

State of Rhode Island

County of Washington

In Hopkinton on the twenty first day of March 2022 A.D. the said meeting was called to order by Town Council President Stephen Moffitt, Jr. at 6:30 P.M. in the Town Hall Meeting Room, 1 Town House Road, Hopkinton, RI 02833.

PRESENT: Stephen Moffitt, Jr., Sharon Davis, Robert Marvel; Scott Bill Hirst, Michael Geary; Town Solicitor Stephen Sypole; Town Manager Brian Rosso; Town Clerk Elizabeth Cook-Martin.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR HIRST AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR DAVIS TO CONVENE IN OPEN SESSION AND RECESS TO EXECUTIVE SESSION UNDER: R.I.G.L. SEC. 42-46-5(A)(1) - INTERVIEWS: BOARDS & COMMISSIONS: COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE AND R.I.G.L. SEC. 42-46-5 (A)(2) LITIGATION.

POLL VOTE:

IN FAVOR: Moffitt, Davis, Hirst, Geary, Marvel

OPPOSED: None

SO VOTED

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR HIRST AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR MARVEL TO RECONVENE IN OPEN SESSION.

IN FAVOR: Moffitt, Davis, Hirst, Geary, Marvel

OPPOSED: None

SO VOTED

Council President Moffitt reported that no votes were taken in Executive Session relative to RIGL sec. 42-46-5(a)(1) Interviews: Boards & Commissions: Communications Committee.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR MOFFITT AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR HIRST TO AFFIRM ALL VOTES TAKEN IN EXECUTIVE SESSION RELATIVE TO RIGL SEC. 42-46-5 (A)(2) LITIGATION.

IN FAVOR: Moffitt, Davis, Hirst, Geary, Marvel

OPPOSED: None

SO VOTED

§ 42-46-4(b) - All votes taken in closed sessions shall be disclosed once the session is reopened; provided, however, a vote taken in a closed session need not be disclosed for the period of time during which its disclosure would jeopardize any strategy, negotiation or investigation undertaken pursuant to discussions conducted under § 42-46-5(a).

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR DAVIS AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR MARVEL TO SEAL THE MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE SESSION.

IN FAVOR: Moffitt, Davis, Hirst, Geary, Marvel

OPPOSED: None

SO VOTED

The meeting was called to order with a moment of silent meditation and a salute to the Flag.

CONSENT AGENDA

Councilor Hirst removed the Town Council Meeting Minutes of March 7, 2022 from the Consent Agenda to vote on separately.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR HIRST AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR MARVEL TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA AS

FOLLOWS: Approve Budget Workshop Minutes of March 3, 2022; Budget Workshop Minutes of March 9, 2022; Budget Workshop Minutes of March 14, 2022; Set Monday, May 9, 2022 as date for Special Town Council Meeting to adopt the proposed 22/23 fiscal year budget; Accept the following monthly financial/activity report: Town Clerk; Approve refund resulting from a double payment on real property tax by the seller and buyers escrow company submitted by the Tax Collector.

IN FAVOR: Moffitt, Davis, Hirst, Geary, Marvel

OPPOSED: None

SO VOTED

Councilor Hirst was asked why he wished to vote on the minutes separately and he indicated he had an issue with how the February 7, 2022 meeting was handled.

Council President Moffitt noted the date differed from March 7, 2022 which was before them, at which point Councilor Hirst stated that he would make a motion to approve.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR HIRST AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR DAVIS TO APPROVE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF MARCH 7, 2022.

IN FAVOR: Moffitt, Davis, Hirst, Geary, Marvel

OPPOSED: None

SO VOTED

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

Town Manager Brian Rosso provided an employment update noting that Elizabeth Monty was in place as the Finance Director with Debra Lewis as the Deputy Finance Clerk. He also noted that Talia Jalette has been promoted as the Planning Director and Michelle Gagnon-Smith was hired as the Town Manager's Assistant.

