec Commission employees. She noted there are two union employees and several seasonal employees. Councilor Davis asked about the revenue, noting with Covid it would probably be less. Mr. Rosso advised that he and Mrs. Sawyer had addressed that and this was a concern noting that if they did not receive the revenue they would not be spending the expenses. It was acknowledged that if the programs, such as winter basketball, were held, they would probably see a small loss on the budget due to Covid. Councilor Davis asked Mr. Rosso about the last line in the Recreation budget which showed a negative \$166,459 and if this meant that the Recreation Department was not totally covered by its revenue, which he indicated was correct.

Town Manager

Mr. Rosso, Acting Town Manager, was present. He noted that the largest change in this budget was the health insurance. He noted that the previous town manager and his assistant both received a buy-back for health insurance. He noted that they cannot make that assumption going forward. Councilor Davis asked the Town Clerk where the town stood regarding the search for a new Town Manager. Mrs. Cook-Martin noted that there has been no search started as of yet. Councilor Marvel asked if the salary noted in the budget was comparable to other towns. Mr. Rosso advised that it was based on the previous Town Manager's salary plus a 1% increase. Mr. Rosso noted that this was not a union position and when they hired someone they would negotiate that contract. Council President Moffitt commented that he hoped Mr. Rosso would apply for the Town Manager's position when the time comes, which was the consensus of all Councilors.

Finance

Mr. Rosso, Finance Director was present. He noted regarding Contract Services, they recently upgraded their payroll system because they had a very antiquated system prior and this is now an online system.

Debt Service

Regarding debt services, Mr. Rosso indicated that he added comments to provide a background regarding various outstanding loans. He noted he was working on refinancing two of the oldest bonds in order to save some money. Councilor Geary asked how long they had to pay a bond back and are the bonds insured. Mr. Rosso did not believe the bonds were insured. He advised that they just added the Land Trust bond issued in 2019 which is \$175,000 a year to pay off that \$2,000,000 bond, plus the \$1,000,000 that they are still paying off on the 2012 bond; total debt service for the Land Trust right now is approximately \$250,000 per year. The road reconstruction bond was taken out in 2015 and they refinanced the police station at that time and consolidated it with the new road reconstruction bond. The time frame on the bonds is structured on the useful life of the asset; such as Land Trust bonds are 20 to 25 years; street lights are 10 to 15 years; and, road reconstruction was 15 years. Councilor Marvel asked what the current bond rating for the town was and Mr. Rosso noted that it was an AAA rating. Councilor Marvel was curious about the different bonds and asked if there was any documentation on what the bonds entailed and Mr. Rosso provided an overview.

Capital Improvement Program (CIP)

Mr. Rosso noted that the police cruisers are retired when they reach approximately 125,000 miles. Chief Palmer noted that contract negotiations would be occurring soon and he wished to change that mileage to 140,000 because vehicles are made so much better now. Mr. Rosso noted that this year they were proposing to fund the police cruiser replacement line item in the CIP by \$53,274 which was for the last payment of the two sedans procured in FY20 of \$23,000 then the second payment of last year's SUV that they funded and then year one of FY22. Mr. Rosso noted that generally they lease these vehicles but they like to pay up front when they can for most CIPs. If they lease, they like to have the lease shorter than the life expectancy of the vehicle.

Warrant Items/Other Departments, Agencies and Budgetary Matters

There was nothing discussed in this regard.

Joe Moreau of Old Depot Road asked about page 6 of the budget, noting that several years ago he and Mr. Rosso had had a discussion concerning cell phone towers and their revenue and he had mentioned that in some cities and towns are using flagpoles and inside those flagpoles are cell equipment for additional revenue. He noticed under the year to date December 31st it showed a dollar amount of \$93,424 which was much higher than the previous years and he wondered why. He also wished Mr. Rosso to consider taking the position of Town Manager permanently. Mr. Rosso stated that last year he had discovered that there was an escalating clause in their contract with AT&T which had never been honored. The town was owed a 1% aggregate increase over the last fifteen years and AT&T issued the town a check. The annual payment has now increased to where it should be.

The workshop was closed at 7:50 PM.

Elizabeth J. Cook-Martin

Town Clerk

Marita D. Murray

Deputy Town Clerk