

TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP - MONDAY EVENING - MARCH 17, 2008

PRESENT: Marshall, Cordeiro, Parella (arrived at 7:38 o'clock PM) and Barboza

ALSO PRESENT: Diane C. Mederos, Town Administrator
John M. Day, Town Treasurer Day

ABSENT: Herreshoff

The Council met in budget workshop session on Monday evening, March 17, 2008 in the Town Hall Council Chambers beginning at 7:10 o'clock PM, Council Chairman Marshall presiding:

Town Administrator Mederos presented the budget to the Council and indicated that her proposal was a "best effort" based upon the State imposed tax-cap, declining State funding, and diminishing non-tax revenue. She recommended that the Town might seek an override from the State Department of Community Affairs in consideration of the diminishing non-tax revenue.

Town Administrator Mederos also reported that the funds that might be derived from an override were not reflected in her budget recommendations, but would provide recommendations for the override funds as the Council proceeds through its budget deliberations.

Town Administrator Mederos also reported that she trimmed down the \$2 million department capital funding requests by 50% and attempted to recommend budget cuts that would not impact operations and Town services.

Town Administrator Mederos also explained that she made departments aware of the funding limitations and asked management to "sharpen pencils." She noted that the departments were all sensitive to the seriousness of the budget constraints.

Town Administrator Mederos also reported that she continues to look at the possibility of collaboration with the neighboring Bristol County towns and stated that it was "easy to work together since the towns appear to have the same needs and the same goals in mind."

Town Administrator Mederos also stated that the Town might wish to consider the privatization of services in the future in order to reduce cost, and that she expects additional financial difficulty in future budget years.

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Town Administrator Mederos further reported that the news from the State provides no relief and the budget situation may actually worsen since the hope for State program funding is tenuous and growing weaker.

Insofar as the budget request for the Bristol Warren Regional School District is concerned, Town Administrator Mederos stated that she trimmed the request by \$100,000 and recommended that the Town might restore this cut, if approved by the Joint Finance Committee, were the Town to receive a \$300,000 override.

Councilman Barboza asked if the timing of the override request was known with Town Administrator Mederos responding that she did not know how long it would take for the State to react to a Town request for an override.

Town Administrator Mederos also noted that the library budget request was not as "horrendous" as it might have been and explained that the request is based upon a September opening and a "phase in" of increased operations and staff. She noted that the library is a "frugal" organization.

Town Administrator Mederos reported that her budget recommendation includes "level funding" for the Human Services line items; but that the Council might consider restricting these to the funds derived from the trust and special accounts set-up for this purpose.

Town Administrator Mederos informed the Council that she was of the opinion that her budget recommendations were fair and equitable.

Council Chairman Marshall stated that he expected that the Council would review the budget requests and recommendations and make notes to aid in the discussion process.

A discussion ensued concerning the upcoming budget workshop schedule with the Clerk reporting that Town Solicitor Ursillo was unable to attend the session set aside for him but would rather answer any of the Council's questions concerning his budget during an upcoming Council meeting.

405 - Emergency Management - James Moreira

Mr. Moreira noted three goals for the upcoming year these being a volunteer drive, training for volunteers, and a mock disaster. He also noted that the Town is in much better straits than the State, which appears to be disorganized.

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Councilman Barboza asked if anything is being further considered regarding the pandemic influenza with Mr. Moreira responding that the Fire Department is working on the preparedness concerning this issue.

701 - Police Department - Col. Russell S. Serpa, Chief

Town Administrator Mederos noted that each of the departments were careful regarding any requests for budget increases and most of those asked and recommended by her were in the fuel accounts; these being dramatically impacted by price increases.

Council Chairman Marshall asked for an explanation for the increase in the computer line with Police Chief Serpa responding that this line was previously funded through a grant that is no longer forthcoming.

Town Treasurer Day noted that the capital account for this department was trimmed from \$86,000 to \$57,000 with Town Administrator Mederos suggesting that some or all of these funds might be restored were the Town to receive permission for the override.

A discussion ensued regarding staffing levels and an expressed concern that these might be cut-back. Col. Serpa noted that the department has been successful in deterring trouble in Town with current staffing levels and in particular there have been few, if any unanswered problems. He further explained that the staffing levels are necessary due to the Town's many alcoholic beverage establishments and proper coverage of these require the current number of officers.

