

TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP - MONDAY EVENING - MARCH 16, 2009

Present: Marshall, Cordeiro (arrived at 7:20 o'clock PM),
Parella, Barboza and Herreshoff

Also Present: Diane C. Mederos, Town Administrator
John M. Day, Town Treasurer

The Council met in workshop session for the purposes of the 2009-2010 Town budget deliberations in the Town Hall, Council Chambers on Monday evening, March 16, 2009 beginning at 7:05 o'clock PM, Council Chairman Marshall presiding:

Documents Received:

- Town of Bristol Budget Recommendations 2009-2010
- Revenue Projections
- Rate Calculations
- Recapitulation

Town Administrator Mederos presented the budget to the Council informing its honorable body that her efforts regarding same "reflect the state of the economy."

She informed the Council that the budget anticipates a marked reduction in State aid and that the various departments trimmed their requests to present a "frugal" plan.

Town Administrator Mederos noted that she met with the various labor unions representing the Town workers and that there have been no concessions thus far. She also noted that the unions "did not close the door" but rather expressed an idea that the Town might run down its surplus rather than expect concessions.

Town Administrator Mederos explained that the surplus level was necessary to protect the Town's bond rating, etc. She also noted that the failure of the unions to agree to concessions might result in layoffs of personnel.

Town Administrator Mederos noted that some "modification" to the workforce may come about due to attrition. She also noted that many of the Town's non-tax revenue streams were experiencing a downward trend and presented a listing of the non-tax revenue comparison.

Town Administrator Mederos explained that the Human Services Department is experiencing an upward call for aid and services and that one of the few increases in this year's budget supports the department's emergency fund.

Town Administrator Mederos announced that her budget "level funds" the schools and that the Town awaits news on the Federal Stimulus aid to education.

Town Administrator Mederos explained that her budget creates a "capital fund" of \$500,000; this fund replacing all of the individual departments' capital budgets. She suggested that capital projects might be considered on an urgency basis only.

In consideration of the Human Resources section of the budget, Town Administrator Mederos informed the Council that the revenue from the Trust and Special Funds will reach only \$50,000 next year. She did, however, fund this section to a total of approximately \$100,000; effectively reducing most grants by one-half versus last year. Town Administrator Mederos further informed the Council that some of previous years' grantees did not make funding requests due to the overall financial climate.

Town Administrator Mederos credited her staff for their work on the budget noting the staff as "invaluable."

Town Treasurer Day reviewed the revenue distribution and the rate calculation, noting that the budget presented keeps the Town Tax Rate at \$10.35 per \$1000 of assessed valuation.

Responding to questions, Town Treasurer Day explained that the Library revenue gain was due to a re-calculation of a line item appearing elsewhere in past budgets and did not result in an overall revenue increase to the Town.

Councilman Barboza asked to know if any State Aid was restored with Town Treasurer Day responding that some revenue is forthcoming for the current fiscal year but that future years' State revenue sharing remains questionable.

Councilman Cordeiro arrived at this point in the meeting (7:20 o'clock PM).

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know if the sale of the former Romarine property was anticipated with Town Treasurer Day responding "not yet." Town Treasurer Day also explained that the proposal must repay the Town's General Fund \$100,000 and that the mitigation agreement might require the Town to set aside funds also.

Town Treasurer Day also explained the sheet entitled "Rate Calculations"

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know if the collection rate might be less than estimated with Town Treasurer Day noting that the Town is collecting over 98% and that the collection rate in the calculation is set at 96.25%. Town Treasurer Day stated that he was of the opinion that this collection rate was acceptable for the plan.

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know if the Town's proportion of the School Budget would be impacted by the number enrolled with Councilman Barboza stating that he was informed that there may be more Bristol students than last year.

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know if this amount was factored into the budget projection with Town Treasurer Day responding that these were not included and Councilman Barboza stating that he would ask these questions of the School Administrators and report back to the Council with specific data.

Town Treasurer Day reported that there will likely be a 10% reduction in motor vehicle tax revenue due to the "trickle down" of less new vehicle sales. He also reported that the budget does consider a 0% increase in the tax rate.

Councilwoman Parella asked if there was a plan were the school to be granted more than level funding with Town Administrator Mederos responding that an increase to the schools may be derived from the capital project account.

Town Administrator Mederos also reported that her departments are examining the possibility of reductions in energy costs with Town Treasurer Day noting that an energy program has "real potential" for cost savings in consideration of the energy consumption efficiencies possible at the water pollution control and composting facilities and also the removal of redundant street lights where the new decorative street lights have been installed.

