

TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP - MONDAY EVENING - MARCH 28, 2011

PRESENT: Marshall, Barboza, Teixeira, and Parella

ABSENT: Herreshoff

ALSO PRESENT: Diane C. Mederos, Town Administrator
Julie Goucher, Town Treasurer

The Council met in workshop session for the purpose to consider the 2011-2012 Town Budget on Monday evening, March 28, 2011 in the Town Hall, Council Chambers beginning at 7:17 o'clock PM, Council Chairman Marshall presiding:

603 PUBLIC WORKS

Fred Serbst, Director

Council Chairman Marshall asked to know if there was any data available regarding the potential cost of the curbside trash collection.

Public Works Director Serbst reported that the cost range for similarly sized towns appears to be \$184,000 to \$435,000.

Council Chairman Marshall noted that Councilman Herreshoff suggests that the Town keep the trash collection vehicles should the Town decide to resume its own collection.

Public Works Director Serbst agreed that the equipment should be retained for at least one (1) year to prove-out the new arrangement.

Councilman Teixeira asked about the collection of rubbish on the Fourth of July holiday with Public Works Director Serbst explaining that this would be done as in previous years. He also explained that the parade route is relatively small as compared to the entire Town.

Public Works Director Serbst also explained that the Public Works employees will still pick up rubbish after special events as in previous years.

Councilman Barboza recalled earlier discussions concerning the rubbish collection equipment and asked Public Works Director Serbst if the value of same was essentially negligible. Public Works Director Serbst explained that the equipment is old and in need of replacement.

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Council Chairman Marshall asked to know if the full value of the privatization of the rubbish collection, including motor vehicle expense, was factored into the budget recommendation with Town Administrator Mederos reporting that it was included.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if the sale of the equipment was factored into the budget with Town Administrator Mederos noting that the sale of equipment was not considered as an offset to the budget, as recommended.

Town Treasurer Goucher explained that the "traditional" budget was adjusted line-by-line to reflect the proposed savings realized through private rubbish collection.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know the purpose of the salary "differential" with Public Works Director Serbst explaining that this amount is paid to individuals who perform work that has a higher pay-scale classification.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know if the amount listed was an estimate with Public Works Director Serbst responding that it was estimated based upon many years of experience.

Councilman Barboza asked to know if the employees were "on-board" with the plan to privatize with Public Works Director Serbst responding that some employees were not.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if there would be a problem transitioning employees to new responsibilities with Public Works Director Serbst responding that the employee pool is "well rounded" and that he did not anticipate any transition issues.

Councilwoman Parella noted that the various parties appear concerned that the transitional plan will not be successful and that layoffs will be necessary.

Public Works Director Serbst responded that he would not put forth a plan that would require or support loss of jobs within the current workforce. He added that the department has talented people and that the transition should be successful.

Council Chairman Marshall suggested that the contract might include both curbside pickup and hauling to the Central Landfill with Public Works Director Serbst responding that these are considered as two different types of work and may attract different pools of potential contractors.

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Council Chairman Marshall asked to know if the Town anticipates any reduction in the cost of hauling based upon the contract curbside pickup with Public Works Director Serbst responding that this savings may be \$80,000.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if the rubbish will be hauled directly from the curbside collection point to the Central Landfill and also what type of vehicle will be able to do this.

Public Works Director Serbst responded that it will, indeed, be possible and the Town has one of the vehicles in service at this time.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know if the proposal will include rubbish collection and not recycling with Public Works Director Serbst responding affirmatively.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know if the Town has plans to improve recycling with Public Works Director Serbst responding that the plan includes adding recycling collection at North Farm and also to expand business recycling.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if the current employees will receive lower salaries as a result of the change with Public Works Director Serbst responding that the opposite will likely occur in some cases since some employees will be doing higher pay scale rated jobs.

Peter Moran, a Public Works employee, stated his opinion that the quality of the current rubbish collection operation will likely not be matched by the new contractor. He noted that the employees provide "special service" to the elderly and persons with disabilities. He added that he did not view the proposal as "worth it."

