

State of Rhode Island

County of Washington

In Hopkinton on the twenty-eighth day of February 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.

Town Manager Brian Rosso explained that the town has five union contracts. The Police Department's contract had been extended one year; the clerical and professional/technical contracts he felt was close to being agreed upon; and, the Dispatchers and Public Works contracts were going to mediation. Mr. Rosso felt that it was important to note that since the FY22 budget had been rejected by voters, they had to revert back to the FY21 budget so in this year's proposed budget it will show two years of wage increases because contractually the Town was still obligated to provide the salary increases as depicted in the union contracts. He went on to state that this year there was an increase from Chariho of roughly \$216,000; the town's overall operating expenses were up \$230,000; and, the CIP was over \$148,000 which was driven by the \$156,000 needed for the full reval. He advised that total expenditures are \$595,299. Regarding revenue, there were some increases in assessed values and in general government there was an impact fee which was a one-time source of revenue received every five to seven years which will be transferred from a restricted account. This was in the FY21 budget and was used so it is no longer there. The revenue matches the expenses and the proposed increase would be twenty-one cents from \$18.53 to \$18.74 which represents the \$216,000 that was passed to us from Chariho and that would have an impact of \$63.00 on the tax bill of a home valued at \$300,000 which is a 1.13% increase. Councilor Hirst asked what percent of the town's revenue currently went to education and Mr. Rosso noted in was 77% in FY22

with 23% going to the municipal budget and in the proposed budget it would be 76% to education and 24% to the municipal budget.

#### PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT/LANDFILL

Public Works Director David Caswell was present. Councilor Davis asked Mr. Rosso to discuss compensation and salaries. Mr. Rosso indicated that what was in the proposed budget was the most recent proposal made to Public Works which had been rejected. He explained that they did not negotiate in FY21 when that contract expired so they received a zero percent increase that year. He noted that they had been offered a retroactive one percent increase in FY21, two percent in FY22 and three percent in FY23, which is what is represented in the current proposed budget, but was rejected. So they were looking at three years of salary increases for Public Works and two years' worth of salary increases for the other departments. Councilor Geary felt they could not put a price on safety and the Public Works Department needed money to make repairs on vehicles. In the proposed budget maintenance supplies was listed as \$8,000 and he wondered if this would be enough money to cover the necessary supplies for vehicle maintenance and felt that possibly with some of the COVID money they could purchase some new equipment and software to be able to work on the newer vehicles. He wished to also see the purchase of another vehicle for DPW and felt they could look into buying state surplus equipment. Mr. Rosso did note that the Public Works fleet has been neglected for several years and they have tried to start revamping their fleet. He suggested that after the budget process, after the Council submits their budget, they could start holding similar workshops on the use of the ARPA funds. He noted that he worked with department heads to come up with projects to propose to the Council and the Public Works fleet was high on that list. Councilor Davis spoke about the tree trimming line item, noting that last year they had indicated there was \$30,000 in remaining funds from the original \$72,000. Mr. Rosso suggested that there was still \$32,000; however, there were a few projects that were potential liabilities to the town that will be costly and he felt that they would be going through a good portion of those funds. Mr. Caswell noted that in the DPW budget the line item for tree trimming was \$1,500 and noted that the year to date total was zero and typically the Department waited for

the end of the budget cycle to target some of those problem trees; however, it typically costs \$1,500 to remove one tree. He believed the money in the restricted account would be depleted rather quickly when they started to move forward; however, they were waiting to see what National Grid removed. Councilor Davis asked if tree trimming could be an ARPA project and Mr. Rosso advised that it could. Council President Moffitt noted that they would be discussing how to spend those monies after the budget process was completed and he did not want to get off-track. Councilor Geary asked if the Department of Public Works was short of help and Mr. Caswell stated that they were short one person and they were currently accepting applications. Mr. Caswell explained that the line item for part time help was used for people who he called in to assist with snowplowing and they used the town's equipment. Councilor Hirst questioned the landfill and asked what the immediate concerns of the landfill were. Mr. Rosso noted that this line item concerned the cost that the town paid to Westerly in order to use their landfill. Councilor Davis asked if this was a contract and Mr. Rosso indicated that in the past it had been but currently was not. He noted that he has been working with Chief Lacey and was trying to meet with him to discuss this contract. Chief Lacey's council proposed a very hefty increase for the year and Mr. Rosso has asked them to meet with him and provide some data as to how they came up with that number. He noted that he has put a moderate increase in the budget for this but it was going to take some convincing to get to that amount and this would be a one-time expense because after FY23 the residents are going to have to pay a yearly fee for a dump pass which is projected to be \$50.00 for Westerly and Hopkinton residents and this line item will be removed from the budget.

