

TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP - MONDAY EVENING - MARCH 19, 2012

PRESENT: Marshall, Barboza, Teixeira, Herreshoff and Parella

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

The Council met in workshop session on Monday evening, March 19, 2012 in the Town Hall, Council Chambers, beginning at 7:07 o'clock PM, Council Chairman Marshall presiding:

Barboza/Teixeira - Voted unanimously to continue the matter of the Harbor Patrol budget until the Town Council workshop scheduled for March 26, 2012 and to instruct the Clerk to rearrange and repost the schedule accordingly.

Prior to the vote taken, Council Chairman Marshall noted that Harbor Master Cabral could not attend this evening's meeting and asked that his budget deliberations might be postponed for one week.

General Budget Discussion

Town Administrator Mederos introduced the budget as presented and thanked her assistant, Denise Asciola and also Town Treasurer Goucher, for their efforts toward the preparation and presentation of the budget and related documents.

Town Administrator Mederos noted that the Town continues to face certain challenges and also that state revenue sharing continues to be declining. She added that she and the various department managers prepared the budget with "serious consideration" of the economic challenges.

Town Administrator Mederos also noted that her budget recommendations require no increase to the tax rate and that the Town has experienced "a bit of a reprieve" versus earlier years.

Town Administrator Mederos reported that she is concluding negotiations with three bargaining units and that there is a commitment to changes in the employee contributions to

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healthcare. She added that the bargaining units were "pitching in" to do their part.

Town Administrator Mederos informed the Council that she recommends a \$300,000 increase to the Town's share of the Regional Schools and also that she continues to restructure the Town operations to allow maintenance of the essential services without raising taxes.

She added that the budget recommends that some of the reserve account will be utilized to offset taxes and also that there is no recommended increase in the sewer use fee.

Town Administrator Mederos again thanked her staff and assistant, Ms. Asciola.

Councilman Barboza asked to know the amount Town Administrator Mederos recommends to take from the reserve account with Town Treasurer Goucher responding \$1.7 million.

Councilman Barboza asked to know if the Town will remain in a good financial position should the Council agree to this amount with Town Treasurer Goucher responding that the Town will still have 16% reserves and that this would represent a very good position.

Town Treasurer Goucher added that the Town may not have to use the full amount (\$1.7 million).

Councilman Barboza asked to know the anticipated tax rate with Town Treasurer Goucher noting that this would be the same as the current fiscal year at \$12.43 per \$1000 of assessed valuation.

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know the amount in the reserve account with Town Treasurer Goucher responding \$9 million.

Town Treasurer Goucher added that the Town's good fiscal practices have helped sustain this reserve.

Councilman Barboza noted that the school district plans to offset their budget with reserve funds also, for both FY 12 and FY 13.

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Town Treasurer Goucher reported that the use of the reserve was discussed with the Town's bonding agencies and that the amount does not appear to pose any problem. She added that she is hopeful that the Town may be able to use less than the \$1.7 million.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know the amount that the Town will have in its reserve account if it utilizes the planned \$1.7 million with Town Treasurer Goucher responding that the amount remaining will be 16% or approximately \$7 million.

Councilman Barboza asked to know if any of the \$7 million was "restricted" with Town Treasurer Goucher responding that this amount was not restricted.

Councilwoman Parella stressed the importance of the Town's maintenance of its reserve account. She added that some other communities now have zero reserves. She also added that the "best way" is to allow for sufficient reserves while returning some to the taxpayers by offsetting the tax rate.

Town Treasurer Goucher agreed with Councilwoman Parella and added that the process must be based upon sound fiscal practice.

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know the planned collection rate with Town Treasurer Goucher responding 96%.

Councilman Herreshoff congratulated Town Administrator Mederos and Town Treasurer Goucher and stated that they did a good job in preparing the budget.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if the budget anticipates the dramatic ongoing increases in the price of gasoline and oil with Town Treasurer Goucher stating that the budget considers the history of gasoline and oil expenses and that some budgets were increased accordingly.

Councilwoman Parella stated that she believed that the budget lines for gasoline and oil may be optimistic and that she hopes that the optimism will "pay off."

Town Treasurer Goucher reported that the Town's tax rate is comparatively low when other towns and the level of services provided are considered.

701 - Police Department

Josue Canario, Chief

Police Chief Canario described his budget as "lean and mean" and reported that his department is attempting to work with less albeit some expenses are difficult to control.

Police Chief Canario further reported that there has been cooperation between the command function and the union employees and also that he agreed to level funding for most of the controllable expenses.

Police Chief Canario explained that the department is utilizing more cost effective measures; replacing cruiser patrols with motorcycles and bicycles whenever practicable. He further explained that the warmer than typical temperatures have allowed him to dispatch the bicycles and motorcycles earlier this year.

Councilman Barboza noted that he observed a parked cruiser with the officers walking a beat near the Byfield School and that this type of police presence "looked good."

Police Chief Canario noted that he supports this type of visibility and termed it "community policing." He also reported that 24 officers participated in the St. Patrick's Day parade in the City of Newport and also that he appreciates the support he receives from the Town Council and Town Administrator.