Mr. Moran also informed the Council of his concern regarding the potential for layoffs in the future.

Councilman Barboza stated that he does not believe that "anyone will be put out on the street" with Mr. Moran responding that he believes there is no intention to lay off employees.

Councilwoman Parella stated that it may be advisable to take this action at this time since there is a plan to keep all employees and that a future plan might require layoffs.

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Mr. Moran stated that he speaks for everyone at the Public Works Department about the concern for quality of work.

Councilwoman Parella stated that the Town has been fortunate that employees agreed to delays in salary increases and also that workforce numbers have been reduced through attrition rather than layoffs.

Councilman Barboza asked to know how many new hires will be needed if contract rubbish collection is rejected with Public Works Director Serbst responding that the Department may have to hire as many as four (4) new employees to keep up with the Stormwater Phase II and other requirements.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if the projects Public Works Director Serbst outlines will take multiple years with Public Works Director Serbst informing the Council that the projects will be ongoing maintenance activities. He added that the Town received a "wrist-slap and gets hammered" since the catch basins are not cleaned regularly.

Councilman Barboza stated that the next fiscal year promises to be financially (the worst) noting that the Town does not anticipate any State aid and that "the last thing anyone wishes to do it put people out on the street."

Mr. Moran stated that he appreciates the Council's point of view but strongly urges consideration of other options.

Mr. Moran also informed the Council that perhaps 20% of the barrels emptied by rubbish collection personnel are of the size allowed by Town Ordinance. He added his opinion that the "rules" are "thrown to the wayside" in order to appease the public.

Councilwoman Parella stated that she generally disfavors privatization but sees rubbish collection by private contractors as the "wave of the future." She noted that the plan includes no layoffs and asked Mr. Moran if she could know his "real fear."

Mr. Moran informed the Council that the Public Works Department has "tons of work currently" but that he views the rubbish collection as "job security" since this must be done while other projects may be left undone.

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Councilwoman Parella stated that she sees other work projects, especially road repair, as "never ending."

Mr. Moran stated that he agrees with Councilwoman Parella "in part" but again stated that the rubbish collection program provides "job security." Mr. Moran admitted that job injuries and staff issues can be a problem. He also added that employee safety is in need of improvement.

Councilwoman Parella noted the earlier comment of Mr. Moran regarding the oversized rubbish containers, etc., and asked to know why the matter was not made more commonly known.

Mr. Moran suggested that the approach to the problem has been "lackadaisical" and it is now "out of control."

Councilwoman Parella suggested that there should be some type of public announcement to attempt to bring the problem under control.

Councilman Barboza suggested that the Town might place stickers on oversized or overweight trash containers.

Robert Holt, also an employee of the Public Works Department, stated that he has been employed by the Department for twenty-four (24) years and objects to the privatization of rubbish collection.

He added that the trash is consistently picked up under the current procedure. He also added that the Town should have increased transfer station/dump fees many years ago since the lack of fees resulted in a high cost to the Town for tipping fees, etc.

Mr. Holt also informed the Council that he spoke with the crew which picks up the rubbish and that many of these persons wish to remain in their current position. He also questioned the safety of the practice he has observed in other towns, explaining that he does not find the Town of Warren's practice of the truck driver also leaving the truck to pick up rubbish as prudent.

Councilman Teixeira suggested that the matter might be better discussed in a special meeting/workshop.

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Councilwoman Parella suggested that the Council learn about the pending projects, cleaning catch basins, etc., in detail with a time estimate for work to be done annually.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know who has accomplished any of the work on the drainage, etc., during the past two (2) years with Town Administrator Mederos reporting that the Town has hired temporary workers. She added that the reduction in workforce was due to attrition.

Councilwoman Parella suggested that the private trash collection contract should be written so as to allow the Town a certain "leeway."

Public Works Director Serbst stated that he intends to write the Town's parameters into the contract.

A discussion ensued regarding a possible special meeting/workshop to finalize this matter with Councilman Barboza suggesting that the Council may wish to schedule this meeting for April 5 or April 7, 2011.