Councilwoman Parella observed many reductions and/or level funding in the energy accounts and she cautioned that since the energy market has been unpredictable these slimly funded accounts may be problematic later in the year.

Town Administrator Mederos agreed with Councilwoman Parella and stated that the budget process for energy costs is a "guessing game."

Councilwoman Parella suggested that the budget might include the cost of implementing further energy efficiencies with Town Administrator Mederos responding that the program will need an orderly phase-in.

Councilman Herreshoff suggested that the Administration might develop an overall policy that personnel vacancies should not be filled with Town Administrator Mederos and Town Treasurer Day explaining that the Town is of the opinion that some vacancies will come about due to retirement. Town Treasurer Day also noted that the various labor unions are looking to management policy before considering any concessions.

Town Administrator Mederos stated that everyone is waiting to learn the result of the State budget policies.

Councilwoman Parella noted the State retirement policy in that she expects approximately 1600 teachers will retire state-wide.

A discussion ensued regarding how this issue may impact the Bristol Warren School District with Councilman Barboza agreeing to obtain the available data from the School officials prior to tomorrow evening's workshop.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if the possibility of heavy teacher retirements was factored into the budget proposal.

A discussion ensued regarding the anticipated State retirements due to the elimination of the cost of living adjustment (COLA).

Councilman Herreshoff suggested that "level funding" the schools may require an additional \$200,000.

Town Administrator Mederos informed the Council that the Emergency Management Department has been melded into the Fire Department with Fire Chief Martin appointed to serve as "lead-person." She also noted that the Emergency Management Department's budget is now reflected in the Fire Department budget.

Police Department - 701 - Josue D. Canario, Chief

Town Administrator Mederos explained that this budget was trimmed in several places and that the most noticeable change is the elimination of the parking enforcement program with Police Chief Canario explaining that the regular patrol officers will assume these duties particularly those who have been qualified to patrol on bicycle.

Councilman Barboza expressed concern that he did not wish to see "all hell breaking loose" regarding the downtown parking problems experienced during the summer season with Police Chief Canario responding that the parking management will become a priority of the regular patrol personnel.

Councilwoman Parella asked if it might be prudent to consider a scaling down of the program versus elimination of same.

Police Chief Canario noted that the overall budgetary concerns has precipitated this move and that he fully expects the program will work although it is not an easy task.

Police Chief Canario also noted that he anticipates that as many as four (4) officers will retire this year thus reducing the force overall.

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know the status of the Police Union contract with Police Chief Canario informing the Council that the current contract is in-effect until 2011.

Councilwoman Parella noted the overtime account and asked if volunteers for trash collection and security may take the pressure off of the Town budget with Police Chief Canario informing the Council that he and Town Administrator Mederos are working with the 4th of July Committee to have the parade end sooner; thus lessening the need for overtime pay.

A further discussion ensued regarding the 4th of July activities with Police Chief Canario explaining that the Committee's decision to move the concert series back to Colt Memorial School has improved the situation with this venue requiring less police support.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if litter volunteers might be recruited to lessen the need for Public Works personnel to remove litter.

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know when the 4th of July fireworks will be held with Police Chief Canario responding that

these will take place on July 3.

Councilman Herreshoff noted that he was not generally in favor of a July 3 fireworks display but that he would reluctantly accept this schedule as a cost-saving measure. He further stated that he was hopeful that the fireworks will return to the evening of July 4th when the economy improves.

Town Administrator Mederos informed the Council of the 4th of July Committee's plan to have the parade run for a shorter time versus 2008 and that the extra hour of the 2008 parade was very costly. She further explained that the Committee was informed that it must cover the cost of police overtime if the parade runs excessively long.

Councilman Cordeiro asked to know if the full complement of police officers will not exceed forty (40) with Police Chief Canario in agreement that this complement will not exceed that number of police officers.

Council Chairman Marshall asked to know the rationale for the fuel line-item with Police Chief Canario responding that this line item is watched very carefully and that the current year's expenditure is "right on target" particularly due to the increase in bicycle patrols.

A discussion ensued regarding the fuel bids with Police Chief Canario informing the Council that he plans to bid this line item locally in the future.

Councilman Herreshoff suggested that fuel costs will increase next year. He also asked to know the Police Department plans to dispose of two police vehicles when the department purchases its new vehicles. Police Chief Canario explained that the department plans to purchase two new Ford vehicles with the "police package" and that two will be disposed of likely through surplus sale. Responding to questions posed by Councilman Herreshoff, Police Chief Canario explained that the department no longer has obsolete vehicles "hanging around."

