

State of Rhode Island

County of Washington

In Hopkinton on the twenty-second 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 budget workshop was called to order with a moment of silent meditation and a salute to the Flag.

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

Land Trust

Marilyn Grant, Chairperson of the Land Trust was present. Mr. Rosso noted that the Land Trust's budget used to be under Boards and Commissions; however, four or five years ago it was moved out into the CIP. He explained that the Land Trust receives a portion of the Town Clerk's real estate conveyance tax stamp revenue, noting that the Land Trust has asked for \$15,000 this year. Mrs. Grant indicated that she had provided two sheets, one was an overview of their properties and projects they are currently working on; and, the other is some of the other relationships that they have, such as the Conservation Commission. She explained that their costs were for maintaining their properties and projects that are in the works. She noted that they expect to be closing on another property in the fall which will require some work and she explained the other costs and expenses. Regarding revenue, the Land Trust receives an endowment from the RI Foundation which was established by Ed Wood a few years ago; they lease three properties to farmers for hay and corn growing; Southern Sky solar is an

agreement they worked out with the developer to move an easement they had on a piece of land which allowed the solar company to build their solar array; and lastly, they receive the money from the town.

Councilor Marvel asked about the legal fees and wondered why it was higher than last year. Ms. Grant advised that this was due to the expected closing costs associated with the purchase of the new property.

Planning

Mr. Lamphere, the Town Planner, was present. Mr. Rosso indicated that this department's revenue came from land development projects, some of which were from solar, which they do not anticipate to continue; however, there are some upcoming land development projects that should keep that revenue line item steady for the upcoming fiscal year. Councilor Davis asked if any of the revenue income was from solar and Mr. Rosso indicated that it was not.

Building/Zoning

Anthony Santilli, the Building and Zoning Official was present. Mr. Rosso explained that Hopkinton pays Mr. Santilli's wages and benefits, including workers' compensation and pension, and is reimbursed by Richmond for Mr. Santilli works in Hopkinton three days a week and in Richmond two days a week. Council President Moffitt asked about state fees and Mr. Rosso advised that this is a pass-through account where they collect the fees and then pay them out to the state. Regarding Building and Zoning revenue and solar fees, Mr. Rosso shared the town's solar project list and the revenue they were projecting. He noted that they were anticipating receipt of \$327,000 in permit fees from two solar projects, 15 Frontier Road and Palmer Circle, which they anticipated on being approved. He noted that from a budgeting standpoint this became problematic because it is a one-time source of revenue in the operating budget but builds a structural deficit for next year. Mr. Rosso indicated that he liked to handle this with a one-time expense which will eliminate the structural deficit.

Councilor Davis referred to a solar list that she had dated November 5, 2020 and asked about the total increase in tax revenue. Mr. Rosso explained that this revenue is shown under the tax revenue; and, the building permits show up in the operating budget of the Building and Zoning Department.

Council President Moffitt noted that those were anticipated fees and not guaranteed and what if those projects were not allowed. Mr. Rosso felt that if these projects were not going to be allowed they should take that anticipated revenue out of the budget. Council President Moffitt asked if the Planning Board was the Board that would be approving these projects and if so Mr. Lamphere would have a better idea if those projects were going to be approved. Council President Moffitt thought that the Palmer Circle (Stone Ridge) project's master plan had not yet been approved. Councilor Geary thought they should have a better answer as to whether the Stone Ridge project would be approved before putting that revenue in the budget. Councilor Hirst felt that this was only the beginning of the budget process and they did not have to make a decision on this right now. Councilor Davis wished Mr. Rosso to confirm with Mr. Lamphere that he believed the Stone Ridge project would be approved, which Council President Moffitt agreed with. Councilor Hirst asked Mr. Rosso what the proposed Chariho budget did to our mill rate. Mr. Rosso stated that the proposed Chariho budget was an increase to Hopkinton of \$469,000 which would be a 46 cent increase to the mill rate; however, they were able to offset that amount with the increase from state aid, revenue from solar, revenue on the department levels and reduce it to 38 cents. Councilor Marvel asked Mr. Rosso if the state fees and radon line item were also pass-throughs and if so, why the revenue and the budget items numbers were different. Mr. Rosso indicated that it was just a timing issue regarding reimbursements.