405 Boards and Commissions (Supplemental)

Substance Abuse Prevention Task Force

Thomas Carroll, Chairman

Mr. Carroll reported that the fund derived from the grant that has supported the Task Force requires an "in kind" match. He also reported that the grant amount has been reduced from \$32,000 to \$20,000.

Mr. Carroll requested that the Council may provide "anything that it can give" and suggested that \$7500 would be required.

Ms. Ursini, who formerly worked as Coordinator of the Task Force reported that the Roger Williams University/Town grant program awarded \$1000. She added that there are "some big grants out there" which may be available to the Task Force.

Mr. Carroll reported that the Task Force prepared a grant proposal in cooperation with the Town of Warren but encountered a problem due to the Regional School District in that the grant could not be apportioned.

Council Chairman Marshall asked to know if the State budget will continue to support the Substance Abuse programs with Ms. Ursini

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reporting that the amount from the State has been reduced every year.

Councilwoman Parella noted that support for the program is still in the State budget with Mr. Carroll reporting that its inclusion is "tenuous."

Councilwoman Parella suggested that the Task Force might be merged with the Recreation Department with Ms. Ursini noting that the focus of the Task Force is prevention.

Councilwoman Parella stated that "prevention" should be a component of the (recreation) summer programs.

The Council, by consensus agreed to take this matter "under advisement" and made no changes to the budget as recommended.

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION (Supplemental)

Oryann Lima, Vice Chairman

Ms. Lima reviewed the budget request form.

A discussion ensued regarding a possible solution to the need for additional hours for the Staff Assistant.

It was noted that this budget probably belongs with Community Development rather than in "Boards and Commissions."

Town Administrator Mederos agreed to speak to Town Solicitor Ursillo regarding this matter in order to assure that there were no impediments to making a change in the budget.

A further discussion ensued regarding the Staff Assistant's hours with Ms. Lima stating that more hours were needed and Councilwoman Parella reminding the Council that the increase in "sign-offs" per the Council's instructions will place a larger time-burden on the staff and that it will be necessary for the Staff Assistant to be available due to the sign-offs.

A discussion ensued regarding the meeting advertisement requirements with the Clerk reporting that the advertisement is published due to the stipulations of the Historic District Commission Ordinance.

The Clerk agreed to check with Town Solicitor Ursillo regarding Historic District Commission advertising and budget.

402 TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

Diane C. Mederos, Town Administrator

The Council made no changes to the recommended budget for this department.

501 FINANCE

Julie Goucher, Treasurer

The Council made no changes to the recommended budget for this department.

502 DEBT SERVICE

Julie Goucher, Treasurer

The Council made no changes to the recommended budget for this department.

503 Fixed Charges

Julie Goucher, Treasurer

The Council made no changes to the recommended budget for this department.

504 TOWN HALL COMPLEX

Julie Goucher, Treasurer

The Council made no changes to the recommended budget for this department.

605 CIVIC SERVICES

Julie Goucher, Treasurer

The Council agreed, by consensus, to change the Tree Care/Preservation line to \$50,000.

407 MUNICIPAL COURT

Louis P. Cirillo, Clerk/Magistrate

The Council made no changes to the recommended budget for this department.

403 TOWN CLERK

Louis P. Cirillo, Town Clerk

The Council made no changes to the recommended budget for this department.

402 TOWN COUNCIL

Louis P. Cirillo, Council Clerk

The Council, by consensus, reduced the "Grant Procurement" line to \$1 and reduced the "Advertising" line to \$17,000.

The Council made no other changes to this budget.

Parella/Barboza - Voted unanimously to schedule an additional special meeting/budget workshop for Tuesday, April 5, 2011, to be held in the Town Hall, Council Chambers, beginning at 7:00 o'clock PM and to continue the matter of the Public Works curbside rubbish collection proposal and all budget matters to this special meeting.

There being no further business, upon a motion by Councilman Barboza seconded by Councilwoman Parella and voted unanimously, the Chairman declared this meeting to be adjourned at 11:45 o'clock PM.

Louis P. Cirillo, CMC, Council Clerk