A discussion ensued regarding salary increases with Town Treasurer Goucher reporting that most of these are contractual. She also reported that the non-union personnel are generally recommended for a salary increase of three percent (3%).

Councilman Teixeira asked to know about the overtime account of \$120,000 with Police Chief Canario reporting that most of this overtime is to allow for minimal manning and that this is a contract provision. Police Chief Canario added that this overtime amount is relatively small as compared to other similarly sized communities.

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Councilman Teixeira asked for an explanation of line item 223, Uniforms and the reason for this line when there is already a Clothing Allowance line. Police Chief Canario responded that the Uniforms line is used for repairing uniforms damaged beyond typical wear and the clothing allowance is contractual.

Council Chairman Marshall asked to know the status of the Education line item with Police Chief Canario explaining that this line continues to climb. He reported that Town Administrator Mederos met with union officials who agreed to a "not to exceed" amount and also that the Town is attempting to get more opportunities for tuition remission with Roger Williams University for law enforcement related courses including the online courses.

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know the average price of a course with Police Chief Canario reporting that the range is \$700 to \$2500 per course.

Town Administrator Mederos reported that Roger Williams University has agreed to allow Town employees to take online courses at a reduced tuition rate.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if police officers must have a college degree with Police Chief Canario responding that officers must have a minimum of an associate's degree.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know if an officer receives a salary increase when promoted or must otherwise wait until the new fiscal year with Police Chief Canario responding that the circumstances vary with the situation.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know how the department can accommodate 40 officers with Police Chief Canario responding that if an officer retires, the salary is no longer paid.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know if an officer must make a commitment to the Town in order to attend the police academy with Police Chief Canario responding that the candidate must make a commitment and that some candidates may not remain for the full term but most do.

Councilman Barboza commented that those who do not fulfill their legal commitment to the Town will face a financial penalty.

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Councilman Teixeira stated that he believes that officers who attend the academy as candidates from the Town then should find employment here eventually.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know if cadets receive a salary from the Town with Police Chief Canario responding that this amount is outlined in line item 345, Probationary Patrolman Expense and that this amount is for two (2) officers.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know which budget items are the most difficult to control with Police Chief Canario responding that it is not possible to predict the extraneous costs associated with storms when officers must be called in to work extra hours.

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know how Police Chief Canario manages fuel cost increases with Police Chief Canario responding that the police department uses bicycles and motorcycles as much as possible.

Councilman Herreshoff agreed that the use of motorcycles is cost-effective.

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know about the \$88,000 in the capital budget for the purchase of cruisers with Council Chairman Marshall stating that this must be paid out of the pooled capital funds.

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know if the police department plans to de-accession vehicles with Police Chief Canario responding that the department will dispose of vehicles whenever it is possible to do so once these have reached the limit of their serviceable life.

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know if there were more or less vehicles in service since Police Chief Canario assumed his leadership of the department with Police Chief Canario responding that he believes the department has one less vehicle at this time.

Council Chairman Marshall asked to know if the police department trains officers from other departments with Police Chief Canario responding affirmatively.

Council Chairman Marshall asked to know if the Bristol

Police Department is the first in the State to do this with Police Chief Canario also responding affirmatively.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

702 - Animal Control

Josue Canario, Chief

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know if the operational cost of the new animal shelter was factored into the budget request with Police Chief Canario responding "not yet."

Council Chairman Marshall observed that the budget was reduced from the previous year with Town Administrator Mederos reporting that a part-time animal control officer was not replaced.

Council Chairman Marshall observed that it may not be common knowledge that the Town has not replaced employees with Town Administrator Mederos noting that several Town Hall employees have not been replaced also.

Town Treasurer Goucher noted that the Town is finding more efficient ways to operate and that this efficiency has allowed for the employee reductions by attrition.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know how the animal control personnel operate without the part-time employee with Police Chief Canario responding that the schedule was reworked to include some overlap of remaining personnel.

Councilwoman Parella stated that she was pleased to see the proposed increase for veterinary services since this line appeared underfunded in the past.

Police Chief Canario stated that the line is somewhat out of the control of the department since it is dependent upon the circumstances of need. He added that the vet fees were also negotiated.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know if the \$3000 requested for maintenance was needed with Police Chief Canario responding that the department has no definite date to move into the new shelter and that some repairs to the existing building will likely be needed in the next fiscal year.

Council Chairman Marshall asked if any of the maintenance funds which are unexpended will be returned to the General Fund with Town Treasurer Goucher responding affirmatively.

Councilman Herreshoff stated that he believes that the budget is well-prepared.

Councilman Barboza noted that the Council has received letters commending the police department's officers.

Council Chairman Marshall observed that most of the departments are expected to do more with less and that these have been successful doing so.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know the cost of copies charged by the police department with Police Chief Canario responding that the department charges \$.15 per page.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

601 - Community Development

Diane M. Williamson, Director

The Council reviewed changes to the budget from previous years.

