

State of Rhode Island

County of Washington

In Hopkinton on the eighth day of March 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.

Grants & Contributions Budget

Regarding the nonprofits, Mr. Rosso stated that he had level-funded them and it was up to the Council to decide if they wished to do anything different.

Ashaway Free Library

Heather Field, Library Director of the Ashaway Free Library was present. She noted that they have asked for level funding and noted that they have not been able to hold fundraising events as they have in the past due to Covid and they have not been assessing any fines. Ms. Fields advised that they are providing a lot of virtual programming which has been very well received. Councilor Hirst noted that the libraries have a maintenance of effort requirement and in order to obtain State support they have to receive the same money from the municipality the preceding year. This grant was level funded.

Langworthy Public Library

Nomi Hague, Director of the Langworthy Public Library was present. Ms. Hague suggested that they would be happy to receive level funding this year as well. She pointed out that Langworthy Public Library and Ashaway Free Library are always trying to think of ways to work together to better serve the residents of

Hopkinton. They are hoping to put something together with the Land Trust to bring a story walk to the town which would be a literacy based outdoor experience for children and families. This grant was level funded.

Wood River Health Services

David Henley, Development Coordinator of Wood River Health Services was present. He noted that Wood River Health Services has been performing Covid testing and is now providing Covid vaccines. He explained that they have asked for an increase this year due to increased costs for required changes due to Covid and a drop off in revenue during the past year. Councilor Hirst was against increasing their grant and felt the Council should freeze all of the non-profits. This grant was level funded.

Hope Valley Ambulance

Alissa Fox, Treasurer of the Hope Valley Ambulance was present. She noted that they have asked for an increase in their grant due to increased costs that they have incurred due to Covid. She noted that their call volume has decreased in the past year because people were afraid to go to the hospital. Ms. Fox explained that they have people at the ambulance station 24/7 or they have to be able to get to the station within five minutes time. Regarding their financials, Councilor Davis asked about the grant line item and Ms. Fox explained that this was for grants received from Hopkinton, Richmond and a \$10,000 grant from the SBA. Councilor Geary asked if the crews were full time or part time and Ms. Fox advised that they have paid members, which is most of their expenses, to pay the response stipend; and, they also have volunteers. Councilor Geary asked what a fully licensed day time EMT was paid and Ms. Fox stated that currently their ALS (advanced life support) is earning \$15.00 per hour and their BLS is earning \$13.00 per hour, which is below the occupational standard. She noted that as a cardiac provider for a private ambulance group she had been earning approximately \$18.00 per hour and these people were not there for the money. Councilor Hirst advised that Hope Valley Ambulance takes in all of Richmond and only the northern part of Hopkinton and felt that they should level fund this budget. He asked if the Hope Valley Ambulance received any support from any fire district and Ms. Fox indicated they did not and their income comes directly

from their billing and memberships. Council President Moffitt asked Ms. Fox to explain what their membership income was and what a membership entailed. Ms. Fox explained the people who call the ambulance are charged on different tiers; if they are a member their insurance is billed and any co-pay they would normally be responsible for is waived; and, if someone is a member and has no insurance, that charge would be waived. Council President Moffitt asked what other ambulances cover for them and Ms. Fox indicated Exeter, West Greenwich Rescue 2, South Kingstown, Westerly and Voluntown. Councilor Marvel noted that level funding for the ambulance corps was \$52,000, which he supported. This budget was level funded.

Ashaway Ambulance

Eric Perrin of Ashaway Ambulance was present. He noted that they were requesting level funding, though he wished it to be more. Mr. Perrin explained insurance payments, noting that there was recently an ALS transport to Rhode Island Hospital where the billing company billed the patient \$4,300 and the ambulance corps received a payment of \$124.82 for that run. If the patient had met their deductible, the insurance company would have paid \$1,300 and even that is less than a third of the bill. He noted that he recently had to purchase a specialty intravenous needle (IO needle) because this was a state mandate. He had to buy three boxes, three different sizes, and he had to buy five of each because that is how they are packaged. If he was to buy them directly from the company it would have cost the ambulance corps \$4,500; however they found them on ebay for \$1,500. He wished the town could grant them \$75,000 to \$80,000 instead of the \$52,000, for as the department grows and they try to expand staffing, without that necessary funding they just cannot. Councilor Geary asked what the membership total was in the ambulance corps and he believed it to be between 24 to 30 members. Mr. Perrin noted that they run a two man crew first shift and then they run a one man crew second shift in hopes that they back fill that shift with volunteers. Councilor Geary also questioned Mr. Perrin about their two ambulances and Mr. Perrin advised that they were a 2005 and 2011; noting that they just spent approximately \$28,000 rebuilding a motor in one of them this past year. Councilor Geary asked about Covid grant money and