OLD BUSINESS

TOWN COUNCIL BYLAWS

The Town Council reviewed the updated Town Council Bylaws and Councilor Davis noted that she wished to make four changes, the first being on page 2, Section (B) with a sentence added at the end to read: "The regular Town Council meeting will end at 10:00 p.m." Section (C) should then be changed to: "...Town Council beyond 10:00 p.m. should..." At the top of Page 5, Section (C), Tape Recording: she felt it should state: "The Town Clerk, or her designee, may..." On Page 7, Section 113 – Order of Business, she wished a new No. 14 be added for Public Comment and then Nos. 14 and 15 renumbered. Solicitor Sypole explained that he had sent several minor typographical changes to the Clerk's Office and he wished to discuss Section 2 on page 15, Referral to Committee/Amendments. Council President Moffitt felt this section was redundant and wished to remove it, which was agreed to by all Councilors.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR HIRST AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR MARVEL TO ADOPT THE TOWN COUNCIL BYLAWS WITH THE AMENDMENTS MADE THIS EVENING.

IN FAVOR: Moffitt, Davis, Hirst, Geary, Marvel

OPPOSED: None

SO VOTED

NEW BUSINESS

APPOINTMENT OF AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) COORDINATOR

Town Planner Talia Jalette submitted a letter indicating she was interested in serving as the ADA Coordinator.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR HIRST AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR DAVIS TO APPOINT TALIA JALETTE AS THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) COORDINATOR.

IN FAVOR: Moffitt, Davis, Hirst, Geary, Marvel

OPPOSED: None

SO VOTED

APRIL 5, 2022 CHARIHO SCHOOL BUDGET VOTE

Councilor Hirst had requested discussion re: April 5, 2022 Chariho School Budget vote.

Councilor Hirst was happy to announce that all Town Council members were present at the Chariho Annual School District Meeting. He indicated that he had sent an email to Chariho asking how much the maintenance of effort will be for Hopkinton and received a response that suggested that the FY23 proposed local support per student without non-recurring cost and before issuance of state aid for Hopkinton is: FY22 - \$12,739 and FY23 - \$12,898 or a 1.25% increase.

Councilor Hirst noted that he is against the Chariho budget and wished there to be an unbiased, outside management study which would identify what was needed and not needed in the school district. The maintenance of effort law requires, short of non-recurring expenses and decrease in student enrollment, that you have to give the school district the same amount of money as the previous year. He

wished the Town Council to take a stand on the budget and each Councilor to voice whether they approved or disapproved of the budget. Council President Moffitt noted that he supported the Chariho budget but felt it was up to the taxpayers to decide. He hoped that the residents would come out to vote on this budget whether they approved or disapproved of it. He felt that Chariho and the Chariho Act are an extremely complicated thing that many people do not understand and it bothered him that in some years the town was already at the 4% increase cap on the town budget which meant that they cannot, as a town, could not spend any money or they would be over the 4% cap. He believed Hopkinton was always starting in the hole and the town cannot get out of this hole. He felt their only hope was to encourage our legislators to work hard at a better state funding formula. Councilor Hirst advised that the Rhode Island State Constitution, Article XII, Section 1, specifically states that the General Assembly shall promote education. He noted that years ago an MGT study was done and they proposed an equalized tax rate to be done gradually, but this did not resonate well with Charlestown because it would have increased their property taxes. He wished to have an outside management study performed to look at staffing and how they purchase items, noting that because of the maintenance of effort law the school's budget could never be reduced. There was discussion on how this could be fixed by a change to the Chariho Act, though it was believed that all three towns would not agree to this. Councilor Hirst indicated that the town could hire a constitutional lawyer to sue for an equalized tax rate but that would very costly. He indicated that the General Assembly has the power to take away and abolish the school committees and could take over the schools if they wished. Council President Moffitt noted that there was a bill passed in the House that changed the statute that Councilor Hirst had quoted so that it now read that the General Assembly shall promote a fair and equal education. Councilor Marvel suggested they advocate for every taxpaying resident in Hopkinton to come out and vote on the school budget regardless of whether they were for or against the budget. He also stated that he was in favor of the budget explaining that educating our children was one of the most important essential services that a municipality or state can provide. Councilor Geary indicated that how he voted was no one's

business and agreed that there should be some kind of a fiscal audit. He noted that Chariho was a good school but the town was going broke trying to pay for it. Councilor Davis agreed with Councilor Geary that a person's vote is personal.

SCHEDULE WORKSHOP WITH TWO FIRE DISTRICTS TO DISCUSS AMBULANCE SERVICES

The Council discussed and considered setting a date for a workshop with the two fire districts re: ambulance services including developing a timeframe or outline to be included in the workshop invitation requested by Councilor Davis.

