

State of Rhode Island

County of Washington

In Hopkinton on the third day of March 2022 A.D. a hybrid budget workshop (in person and remote) was held in the Town Hall Meeting Room, 1 Town House Road, Hopkinton, RI 02833 to discuss the proposed FY 22/23 budget.

**PRESENT:** Stephen Moffitt, Jr., Sharon Davis, Scott Bill Hirst, Robert Marvel and Michael Geary; Town Manager Brian Rosso; Town Clerk Elizabeth Cook-Martin. Also present: Finance Director Elizabeth Monty.

### **EMA**

EMA Director Ron MacDonald was present. Mr. Rosso noted that there was not much in this budget other than an increase in the stipend which was put in last year but since the budget was rejected was not received. Mr. MacDonald advised that he was working on a Business Continuity of Operations Plan, which is a disaster plan should something happen in the town, regarding how to recover business-wise for the town employees and town departments. Thereafter, he will be working on the emergency operations plan update and every year they update their meds plan which was used for the COVID vaccines.

### **PUBLIC WELFARE**

Public Welfare Director Joseph Moreau was present. Councilor Davis believed that in the previous year they had added a line item for a discretionary fund of \$100. It was agreed to increase that discretionary fund to \$250. Mr. Moreau wished to see some type of an emergency fund set up for residents.

### **EDUCATION**

Council President Moffitt noted that currently Hopkinton's projected increase was expected to be 1.05%. Councilor Hirst advised that he did not support Chariho's budget and Council President Moffitt stated that he did support Chariho's budget.

### **POLICE**

Chief David Palmer was present. Councilor Geary asked how long a police cruiser was kept. Chief Palmer indicated until it reached 125,000 miles and then it was used for police details. Councilor Geary also inquired about body cameras and Chief Palmer noted that body cameras have been mandated and they were

holding discussions with different vendors. He hoped that the state funding was going to be sufficient to purchase these cameras. Councilor Davis noted that during the previous year's budget process, Chief Palmer had noted that the line item for training of \$10,000 was to be used for mental health training and because that budget was rejected she wondered if they had held this training. Chief Palmer noted that mental health training was included in their regular training and was state mandated; each officer has attended two different sessions this past year. Councilor Geary stated that Chief Palmer's monthly reports indicated that there had been a dramatic jump in attempted suicides and asked what the police response protocol was. Chief Palmer explained that they called EMS and depending on how severe the matter was, if they could prove that there was an actual comment made by the individual about wanting to kill themselves, they were taken to the hospital. Councilor Marvel asked if the \$10,000 for training would be enough this year and Chief Palmer indicated that the \$10,000 covered all mandated training such as CPR, mental health, breathalyzer, etc. If officers wish additional training they are offered comp time.

## **DISPATCH**

Chief Palmer was present. Councilor Geary asked the Chief to explain the protocol that a dispatcher follows when there is a call about an attempted suicide. Chief Palmer noted that all of the officers have been trained in this regard and will ask all necessary questions, such as if there are any weapons involved, where they are, who they are with, whether there are drugs involved, etc., noting that there is a whole series of questions and all dispatchers go through 40 hours of training with a seasoned dispatcher, which includes this.

## **ANIMAL CONTROL**

Animal Control Officer Samantha Bowen was present. Councilor Davis noted that last year Ms. Bowen had indicated that it cost \$80 to spay or neuter a cat before allowing it to be adopted and her revenue has increased by \$1,000 and wondered why. Ms. Bowen explained that this past year she had picked up 70 cats which all had to be vetted, spayed and neutered. She noted that the cost for spaying and neutering has increased to \$100 with the program that they use through Salmon River Spay & Neuter. The issue that they are having is that the

veterinary prices have gone up drastically; however, Stand Up for Animals has been assisting them. There is an extremely large amount of feral cats in town and they are attempting to trap, neuter and release these cats in the areas where they found them because they cannot be placed. Councilor Geary questioned Mr. Rosso about needed repairs to Ms. Bowen's truck. Mr. Rosso explained that this was one of Ms. Bowen's goals as well as more storage. He noted that one of the other projects that they were looking at is a new well which will benefit the animal shelter as well as the Public Works Department, as well as a generator.

## **RECREATION**

Recreation Director Mary Sawyer was present. Mr. Rosso noted that revenue was down due to COVID but he expects that will start improving in the coming year. Ms. Sawyer explained that when COVID first came they had to close down and lay people off. They opened up as soon as they could and are working hard to get back to normal. Councilor Geary asked Ms. Sawyer if she thought using signs would draw more attention to upcoming events. She advised that she has had trouble with the light-weight fold out signs used in the past and if the signs are too heavy she is not able to move them. She suggested that she liked the signs that stuck in the ground and felt they were helpful in getting the word out to residents. Councilor Davis asked if she would prefer to have a lighted sign where the letters could be changed and Ms. Sawyer thought that would be great, but probably expensive.

## **BUILDING/ZONING**

Building Official Anthony Santilli was present via zoom. Councilor Davis noted under the revenue section that last year's commercial solar line was estimated at \$327,000 and this year there was nothing in there. Mr. Rosso noted that this was for permitting fees for solar projects and none are anticipated for this year. Council President Moffitt asked if line item 3400 would include permitting fees as well as revenue from the solar projects and Mr. Rosso indicated that he was correct, this was for residential and commercial solar. There was very minimal revenue that they felt could be put in there. It was noted that Mr. Santilli's salary was paid 60% by Hopkinton and 40% by Richmond which was working well.

## **FINANCE**

Finance Director Elizabeth Monty was present. Mr. Rosso noted that there was a new time and attendance program being used for payroll. There were no questions for this department.

### **DEBT SERVICE**

Mr. Rosso advised that the Land Trust debt had been added into the last budget which was a big increase. Mr. Rosso believed either the road construction bond or the police station bond would be completed in FY24.

### **TOWN MANAGER**

Councilor Davis questioned the raise increase for the salaries and Mr. Rosso noted that he had factored in a 2% increase for FY22 and FY23, similar to the other departments. Mr. Rosso also stated that he had increased the travel and conference expense because he had a lot to learn.

### **CIP**

Regarding the CIP, Mr. Rosso explained that he had included the purchase of a new police vehicle which is in the collective bargaining agreement, which was something that came up every year. He noted that it is very hard to get a vehicle right now and the cost has increased dramatically. Councilor Geary asked if the vehicle was paid for by a bond or a car loan and Mr. Rosso noted that in the past they have used town funds; however, because the interest rates were so low right now he was going through a municipal leasing company who solicits borrowers and they will provide us with the lowest rate and we will sign a three year lease.

### **PLANNING**

Senior Planning Clerk Talia Jalette was not present. Mr. Rosso explained this budget noting that the revenue that they receive is for land development projects. Council President Moffitt asked about line 5250 for printing and copying which was budgeted at \$200; however, the year to date column was \$2,429. Mr. Rosso indicated that he would look into this and believed it to be an error or just a one-time fee.

Councilor Davis questioned the solar projects revenue noting that Mr. Rosso had indicated that they were receiving a lot less solar revenue than was previously thought. She wished to get an updated copy of the spreadsheet of all the solar projects with anticipated fees and revenue. Councilor Davis noted that in the

prior year they had budgeted approximately \$327,000 in revenue which was for: Revity and 15 Frontier Road of \$150,000 and Stone Ridge and Palmer Circle of \$177,000. She wished to know what the amounts truly were and asked for an updated worksheet.

The Workshop was closed at 7:00 P.M.

Elizabeth J. Cook-Martin

Town Clerk

Marita D. Murray

Deputy Town Clerk