#### **TOWN CLERK/PROBATE/BOARD OF CANVASSERS & ELECTIONS**

Town Clerk Cook-Martin was present. Mr. Rosso noted that the Town Clerk's department is part of the clerical union contract. The Town Clerk is not part of the union but her increases mimic what the other employees receive. When the town's budget gets rejected, all union employees still receive their pay increases; however, the Town Clerk does not. Councilor Davis questioned the health insurance cost noting that in the prior year it was supposed to increase by 6% and

dental by 3%. Mr. Rosso noted that the Trust is proposing a small increase of 2% to 6% and he noted that he had used the smaller figure, with the employees paying 22% of their healthcare coverage and the town paying 78%. Lastly, Councilor Davis questioned the pension line item noting that it had been 2.98% and was decreasing to 2.91% and Mr. Rosso stated that this was determined by the state. Councilor Geary asked the Town Clerk if she was fully staffed and she indicated she was except for the Board of Canvassers, which was short one person. She advised the Council that this matter was scheduled on their next agenda and Councilor Davis asked if they were to hold any interviews. Clerk Cook-Martin indicated that she had sent the law to the Solicitor and Council President Moffitt which indicated that based on the lists submitted by the two political parties in the town, the Council President makes a nomination from those lists. She did not feel that interviews were required, but the Council could hold interviews if they desired. Council President Moffitt asked if there were any changes that had to be made due to redistricting. Clerk Cook-Martin advised that it appeared that there was no change to the congressional or senatorial districts; however, there may be a slight change to the representative district. She had compared the 2012 legislation to the 2020 legislation and would be reaching out to Representative Kennedy to get an idea of who prepared the legislation and the descriptions because there seems to be a slight change to two districts. She felt they will have enough money in the budget to take care of this cost.

Sarah Steverman of 148 Main Street felt that the best way to get the word out about voting was to place something on Facebook. Councilor Marvel noted that there is an official town Facebook page, though it had been dormant for years. Mr. Rosso noted there is expected to be a new town website in the near future which will tie into their Facebook presence.

## **TOWN COUNCIL**

Councilor Hirst felt that the Town Council deserved an increase in their stipend, noting that it was hard to get people to run for government. Councilor Geary asked when the last time was that the Town Council had received a raise and Councilor Davis noted that it was in 2005 and then from there it was decreased in 2012. She agreed that there should be an increase. Council President Moffitt

noted that this would not be for them, but would be for the next elected Town Council. Mr. Rosso asked the Council if they wished him to find comparables and Councilor Davis noted that previously she had requested an increase of \$5,000 which would be an additional \$1,000 per councilor. Councilor Geary asked if there needed to be a vote in order to include an increase in the proposed budget and Clerk Cook-Martin noted that if this was agreed to by consensus it could be added into the budget and if they needed to make some cuts it could always come out. It was agreed that they would add an additional \$1,000 for each councilor. Councilor Marvel advised that he was not comfortable asking all of the other departments to level fund and then increasing their stipend; this money was not the reason he ran for Council and the pay was not something that would stop him from running. Council President Moffitt questioned if \$4,000 was the usual Town Council contingency amount and believed there were times when the Town Council should be able to do something out of the ordinary. Councilor Hirst felt that should be raised to \$10,000 in case of an emergency. Mr. Rosso noted that generally they have restricted accounts for emergency purposes and if they ever needed to run a deficit they could which would come out of the fund balance. He explained that the Council contingency fund was generally used when the Council wished to do something that was not budgeted for, such as a mailing or assisting a resident or nonprofit with a fee. Councilor Davis advised that she did not wish to raise this to \$10,000 but would agree to \$5,000. Councilor Hirst suggested that he will check with Richmond and Charlestown to see what they had in their contingency fund.

#### **GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

Mr. Rosso went over the General Government budget. Councilor Davis noted that the line item for property and casualty insurance had increased and asked Mr. Rosso to explain that. Mr. Rosso noted that this was a two year increase and came directly from the Trust. The town's total liability coverage increased from \$2,000,000 to \$5,000,000 which was required after the town purchased the street lights and the Trust was projecting a 10% increase this year attributed to cyber-security.

#### **CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Mr. Rosso indicated that the only thing in the CIP right now for Public Works was a three year lease on two pieces of equipment, which is the third year lease payment for one piece of equipment and the second year lease payment for the other piece of equipment. There is no new equipment being purchased for Public Works through the CIP. The police will be purchasing a new cruiser and there is the full revaluation. He also noted that when looking into the town's new website they noted that they would need additional funds for the installation expense. Councilor Davis asked if there would be any increase put towards the expansion of the Town Hall and Mr. Rosso advised that this was something that they were going to try to address with ARPA funds. Council President Moffitt noted that there was currently \$1.6 Million in a bank account allocated for the Town Hall expansion and Mr. Rosso noted that the previous quote they had received to expand the Town Hall was \$2.1 Million but those numbers were quite old and should be updated. Mr. Rosso also noted that the Crandall Field playground project was being delayed because the contractors were having a hard time getting materials.

The Workshop was closed at 7:30 P.M.

Elizabeth J. Cook-Martin

Town Clerk

Marita D. Murray

Deputy Town Clerk