Mr. Perrin advised that they did receive one PP grant for \$29,500 of which 75% had to go towards payroll and he took in an SBA loan this year for about \$97,000 which will be used for infrastructure; i.e. residing and reroofing the ambulance building and putting in new windows and doors. Councilor Geary asked what the procedure was to become an EMT. Mr. Perrin noted the cost to become an EMT was over \$2,000, with about 150 hours of time spent and a state test; he noted that they are having a tough time finding help because of the low pay. Councilor Hirst asked Mr. Perrin if they had contacted any state legislators to request legislative grants and he noted that they receive two legislative grants annually, a representative grant and a senate grant, \$2,000 and \$3,000, which they use for paying down medical equipment. Council President Moffitt asked Mr. Perrin if Ashaway Ambulance had a membership service such as what Hope Valley Ambulance has and he indicated that they used to; however, several years ago they received a grant from the Ashaway Fire District of \$50,000 and they decided at that time that every resident would become a member. Councilor Marvel noted that level funding would be \$52,000 this year. This budget was level funded.

Land Trust, continued

Marilyn Grant, Chairperson of the Land Trust was present. Councilor Marvel believed his biggest concern was with regard to the Land Trust receiving \$20,000 from Southern Sky Solar for an easement over their property and the Town funds the Land Trust \$15,000 which comes from the Town Clerk's tax stamp revenue. Mr. Rosso noted that last year they funded the Land Trust \$10,000; however, in prior years it was \$15,000. Council President Moffitt asked about the two bank accounts, a Citizens account with \$24,791 as of December 31, 2020 and the Webster account. He wished to know what each account was used for and what the balance was in the Webster account. Mrs. Grant explained that the Citizens account was the operating or stewardship account and this has the money from solar in it, which is an agreement that they reached with the solar company; the revenue from the realty tax stamps that they receive from the town; income from agricultural leases; and, a small endowment established many years ago by one of their Trustees at the Rhode Island Foundation which is about \$750 per year. The Webster account is bond money that was voted by taxpayers for purchase of land

and directly related expenses to acquiring land and protecting land through purchase or easements. Mr. Rosso noted the Webster funds are restricted funds to be used solely for open space land purchases along with attorney fees for those purchases. This is money funded through the 2019 bond and authorized by voters in 2009 for \$2 Million Dollars. Councilor Marvel questioned Mrs. Grant about the Southern Sky payment which she noted was to be paid by June 30th of each year. Councilor Marvel also asked about the line item for Atlantic Solar and Mrs. Grant noted that this was a one-time donation.

Joe Moreau of Old Depot Road asked Mrs. Grant if the Land Trust still wished to receive a \$15,000 grant from the Town and she stated yes. Mr. Moreau noted that the Land Trust is not consistent with filing their Minutes. He reviewed the actual numbers for FY18/19 Debt Service for the Land Trust, Interest on Debt, which was \$27,550; FY 19/20 was \$105,219; and, FY 20/21 year to date 12/31 is \$52,219, stating that the town has paid a total interest on debt of \$184,988 over the last three years just for the Land Trust. He stated that there is also an item for continuing bond disclosure fee of \$1,500 for each period. He believed that when the residents approved the Two Million Dollar bond for the Land Trust in 2019 they did not realize that this did not include interest and they probably do not realize that when the Land Trust purchases property it is no longer on the tax rolls. If you add up the interest on the bond and the loss of the tax stamp revenue that is paid to the Land Trust from the Town Clerk's office, it is very expensive to the taxpayers. He felt the Land Trust was receiving enough money from the solar company and they should not be receiving money from the town. Mr. Moreau noted that 25% of our residents are aged 65 and older and he did not believe they were walking these trails. He felt enough was enough and the town hall consolidation project should be a priority due to most offices being inaccessible to individuals with disabilities. Lastly, he noted that other nonprofits indicated that they are making concessions due to lack of revenue; however, the Land Trust is looking for an increase of \$5,000 even though they are receiving \$20,000 from Southern Sky.