Joe Moreau of Old Depot Road felt that it would be helpful if residents could see the spreadsheet that Marilyn Grant of the Land Trust had prepared. He wished to know what property she was referring to that had an easement which was granted to the solar company. He also wished to know if there were any other projects that received monies from solar because he thought he had heard in the past developers indicated that they would make donations to the Land Trust. He felt that it would be helpful for a revenue line such as 3400 Revenue – Solar, to have the specific projects listed so residents would know what they were talking about. He also thought there were still zoning issues that needed clarification concerning the Stone Ridge project.

Tax Assessor

Elizabeth Monty, Tax Assessor was present. Councilor Davis asked what the line item for land use change penalty-open space was for and Ms. Monty stated that this occurs intermittently and the amount is different depending on the situation. She explained that when a taxpayer decided to come out of the Farm, Forest and Open Space designation before their fifteen year commitment, there was a penalty assessed which is based on the amount of time that they have been in the program.

Tax Collector

Mary Lynn Caswell, Tax Collector was present. Councilor Davis asked about the tax sale revenue. Mrs. Caswell explained that the tax collector's revenue was for municipal lien certificates which is a state-mandated fee and the town gets to keep. Regarding tax sales, Mrs. Caswell indicated that they really do not receive any revenue from the tax sales. At the time of the sale they get paid the taxes that are due and any other charges are a wash. Councilor Davis asked what the difference of the tax sale revenue and the tax sale redemption was and Mrs. Caswell explained that the redemption was when a property owner redeemed the property from tax sale.

Municipal Court

Mary Lynn Caswell was present. Mr. Rosso indicated that the revenue was down because of Covid and Mrs. Caswell explained that they were given permission from the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal to look at an individual's driving record to determine if that person qualified as having a good driving record. If they did, they would not need to come to court, they could just sign an Affidavit. Mrs. Caswell advised that they still have a large docket that needs to be heard and it would be up to the Judge and Town Solicitor as to when Court will resume.

IT/GIS

Chris Scheib, the IT Director was present. Council President Moffitt asked if this was a dual position for IT and GIS. Mr. Rosso indicated that Mr. Scheib covers a lot of the GIS; however, some of that is very technical and they outsource that, which is under contract services though Mr. Scheib facilitates the process and is the coordinator. Councilor Hirst noted that the Council members now have their own email address and they can be contacted at towncouncil@hopkintonri.org.

Councilor Marvel asked if the line item for contract services was where the outstanding contract came in and Mr. Rosso suggested that this consists of approximately fifteen different contracts that the town has with various companies and basically all of the town's technology contracts go through this line item; it is not IT specific. Mr. Rosso had a breakdown of the contract services which he indicated that he would provide to the Councilors.

Capital Improvement Program (CIP)

Mr. Scheib was present. Mr. Rosso noted that the first item in this section was for computer replacement of \$19,500. He explained that breakdown as follows: \$2,500 for firewall replacement at the police station; \$1,500 for a new server at the Crandall House; \$2,500 for continuous computer upgrade town wide; and, \$13,000 for the new town website with Civic Plus. Councilor Marvel questioned computer replacement and asked if the computers were purchased or leased and Mr. Scheib indicated that they were purchased. Councilor Marvel asked if they had considered leasing, noting there may be some type of a municipal deal at the state or federal level. Mr. Scheib indicated that he would not be opposed to that and noted that he has only replaced one computer since he has been with the town and all the other computers were at least ten years old. It was decided that this might be something worth looking into. Mr. Rosso felt that this might be more expensive but noted they would explore that option. Mr. Scheib explained that most towns in the state use Civic Plus for their websites and Hopkinton's current website was probably the most economical way to go; however, it is not that easy to navigate. He felt this would be a better way of controlling their agendas and minutes and the company would take care of that for them and also transfer the town's domain over to the .gov domain. Councilor Marvel asked if the new website hosting service had the capability of providing document repositories where they can create a publicly accessible document repository and Mr. Scheib believed it did but may be an additional cost. He noted that they only received a bare bones quote. He also noted that some towns use the program Clerk Base which was for document services and would be another cost.

Joe Moreau of Old Depot Road was alarmed when he heard that the Thayer House computers were not being backed up, noting that the Covid vaccine

registrations were occurring from that location. He asked if the information concerning the vaccines was being backed up and Mr. Scheib advised that fortunately most of that was cloud based so that data was being stored in the cloud. Mr. Rosso also noted that the document was shared between the Town Manager, his assistant and the EMA Director, so it is on all of their computers.

Warrant Items/Other Departments, Agencies and Budgetary Matters

There was nothing discussed in this regard.

The workshop was closed at 7:40 PM.

Elizabeth J. Cook-Martin

Town Clerk

Marita D. Murray

Deputy Town Clerk