Council Chairman Marshall asked to know if the new line item, EDC Marketing Website was the "collaboration website" as previously discussed by the Economic Development Commission with Director of Community Development Williamson responding affirmatively. She added that this website will resemble the program entitled "Destination Bristol" and also that EDC Acting Chairman, Michael Byrnes, was invited to explain this tonight but is unavailable.

Director of Community Development Williamson added that of the possible promotional activities for this "destination" project, the website appears to be the easiest to implement and also the most cost-effective.

Director of Community Development Williamson reported that Mr. Byrnes will provide an update of this effort at an upcoming Town Council meeting.

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Director of Community Development Williamson also explained that Susan Church's salary was moved from the Historic District Commission budget to be included in with the regular Community Development salaries although her responsibilities will remain as before.

A discussion ensued regarding salary increases with Town Treasurer Goucher noting that it is recommended that non-union personnel should generally receive 3% increases but several are recommended for merit increases of 5%.

Councilwoman Parella stated that she was of the opinion that 5% was high for the public sector.

Councilman Teixeira referred to the 5% as "a little steep."

Town Administrator Mederos noted that the amounts are as recommended and that the Town Council has the final word on the employees' salaries.

Councilman Herreshoff suggested that the topic of salary increases should be considered at the end of the budget workshop deliberations.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

602 - Building Inspection

Diane M. Williamson, Director

Council Chairman Marshall observed that the revenues appear to be down. He added that the operating budget appears to be lower than requested with Town Treasurer Goucher noting that the department requests a computer which will likely be purchased from the pooled capital funds.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

A discussion ensued regarding the Community Development Department's capital request with Town Treasurer Goucher reporting that the Town Administrator recommends pooled capital funds in the amount of \$300,000 with all departments sharing according to need and established priorities.

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Councilman Herreshoff stated that he was of the opinion that most of the capital budget items recommended by Director of Community Development Williamson could probably wait another year.

Director of Community Development Williamson noted that she continues to recommend the implementation of the permit tracking software program and that she is reviewing several sources and that the State may have a "model" program.

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know if the Town might "piggyback" on the State's program with Director of Community Development Williamson responding that this may be possible.

Director of Community Development Williamson also informed the Council that she is seeking grant funding to study the downtown buildings and that the Town may have to provide matching funds.

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know the amount with Director of Community Development Williamson stating that she was uncertain as to the exact amount but also that she expects that much of the match will be covered by in-kind expenses.

Director of Community Development Williamson noted that the State Street Dock upgrade will require additional capital funds with Councilman Herreshoff asking to know if the first phase of the upgrade was fully funded.

Director of Community Development Williamson responded that the first phase is fully funded.

Director of Community Development Williamson noted the capital request for "wayfinding" signage with Council Chairman Marshall asking to know if the Governor's "main street" initiative may cover this expense.

Director of Community Development Williamson agreed to investigate this possibility. She added that although she knows that much of the capital program will be deferred, she informed the Council that keeping the list current and prioritized is helpful in the planning process for future capital budgets.

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Councilman Teixeira asked for a report on the State Street Dock project with Director of Community Development Williamson stating that the paving remains to be completed.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

402 - Town Administrator

Diane C. Mederos, Town Administrator

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know who is handling negotiations with Town Administrator Mederos responding that Bill O'Gara is assisting her with contract negotiations.

Councilwoman Parella asked to know if the line item, Departments Dues and Conferences, under the Town Administrator's budget, was working as planned with Town Treasurer Goucher noting that this was a particularly good idea and is working well.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know if employees were reimbursed for mileage with Town Treasurer Goucher noting that some are.

Councilman Teixeira asked to know who negotiates the Town Administrator's compensation "packet" with Town Administrator Mederos noting that the Council approves the salary by ordinance for the upcoming term and that the benefits are the same as the non-union personnel.

Councilwoman Parella suggested that the Council should examine the Town Administrator's salary to determine if an adjustment is warranted.

Town Administrator Mederos noted that any salary adjustment would have to be approved through an ordinance and that this would take effect after December 2012.

Town Treasurer Goucher stated that the Town Administrator's salary appears to be low.

Councilwoman Parella stated that some of the Town's salaries appear to be "shockingly" low.

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Councilman Herreshoff stated that most of the Town Administrators served for only one term and that only one served for two terms.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

806 - Municipal Observances

Diane C. Mederos, Town Administrator

The Council, by consensus, agreed to withhold discussion regarding this agenda item until tomorrow evening's budget workshop.

401 - Town Council

Councilman Herreshoff asked to know the amount remaining in the Council Contingency account for the current year with Town Treasurer Goucher responding \$6,435.

Councilman Herreshoff suggested that the Town may wish to suspend printing code supplements with the Clerk reporting that the cost of the supplements is in the codification and that the cost of printing is relatively minimal. He added that the Town used to print many copies of the supplements and now prints only the minimum order.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

There being no further business, upon a motion by Councilman Barboza, seconded by Councilman Herreshoff and voted unanimously, the Chairman declared this workshop to be adjourned at 8:48 o'clock PM.

Louis P. Cirillo, CMC, Council Clerk