Mrs. Grant responded that she did not see this as an increase because last year they received a decrease from prior years. She noted that interest is charged on all

bonds received by the town. The property purchased by the Land Trust was taken off the tax rolls; however, it has been proven that development is more costly to a town than open space. She also noted that many of the properties they purchase are in the Farm, Forest and Open Space program and are paying a reduced level of taxes. Over the past year, the increase in use of trails and open space has been astronomical. She noted they need to maintain the trails; add new trails; build bridges; and, put parking areas in and they cannot do it all with just volunteers, they have to buy materials and pay people to do some of the heavy work.

Councilor Hirst noted that the town is stressed financially and this is something to be considered. Council President Moffitt noted that this is a trying year and the Land Trust has found a new revenue stream. He wished to reduce the Land Trust grant. Councilor Hirst suggested that not every aspect of town government benefits from solar. Councilor Geary questioned Mrs. Grant about the agreement between Southern Sky and the Land Trust and asked how that came about. Mrs. Grant explained that the one-time payment received from Atlantic Solar was something that was done through the previous Council. The \$20,000 payment that they receive now is due to an agreement they made with the solar developer to move a right-of-way so the developer could use more property to develop their project. Council President Moffitt believed that any agreement with the solar developer was between the town and the developer since the Land Trust is a part of the town. He wished to reduce the Land Trust's grant to \$7,500, which was agreed to by Councilors Geary and Marvel. Mrs. Grant wished to level fund at \$10,000. Mr. Rosso noted that if the Council decided to reduce the Land Trust budget to \$7,500 this would equate to approximately a one penny reduction in the mill rate. This budget was reduced to \$7,500.

Building & Zoning Revenue, continued

Mr. Rosso indicated that this had been continued to discuss the solar revenue line item for the two projects (Frontier Road and Stone Ridge) which they thought would be approved. Council President Moffitt noted that at the last Planning Board meeting regarding the Stone Ridge project, they had asked for a continuation of the hearing. Mr. Lamphere was present and noted that the Stone Ridge hearing was continued to April. He advised that they are altering their

project and scaling it down in order to allow the Narragansett Trail to be maintained. Mr. Lamphere had hoped to get a consensus from the Planning Board at the March meeting as to whether they were willing to accept this as a legitimate project. He noted that if these projects are not contested and are accepted and worked through the system then he can say with pretty good confidence when that money will come in; however, should the Planning Board not accept this as a legitimate project or the project be challenged by an outside objecting party, then he cannot foresee how this will play out. He personally believed that the Stone Ridge project should be approved and thought that it would eventually be approved with the money coming in FY22. Mr. Lamphere also brought up the revenue from the Skunk Hill solar project that was projected in the FY21 budget and Mr. Rosso noted that there would be a deficit in that regard. Mr. Lamphere noted that there were other approved solar projects that were being contested and he was unsure if there would ever be any revenue realized. Mr. Rosso noted that this budget only concerned the Stone Ridge and Frontier Road projects and Mr. Lamphere felt that if the Stone Ridge project went through, as it probably should, then the money was projected to be received in FY22, but he could not predict what the Planning Board would decide.

Town Clerk Cook-Martin noted that if they have another workshop it could not be later in the month because they would run out of time for there needs to be a notice placed in the newspaper per the Charter, thirty days ahead of the Financial Town Assembly. Councilor Hirst noted that the budget could be adjusted based upon the Financial Town Assembly. Mr. Rosso felt that they should meet one more time to discuss the budget as a whole. Town Clerk Cook-Martin suggested discussing this at their next regularly scheduled meeting of March 15, 2021 possibly starting a little earlier, which was agreed to by all.

Town Council Stipends, continued

Councilor Davis withdrew her request for an increase in their stipend. Councilor Hirst wished to ask the solicitor when it would be appropriate for them to increase the Town Councilors stipend, but felt this was something that they should look at next year. Council President Moffitt noted that he would have a problem voting for a potential raise for himself which Councilor Marvel echoed.

Estimated Tax Rate

Mr. Rosso noted that this would change because of the reduction to the Land Trust grant that they made tonight.

General Government, CIP/Debt Service, continued

Nothing was discussed in this regard.

Warrant Items, Other Departments and Budgetary Matters.

Nothing was discussed in this regard.

The budget workshop was continued to March 15, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.

The workshop was closed at 8:50 PM.

Elizabeth J. Cook-Martin

Town Clerk

Marita D. Murray

Deputy Town Clerk