Police Chief Canario also informed the Council that he has been in contact with the department's various vendors and that these businesses do not anticipate price increases in the next fiscal year.

Council Chairman Marshall noted that the electricity cost for the Police Headquarters appears higher than the cost of heating

fuel with Police Chief Canario reminding the Council that this building is utilized round the clock and that it is in remarkably good repair this being a priority of the department to recognize and repair maintenance problems immediately.

Councilman Barboza stated that he was of the opinion that the Police Department budget was "well prepared and fair" and that he would reserve judgment on any adjustments until the budget process was concluded.

A discussion ensued regarding the capital budget with Councilman Herreshoff stating that he was in favor of new police vehicles with Town Administrator Mederos reminding the Council that all of the capital funds were placed in a single account this totaling \$500,000 and that these funds must be appropriated on a greatest-need basis.

Animal Control - 702 - Dyanne Gibree, Animal Control Supervisor

Town Administrator Mederos noted that she made some reductions in this department's budget request with Ms. Gibree indicating that although she was comfortable with most line items the "supply" line was worrisome since the shelter's supply for no-cost animal food and cat litter was no longer available and that the shelter must now purchase these items from its supply account.

Councilman Herreshoff suggested that Animal Control might be able to operate with less personnel hours with Ms. Gibree explaining that the Animal Control staff must be on duty seven days per week in order to feed the animals and clean the various cages and pens.

Councilman Herreshoff expressed concern that the Animal Control Department was importing animals from other states and asked Ms. Gibree if this practice continues with Ms. Gibree responding that the shelter is no longer bringing in out-of-state animals. Ms. Gibree also asserted that the out-of-state animal program did not cost anything.

Councilman Herreshoff suggested that the overall cost to maintain the animal shelter might be reduced if the program's scope was reduced.

Councilman Herreshoff suggested that the Animal Control Department was a "business" and that the overall goal of any business was to find ways to operate more efficiently with

Councilwoman Parella noting that the economic downturn may result with more citizens abandoning their pets these becoming the responsibly of the Town and its animal shelter.

Ms. Gibree asserted that her budget was "bare bones" and the minimum required to make the program work.

Councilman Herreshoff stated that should he determine that the Town is importing animals from out of town he intends to "raise hell."

Harbor Patrol - 703 - Joseph Cabral, Harbormaster

Harbormaster Cabral informed the Council that he was careful with his budget; cutting expenses wherever possible.

A discussion ensued regarding the capital budget with Town Treasurer Day reminding those present that all capital funds were eliminated with the exception of the \$500,000 priority fund.

Councilman Cordeiro stated that he was in favor of providing \$25,000 to the Harbor Patrol for dock maintenance since this department provides revenue to the Town.

Councilwoman Parella stated that all departments have been asked to hold off on non-emergency capital expenditures with Harbormaster Cabral informing the Council that he intends to make the necessary repairs himself if need be.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if dock slip and mooring tenants were surrendering their spots with Harbormaster Cabral informing the Council that very few have indicated they no longer wish to use the slips and moorings. He did note, however, that the Harbormaster's office is now collecting its mooring and dock fees.

Council Chairman Marshall asked Harbormaster Cabral if he wished to appeal any of the Town Administrator's budget recommendations with Harbormaster Cabral responding that he "will make it work."

Community Development - 601 - Diane M. Williamson, Director

A discussion ensued regarding the department's desire to install permit-tracking software with Director of Community Development Williamson explaining that the department is evaluating same.

Further discussion followed regarding the department's implementation of its GIS mapping.

Town Administrator Mederos noted that dues and training accounts have been all consolidated in a single account in the Town Administrator's budget and that the Town Administrator will evaluate the requests for conferences, etc.

A discussion ensued regarding the proposal to expand the Historic District Zoning with Director of Community Development Williamson explaining that the Town Comprehensive Plan strongly recommends that the Historic District should be expanded. She further noted that the funds will be used to prepare the requisite maps, advertising, etc. Director of Community Development Williamson also noted that the Comprehensive Plan calls for three phases of Historic District Zoning expansions this one being the first phase to extend the District from Franklin Street to Poppasquash Road.

Council Chairman Marshall noted that there were no salary increases for non-union/non-contract personnel planned as part of the Town budget. He explained that he was reluctant to "reward" those union positions at the expense of the various personnel who put in long hours - particularly certain management individuals.