Police Chief Serpa also noted that the largest issues relating to increased costs are due to contractual requirements.

A discussion ensued regarding the various salary line items.

Councilman Barboza expressed gratitude for Police Chief Serpa's forty years of service for the record and further stated that the Colonel will be missed.

Councilman Cordeiro congratulated Police Chief Serpa for his comprehensive budget request.

Councilwoman Parella arrived at this point in the workshop (7:35 o'clock PM).

803 - Parks and Recreation - Walter Burke

Mr. Burke explained that he was pleased with the budget as recommended by Town Administrator Mederos and did not wish to make any further requests of the Council regarding same.

Councilwoman Parella enquired concerning the increase in arts and crafts with Mr. Burke responding that the summer program will operate three (3) additional days this year, thus the increase in expenditure.

Mr. Burke also reported that the summer program will no longer have its annual parade but will rather have a "big picnic and talent show" at the Town Beach at the conclusion of the summer program.

Councilwoman Parella asked if the summer program was considered for license by DCYF as a child care site with Mr. Burke responding that he looked into this matter in the past. He also noted that the cost to provide a lunch for campers was higher than the private arrangement (\$1 per) through the State program.

Councilwoman Parella noted that any State subsidies might be cut.

Councilwoman Parella enquired regarding the proposed repairs to the Community Center front doors with Mr. Burke responding that this will be a temporary repair due to the plans to relocate the Community Center program to the Quinta-Gamelin building.

Mr. Burke also explained his plans for video surveillance, noting that this will be a "cooperative effort" between the Recreation and Harbor Patrol departments. He noted that the cameras will be installed at the Town Beach and at the Town Common and that the tape "loops" on a monthly basis.

Concerning the funding for "programs" Mr. Burke informed the Council that his proposal includes funding for those programs previously supported by the Substance Abuse Prevention Task Force and the increase is attributable to the elimination of funds from that source.

701 - Animal Control - Dyanne Gibree

Town Administrator Mederos stated that the budget for this department was "minimal."

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Animal Control Officer Gibree informed the Council that the "substantial" increase in the supplies account was due to the unavailability of dog and cat food through the RI Community Food Bank, a former source for same.

Councilwoman Parella suggested that the department might contact those local agencies such as the Rotary Club or Boy Scouts who regularly sponsor food drives and determine if these groups might solicit animal food donations on behalf of the Bristol shelter. Ms. Gibree agreed to do so.

Ms. Gibree also agreed that her department would try to "live within" the budget as recommended by Town Administrator Mederos.

601 - Community Development - Diane M. Williamson, Director

A discussion ensued regarding the CDBG with Council Chairman Marshall noting that the Town Planner in Warren is the CDBG Administrator.

Director of Community Development Williamson noted the increase in the line item for the GIS implementation, explaining that part of this budget previously appeared in the Public Works budget.

A discussion ensued regarding the "office equipment" line item with Director of Community Development Williamson explaining that this line will be used to support the scanning of certain departmental documents and that this will also be shared with the Building department; likely fifty percent each.

Concerning the capital budget requests, Council Chairman Marshall asked if the department could finish the Comprehensive Plan update with less funds with Director of Community Development Williamson explaining that the funds requested were already low in consideration of the amount of work yet to be completed. She outlined same.

Councilwoman Parella asked if the Council might consider funding part of the drainage line requested with Town Treasurer Day noting that the Town's capital borrowing might not be able to fund this item. Councilwoman Parella suggested that this item might become part of an overall bond issue to be considered by the voters in November.

Barboza/Parella - Voted unanimously to continue the discussion relative to the Harbor Patrol/Harbormaster budget until

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tomorrow (March 18, 2008) evening's workshop.

Prior to the vote taken, it was observed that no one was present to speak to the Harbor Patrol budget request.

There being no further business, upon a motion by Councilman Barboza, seconded by Councilwoman Parella and voted unanimously, the Chairman declared this workshop to be adjourned at 8:44 o'clock PM.

Louis P. Cirillo, CMC, Council Clerk