

**TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP - WEDNESDAY EVENING  
MARCH 25, 2009**

PRESENT: Marshall, Cordeiro, Parella, Barboza, and Herreshoff

ALSO PRESENT: Town Administrator Mederos  
Town Treasurer Day

The Council met in workshop session on Wednesday evening, March 25, 2009 in the Town Hall, Council Chambers beginning at 7:08 o'clock PM, Council Chairman Marshall presiding:

A discussion ensued regarding various Town issues relating to the budget and the availability of Federal Stimulus funds.

Town Administrator Mederos reported that she understands that one strategy regarding the Stimulus funds is that much of the funding will become available for road improvements and that the individual communities may be asked to develop their own list of projects for roads.

A discussion ensued regarding the upgrade of the Silver Creek with Town Administrator Mederos reporting that the necessary permits for this work may not be received in time for the Stimulus schedule.

Council Chairman Marshall suggested that the Stimulus program might include a program to place utility wires underground to facilitate the removal of large boats by road in times of emergency.

Director of Community Development Williamson stated that the relocation of overhead utilities to underground can be problematic with Council Chairman Marshall noting that he was only concerned about those wires that cross over the roadways; these preventing the easy transport of larger vessels. Council Chairman Marshall agreed that the total removal of utility poles and all overhead wires was problematic and extremely expensive.

A discussion ensued regarding which of the roads in Bristol might be "State Roads" with Town Administrator Mederos agreeing to obtain a list of "State Roads" from Public Works Director Serbst.

A discussion ensued regarding the additional funding needed to "level fund" the school department.

A discussion ensued regarding the Collection Rate with Councilwoman Parella suggesting that the rate might be raised

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slightly for budgetary purposes from 96.25% to 97% with Councilman Herreshoff expressing his opinion that it might be better to leave the Collection Rate lower.

Council Chairman Marshall asked to know how and if the new Roger Williams University dormitories will pay a sewer use fee with Town Treasurer Day explaining that the larger entities pay a sewer fee based upon their water consumption. Town Treasurer Day agreed to obtain the exact figure from Tax Assessor Spagnolo.

A discussion ensued regarding the impact of \$.01 on the tax rate with Town Treasurer Day explaining that \$.01 roughly equals \$31,000 in revenue.

A discussion ensued regarding the effect of this year's budget upon future budgets since these are subject to a future increase cap. Town Treasurer Day explained that this year's cap is equal to 4.75% of the levy and that this figure is reduced by .5% in future years.

Councilman Cordeiro asked to know if the Town's debt service is coming down with Town Treasurer Day responding that the Town's strategy is to maintain a debt of approximately \$7 million per year so as to level fund the debt service.

**Finance Department - 501 - Town Treasurer Day**

Council Chairman Marshall asked to know why Michelle Aitkens was receiving a higher than average wage increase with Town Treasurer Day responding that the new union contract afforded the position of Payroll Clerk a step-increase.

A discussion ensued regarding the overall increases for the clerical union with Town Treasurer Day explaining that the amount in this year's budget proposal represents three years of increases based upon the union contract.

Town Administrator Mederos also informed the Council that the clerical union agreed to provide a portion of their salary toward the Post Retirement Benefits Fund.

**Debt Service - 502 - Town Treasurer Day**

Town Treasurer Day explained the Debt Service budget, noting the "plan" to have "steady" borrowing and repayment over time to prevent fluctuations in the tax rate.

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Council Chairman Marshall informed the Council that he was aware of the Town of East Greenwich's plan to float \$5000-\$10,000 bonds so that citizens could purchase these. Town Treasurer Day explained that it may be more expensive to issue low denomination bonds and agreed to investigate same.

**Fixed Charges - 503 - Town Treasurer Day**

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if the cost increase of health insurance had been settled with Town Treasurer Day responding that the increase in premiums is set at 8.6%.

A discussion ensued regarding the Severance Pay line item with Town Treasurer Day explaining that the average severance upon retirement for a police officer is \$50,000. Town Treasurer Day also noted that the auditors are of the opinion that the Town should have a larger reserve for this purpose.

A discussion ensued regarding the "local" police pension with Town Treasurer Day explaining that nine (9) officers remain beneficiaries of this plan.

A discussion ensued regarding the cost of workers' compensation insurance with Town Treasurer Day explaining that Beacon is the current carrier but that he is investigating the costs and program offered by the Interlocal Trust. Council Chairman Marshall noted that Liberty is back in Rhode Island and may be able to provide a cost advantage.