Councilor Davis read the following: During our current Hopkinton Town Budgeting process, it has become abundantly clear that Hopkinton cannot fully increase its funding to the Ashaway Ambulance Association and the Hope Valley Ambulance Squad to meet their needs. Both ambulances are requesting \$100,000 grants. Hopkinton has tentatively budgeted \$62,000 each. They will still need \$38,000 each to meet their requests. In addition to reviewing the documentation provided with the ambulance grant requests, several Hopkinton Town Councilors attended a meeting of the Ashaway Fire District on March 16, 2022 to better understand the Fire District's financial commitment to the Ashaway Ambulance Association. The Ashaway Fire District is willing to continue to partially fund the Ashaway Ambulance Association and manage how their funding is used. But they are not ready to absorb the ambulance organization into the Fire District. Long term, the only way to continue to cover ambulance funding needs will be by increasing the fire taxes that Ashaway residents have to pay. The key question is are the Ashaway residents willing to accept increases to their fire taxes? The Hope Valley Ambulance Squad provides services to Hope Valley and Richmond and receives funding from both towns. As both towns' grants top out, I have begun discussions with the Hope Valley-Wyoming Fire District regarding beginning to issue funding directly to the Hope Valley Ambulance without absorbing them. Several other town councilors have also met with the Ambulance Squad. How much of this funding should come from Richmond and Wyoming residents compared to Hope Valley residents? Again, the key question is, are the residents of the involved towns willing to accept increases to their fire taxes? I would like to schedule a Hopkinton Town Workshop on July 11, 2022 at

7:00 pm or sooner to further discuss future funding of volunteer ambulance services in Hopkinton. The Ashaway Fire District needs to determine if it is willing to increase fire taxes so that it can increase the grant that it gives to the Ashaway Ambulance. The Hope Valley-Wyoming Fire District needs to determine if it is willing to increase fire taxes so that it can give a grant to the Hope Valley Ambulance. During the workshop the following agenda items would be addressed:

1. What are the advantages of Fire Districts increasing/beginning to fund ambulances without absorbing them?
2. What are the obstacles that would prevent the Fire Districts from increasing/beginning to fund ambulances by increasing fire taxes?
3. What are the ways to overcome these obstacles?
4. Next steps.

We should invite both fire districts, both ambulance services, the Richmond Town Council and the Hopkinton and Richmond residents to the workshop. This is a serious long-term problem that cannot be solved by the Town of Hopkinton alone.

Councilor Davis noted that when they first began this discussion she had believed that the easiest solution would be for the ambulance associations to be absorbed by the fire districts; however, this does not seem to be agreeable to the fire districts. At the moment the Ashaway Fire District is willing to give the Ashaway Ambulance Association money without absorbing them. She felt that the Hope Valley/Wyoming Fire District might be willing to do the same for the Hope Valley Ambulance Corps. She believed that they should hold a workshop before July 11, 2022, before the Ashaway Fire District has their budget vote on the third Thursday of July and the Hope Valley/Wyoming Fire District has a vote on their budget on the third Wednesday of July. Council President Moffitt noted that he was in attendance at the Ashaway Fire District meeting and after hearing their discussion he was happy about how they have handled this issue. He noted that these are two separate taxing authorities, both in Hopkinton, and felt this was a Hope Valley/Wyoming Fire District issue and Hope Valley residents would have to decide this issue. Councilor Davis advised that she had spoken with Chief Lee

of the Hope Valley/Wyoming Fire District who thought that the absorption would have to be a three to five year plan, which is why she felt that if they do not absorb them but are willing to provide the ambulance corps with funds. The key issue was whether the residents were willing to accept a fire tax increase. Council President Moffitt noted that the Ashaway Fire District had indicated that they were going to have three or four more informational meetings leading up to their budget vote.

The Council set Monday, May 9, 2022 as the date for the Workshop after they finalize and adopt the proposed budget. The Workshop will begin at 7:00 PM.

PUBLIC FORUM

No one spoke during public forum.

ADJOURNMENT

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR HIRST AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR MARVEL TO ADJOURN.

SO VOTED

Elizabeth J. Cook-Martin

Town Clerk

Marita D. Murray

Deputy Town Clerk