Town Administrator Mederos informed the Council that Town Treasurer Day made a preliminary calculation that indicates a modest 2.5% salary increase might cost only \$16,000. A discussion ensued as to whether or not the Town might consider awarding salary increases based upon merit with Councilwoman Parella noting that the Council would not be qualified to make this determination since it is unaware of the actions of those individuals that do not regularly appear before the Council. She suggested that if the Council is to consider merit increases that these would be based upon the recommendation of the Town Administrator.

Director of Community Development Williamson explained that she was aware that times were difficult. She also informed the Council that Town Planner Edward Tanner attends a good many meetings in the evenings.

Council Chairman Marshall noted the budget for the Enterprise Zone and expressed disappointment that the Town of Warren does not wish to pay its share of the Enterprise Zone.

Councilman Cordeiro noted that the Warren people "don't get it." He also explained that the Warren officials do not see the wisdom of the Enterprise Zone.

Council Chairman Marshall agreed to ask Mr. Crisman if the Enterprise Zone might be aligned to include the Town of Portsmouth if Warren maintains its disinterest. He further noted that Bristol appears to have more in common with Portsmouth regarding economic development and that the relationship with Warren and the Enterprise Zone is appearing to be "an exercise in futility."

Director of Community Development Williamson informed the Council that the establishment of an enterprise zone is based upon census tracks and there might not be enough commonality with the Town of Portsmouth to establish an enterprise zone.

Councilman Herreshoff asked why the \$20,000 for CDBG was set to zero with Town Administrator Mederos explaining that this amount was not funded in recent years and rather that the CDBG staff was paid from the Grants administrative fees. Director of Community Development Williamson noted that she requested the \$20,000 as a stop gap if the CDBG does not provide sufficient administrative funding.

Town Administrator Mederos noted that the CDBG Manager works part time to administer the program and that this arrangement works effectively and the CDBG has always provided for the part time salary.

Council Chairman Marshall asked Director of Community Development Williamson if she had anything specific for the Council's consideration with Director of Community Development Williamson responding that she was concerned that the Council might not fully consider the matter of the expansion of the Historic District since this action represents a "strong piece" of the Comprehensive Plan. She also noted that her department needs the budgeted \$5,000 to complete this work.

Councilman Cordeiro asked for the status of the State Street Dock repair with Director of Community Development Williamson explaining that there will be a presentation to the Council next month by the appointed committee. Director of Community Development Williamson also reminded the Council that the funds needed to complete Phase I of the repair/rehabilitation plan was included in the current year's budget,

Recreation Department - 803 - Walter Burke, Director

Also in attendance were Michelle Mascena, Nancy Horne, and Edward J. Quinn of the Recreation Board.

Councilman Herreshoff questioned the salary increase for Jacqueline O'Brien with Recreation Director Burke explaining that Ms. O'Brien is paid per the Town Hall union contract although she is not a member of the union.

Councilman Herreshoff asked for a report on the status of Thomas Park renovations with Recreation Director Burke explaining that he plans a "grand opening" in August; the schedule at the request of the volunteers from the Bristol Garden Club.

Recreation Director Burke reported that an important economy of this budget proposal is that the summer camp will have its activities in Bristol and will not sponsor field trips thus saving on transportation costs.

Councilwoman Parella suggested that the summer camp might consider a modest increase in fees. She noted that the camp was very affordable and a slight increase may help with the budget and overall program.

A discussion ensued regarding the ball field lighting with Recreation Director Burke explaining that \$25,000 is needed to replace the light fixtures. Recreation Director Burke also explained that an upgrade to high efficiency lights might cost as much as \$108,000. Councilwoman Parella speculated that the Federal Stimulus funding might be available to upgrade the lighting to high efficiency.

Councilman Cordeiro explained that Roger Williams University is replacing its ball-field lights and doing so in-house with the help of a hired crane.

Recreation Director Burke stated that the lights in the men's softball field are the highest priority for improvements.

Councilman Cordeiro asked to know if the Parks and Recreation Department plans to "take over" the responsibility for school athletic fields since he is "sick of the lacrosse having to be relocated" to the Town fields and not allowed to play on the school fields. Councilman Cordeiro called this matter "mismanagement."

Town Treasurer Day asked the Council if it was the intention of its honorable body to accept the recommendations of Town Administrator Mederos for the account thus far discussed with the Council in general agreement; reserving the right to return to these lines before the conclusion of budget deliberations.

Council Chairman Marshall suggested that the Council may wish to consider salary increases for the various management personnel based upon a merit system.

There being no further business, upon a motion by Councilman Barboza, seconded by Councilman Cordeiro and voted unanimously, the Chairman declared this meeting to be adjourned at 9:20 o'clock PM.

Louis P. Cirillo, CMC, Council Clerk