Town Treasurer Day stated that the program offered by the Trust may be advantageous since it is aggressive with its retraining programs and getting people back to work and off of compensation. Town Treasurer Day also explained that the cost of workers' compensation insurance for laborers is approximately \$25 per \$100 (or 25%) of payroll.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if the Trust's program was more expensive than that of Beacon with Town Administrator Mederos and Town Treasurer Day explaining that it was not much more overall and that the service provided was much better.

**Town Hall Complex - 504 - Town Treasurer Day**

A discussion ensued regarding buy backs of sick-time etc., with Town Treasurer Day explaining that in order to do this the provision must be renegotiated in the union contracts.

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Town Treasurer Day also noted that he added a line item to allow for the expenses associated with the decommissioned school buildings.

Councilman Herreshoff noted that the Town would have to have a flexible lease were it to rent the John Post Reynolds School since the Council is concerned that the School Committee may wish to have it back. Responding to questions posed by Council members, Town Administrator Mederos explained that the Byfield and John Post Reynolds Schools were being maintained with heat and security by the Town. It was further noted that the cost to purchase heating oil for same was expensive.

A discussion ensued regarding the cost of the website maintenance with the Clerk responding that the current arrangement with Diana Campbell is superior to the previous arrangement and the website is updated more frequently.

A discussion ensued regarding the particulars of the heating oil bid with Town Treasurer Day noting that the state bid proved to be placing the Town at a disadvantage since the price of oil has dropped. It was noted that the Town has its agreement with Brennan Oil Company and that the owners of this company have refused to renegotiate the contract since they were "locked in" at a high price.

Councilwoman Parella and Councilman Barboza noted that the oil prices could have increased based upon the volatility in the market and that the Town would have been at an advantage in that case.

**Civic Services - 605 - Town Treasurer Day**

A discussion ensued regarding the proposed reduction in the operational budget for the Visitor Center with Councilman Barboza noting that the Center appeared to be well-utilized.

Town Administrator Mederos explained that the Town never intended to pay Visitor Center workers but would rather pay a coordinator who would find volunteers to staff the center. She noted that the current budget reflects this type of arrangement. It was also noted that it may be less necessary to staff the Center on weekends since the opening of the public rest room facilities at Independence Park.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know why the Parking Lot Lease line was increased with Town Administrator Mederos explaining

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that the lot north of Court Street was formerly available at no charge and that its owner Joseph Brito is now expecting a rent payment.

Councilman Cordeiro asked to know why the Tree budget has been reduced with Town Administrator Mederos responding that the Town has "caught-up" with a backlog of tree work and that less requests for trimming, etc. are apparent.

A discussion ensued regarding the cost of street lights with Town Administrator Mederos and Town Treasurer Day explaining that the Town is investigating turning off the "cobra" street lights in the areas served by the decorative street lamps - Wood, Thames, Bradford and John Streets.

Town Treasurer Day agreed to provide information regarding the cost per light fixture.

A discussion ensued regarding the possibility of a "pilot" solar energy program.

**Municipal Court - 407 - Court Clerk/Administrator Cirillo**

There were no changes proposed to the budget as recommended by Town Administrator Mederos.

**Town Council - 401**

Council Chairman Marshall noted that the Grant Procurement line remains nearly intact with only \$600 appropriated from same thus far.

The Council agreed, by consensus, to consider the matter of its own budget during the recap. It was also agreed that the matter would be continued until April 2, 2009 and that the continued meeting would be potentially held in the Herreshoff Meeting Room at the Rogers Free Library. The Clerk agreed to arrange for same.

**Town Clerk - 403 - Town Clerk Cirillo**

The Clerk informed the Council that he was in agreement with the budget as proposed by Town Administrator Mederos but that he was concerned that the plan to "pool" the dues, conference and subscription budget should not apply to him as an elected official and not an employee reporting to the Town Administrator. Town Administrator Mederos explained that she

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was in agreement with the Clerk and never intended to re-appropriate the Clerk's dues, conference and subscriptions budget and that was this done through a misunderstanding when the overall budget was prepared. The Clerk also agreed to a cut of \$100 in his request.

The Council agreed to transfer \$1400 from the Town Administrator's budget and return same to the Town Clerk's budget.

It was agreed by consensus that the remaining budget items and this special meeting would be continued until April 2, 2009 beginning at 7:00 PM.

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Louis P. Cirillo, CMC, Council Clerk