

State of Rhode Island

County of Washington

In Hopkinton on the fourteenth 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.

The meeting was called to order with a moment of silent meditation and a salute to the Flag at 6:00 PM.

**ASHAWAY AMBULANCE
HOPE VALLEY AMBULANCE**

Councilor Hirst advised that he was having a meeting with the Hope Valley Ambulance Corps on Friday, March 18, 2022, noting that he would like to contact one of the members of Congress and see what type of community grants they have for small towns. He felt that if they were to grant additional funds to the ambulance associations they should do so with the condition that those funds go to payroll for the EMTs. Councilor Geary noted that the Hope Valley Ambulance Corps was paying for people to obtain their EMT certifications, which was money coming out of their budget; he wondered if those funds could come from somewhere else. He did not wish to grant them extra funds and then have them be in the same situation next year. Councilor Hirst believed that most people work outside of town so the greatest need for an ambulance crew would be during the evening and early morning hours and felt that this was the time to have a paid crew. Councilor Davis wished to note that commencing July 1st, there will be a new telephone number to call for suicide prevention, which was 9-8-8 rather than using the 9-1-1 emergency line. If someone dials 9-8-8 they will speak with a counselor and she hoped that this would reduce the number of calls to the ambulance associations. She also indicated that there is legislation being proposed for Providence to create a mobile integrated healthcare unit which will

respond to non-life threatening 9-1-1 calls, but this would not assist Hopkinton. She also noted that Brian Kennedy had responded to a letter sent to him by Council President Moffitt and explained that the ambulance funding situation was a local issue, not a state issue. Councilor Davis advised that she had spoken with Fire Chief Justin Lee of the Hope Valley/Wyoming Fire District because she felt that the ambulance associations should be part of the fire districts and she felt that he was open to this idea. She suggested that this would require a town workshop with Hopkinton, Richmond and the fire districts. She went on to state that Representative Kennedy had indicated that the fire districts were created by a Resolution through the taxpayers and if they wished to put the ambulance associations under the fire districts there would have to be another Resolution. Councilor Davis suggested holding two referendums, both in April, so that they would have the results and could add them into their May public hearing and then be able to finalize their budget and have their vote in June. Clerk Cook-Martin questioned Councilor Davis' request for two referendums, noting that special legislation would have to be submitted and there would have to be a vote. She was unsure if there would be cooperation from everybody in order to get that done. Mr. Rosso felt that if they tried to do this too quickly they would not get a large turn-out of voters. He suggested they give themselves more time to make residents aware of the situation and then there may be a better turn-out. Clerk Cook-Martin noted that if each fire district was vote on this matter, they may have to arrange for that vote which may just be a meeting with a vote and not necessarily a ballot vote; the fire districts are separate entities and they are their own taxing authority and can do whatever they want. Councilor Hirst suggested that in the past, if he remembered correctly, the Ashaway Fire District had voted against having the ambulance association join them. He believed that if the bills were put in the legislature, the committee that entertained them would look for endorsement from the town councils and the fire districts; noting that they would have to work with the Richmond Town Council as well. Councilor Davis felt that they have to start somewhere and she wished to hold a workshop where all interested parties are assembled to discuss this issue. Council President Moffitt agreed that there should be a workshop. Councilor Hirst wished to ask that one or

two members of each entity attend so there would not be an overwhelmingly large crowd present. Councilor Davis noted that Chief Lee had suggested that the Chiefs and one representative from Hope Valley, Carolina, Ashaway, Richmond and Wyoming should all attend a workshop; she believed that all interested parties should be able to attend so everyone can give their opinion. Mr. Rosso suggested that consolidating the fire districts with the ambulances made sense to him from a managerial perspective because they can share services and also because if the ambulance fell under the town it would have to be managed by the town. He noted that if the town was to take over the ambulance associations, Hopkinton residents would be paying for people in Richmond to get services. If the town was to fully fund the ambulances their requested amounts, it would be the equivalent of the funding of a town department; however, with no management power their problems would not fix themselves. Mr. Rosso reiterated that this was not a one-time fix; it was an ongoing funding issue. He noted that he would be completely against asking for a warrant item and using fund balance. Council President Moffitt wondered how much money the ambulance associations needed to operate; figuring that they could take that number and figure out how much the fire district taxes will increase if they added that amount to their budget. Councilor Davis noted that she had asked Chief Lee how much the taxes would increase if they were to fund the Hope Valley Ambulance with \$100,000 from their budget and he indicated fifteen cents per thousand and they believed approximately ten cents for Ashaway residents. Mr. Rosso felt those numbers can be confusing noting that the bottom line was that if the fire district funds the ambulance corps \$100,000, it was going to cost those taxpayers \$100,000 and if the town funded them \$100,000 it was going to cost the taxpayers \$100,000. He noted that the increase in the mill rate would be more substantial to the fire districts than it would be to the town, but it does not matter because the residents are still being taxed the same amount. Council President Moffitt noted that his fire district taxes were much cheaper than his town taxes so he would rather see an increase there. Councilor Hirst felt that part of the problem was the amount of money that the ambulance associations were being reimbursed from insurance companies and believed that insurance carriers should be paying more of the bills.

The Council collectively agreed that they did not believe having this matter as a warrant item would be a good idea. Clerk Cook-Martin noted that they would need to have full participation by all of the agencies, which included the Richmond Town Council as well as the other fire districts that are in Richmond. Council President Moffitt believed that this problem would not be fixed this year; however, he would like to begin the discussion. Councilor Hirst noted that the Ashaway Fire District has their annual meeting on the third or fourth Thursday of July at 6:30 p.m. and all registered voters in that district can vote. Councilor Davis did wish to increase the ambulance associations' grant by \$10,000. Councilor Hirst agreed and indicated that the financial town assembly was held in May and after that they could still adjust the budget. Councilor Marvel agreed but felt there should not be any warrant item regarding the ambulance associations, which was agreed to by all.

CIP/DEBT SERVICE, WARRANT ITEMS, OTHER DEPARTMENTS AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

Mr. Rosso wished to propose that the Council entertain the idea of a warrant item regarding legal fees, solicitor stipend and litigation which meant that if any accounts were underrun, any excess money would go to the restricted account for legal fees. As of now the restricted account was in the negative by \$7,000 and they were going to mediation for two of the unions; the police contract would be due next year; and, there are also pending lawsuits. The Council questioned whether this needed to be voted on and Clerk Cook-Martin indicated eventually, but there were a number of things that the Finance Office still needed to provide. For the Financial Town Assembly of May 3, 2022 they would have to publish the warning and have it posted within the town which will disclose to the residents the things that the Council was considering and then they would finalize the budget and any warrant items at their next meeting the following week. Any warrant items were put in the form of a question and added to the ballot which was reviewed by the Solicitor and then sent to the Board of Elections for printing. This would have to be on the Financial Town Assembly's order of business and presented by the Town Moderator. Lastly, Mr. Rosso wished to note that Hopkinton's portion of the school budget went up \$30,000 which is an increase of three percent on the mill rate. Councilor Davis questioned what would happen to

the Chariho budget if it was rejected. Clerk Cook-Martin noted within thirty days they have to set another date to hold another budget referendum and their can be a total of three votes. Mr. Rosso noted that the school gets three tries to have their budget adopted, but the town only gets one shot.

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

Elizabeth J. Cook-Martin

Town Clerk

Marita D. Murray

Deputy Town Clerk