

State of Rhode Island

County of Washington

In Hopkinton on the twenty eighth day of February 2023 A.D. a budget workshop was held in the Town Hall Meeting Room, 1 Town House Road, Hopkinton, RI 02833 to discuss the proposed FY 23/24 budget.

PRESENT: Michael Geary, Scott Bill Hirst, Stephen Moffitt, Jr., Sharon Davis and Robert Burns; Town Manager Brian Rosso and Town Clerk Marita Murray. Also present: Finance Director Elizabeth Monty.

RECREATION

Recreation Director Mary Sawyer was present. Mr. Rosso noted that the Recreation Department staff was part of the Clerical PTE Union so this had the same impact as other departments regarding salary, medical and pension. Likewise, there was an increase in heating and heating fuel. The revenue for winter basketball has increased due to an increase in the sign-up fee. Councilor Davis noted that last year they had discussed the possibility of the Recreation Department purchasing a lighted sign to advertise events. Mrs. Sawyer noted that she had researched these signs which were very expensive, approximately \$15,000. She noted that she currently uses the police sign for larger events, but prefers to use the cheap little cardboard signs that stick in the ground and can be placed all around town which usually last a few years. Councilor Burns stated that he does not read the little signs; he liked the sign that is in front of the 7th Day Baptist Church and reads it every time he drives by. Mr. Rosso noted that they could look into that, but it would need to be visually attractive. Councilor Hirst felt people should take the initiative to find out what was going on in town and can check the website or the newspaper. Regarding the CIP, Mr. Rosso stated that the Recreation Department was requesting security cameras for Langworthy Field and Crandall Field due to the vandalism that has been occurring. They have not found any grants to assist in this but feel it is a small investment to make in order to secure millions of dollars in assets. Councilor Burns asked how many cameras there would be, and IT Director Jeff Frenette advised that there would be

four cameras at Crandall Field and approximately five cameras at Langworthy Field.

EDUCATION

Mr. Rosso noted that he is provided a number which he puts into this budget. It was noted that the net increase over last year is currently \$259,538. Education increased by \$1.1 Million and State aid increased by \$800,000; however, it was noted that State aid can be taken away. Councilor Hirst asked Mr. Rosso what percentage of our taxes would be going to Charho, noting it currently was 76%. Mr. Rosso believed it would be closer to 79%.

POLICE/DISPATCH

Chief David Palmer was present. Mr. Rosso advised that compensation and salary were primarily driven by contract negotiations. Their wage increases were two percent in years one and two and three percent in year three. There was a decrease in pension rates and in medical insurance due to some of the new employees having single coverage rather than a family plan. Councilor Hirst asked Chief Palmer whether the size of his department compared with similar sized towns and Chief Palmer advised that Hopkinton has 15 officers, which was similar to Richmond and Gloucester. Councilor Burns asked if overtime would decrease when the two new recruits were hired. Chief Palmer noted that overtime would decrease but salaries would increase. In the CIP there is a request for a new police cruiser. Mr. Rosso explained that it is a requirement with RI General Law and the Union Contract that they are not allowed to keep cruisers on the front line if they have mileage in excess of 125,000. Councilor Geary suggested that they look at government agencies, such as Homeland Security, who give vehicles away. Chief Palmer noted that they do check with Muni-Bid.

ANIMAL CONTROL

Samantha Bowen was present. Mr. Rosso noted that the animal control officer was part of the dispatch union, and this contract has just been concluded similar to the Clerical PTE contract. This budget has increased slightly due to hearing expenses and supplies. Councilor Davis questioned revenue and Ms. Bowen advised that in the past year they had 61 cats and 45 dogs in the shelter and about half were surrendered and became town property. She felt that the numbers were

going to be higher due to veterinary costs increasing and the fact that less people are spaying and neutering their animals. Councilor Hirst asked if there was a law that required all cats to be spayed or neutered unless someone had a breeder's permit and Ms. Bowen confirmed that this was indeed correct.

EMA/PUBLIC WELFARE

Mr. Rosso advised that the Code Red system was coming out of the EMA budget and being added to the IT budget under Civic Ready. Councilor Davis explained the revenue line, noting that this was a grant which paid for 50% of the EMA Director's salary and phone. This grant is collected and placed into a restricted account. Mr. Rosso suggested the EMA Director also receives grants through the Meds Grant program and noted that at year end they will transfer funds over from the restricted account and sometimes this position is fully funded if there are enough grants received in the year.

The Public Welfare Director's budget was level funded.

TOWN MANAGER

Mr. Rosso wished to explain his salary increase, noting that when the Council advertised this position, they included a salary range. The Town Council determined his salary of \$106,890 and on November 7, 2022, the Council received and approved his four-year contract. Mr. Rosso believed the town saved close to \$200,000 while he was the Finance Director and the Acting Town Manager. Councilor Moffitt stated that this was not a job evaluation, just a budget workshop. Mr. Rosso noted that his current contract has a two percent increase for years one, two and three, like other contracts. Councilor Burns asked about the cell phone expense which he noticed on other budgets. Mr. Rosso explained that this was built into the contracts and was for anyone who used their phone for work purposes.

Joseph Moreau of Old Depot Road stated that approximately eight or nine months ago he had asked for four contracts and received three but not the contract for the Town Manager. He questioned Mr. Rosso's wage increase as shown on this budget of 9.7% but acknowledged that it was explained to him that this number was incorrect, and it should only be a two percent increase. Councilor Burns advised that he wished to have a copy of the Town Manager's contract. Mr.

Rosso stated that he would get his contract to Councilor Burns the following day and if Mr. Moreau was requesting a copy, he should make an open records request. Mr. Moreau noted that Mr. Rosso had been seen with a child's car seat in the back of the town car he drove. Mr. Rosso felt that if he had a car seat in his town vehicle it was no one's business but the Councils and he did not need to answer to a resident. Mr. Moreau wondered, as a taxpayer, if there was any liability to the town if Mr. Rosso was driving a town vehicle for non-town use.

FINANCE/DEBT SERVICE/CIP

Elizabeth Monty was present. Mr. Rosso advised that something worth mentioning was the auditor fees because they were going to have to go out to bid for a new contract. Every three years they go to the Auditor General with an RFP, which they are currently in the process of doing.

Regarding Debt Services, Mr. Rosso noted that there would be two items which will be paid off, freeing up approximately \$90,000. He advised that he had spoken with the town's financial advisor and asked how much capital the town would receive for \$90,000 a year debt service payment and it was approximately a million dollars. It was the Councils' decision what they would use that money for. He also noted that the Palmer Circle Road bond would be coming off next year. He added to the budget proposed roadwork, but that was up to the Council. Mr. Rosso also noted that the Police Department was applying for a loan to put solar on their roof, but this would reduce their electricity so this would be a wash.

The workshop was closed at 7:30 p.m.

Marita Murray

Town Clerk