

SPECIAL MEETING NORTH SMITHFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

JUNE 13, 2016

KENDALL-DEAN SCHOOL AUDITORIUM

7:00 P.M.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 P.M. and began with the prayer and the pledge to the flag. Council members present were Ms. Alves, Mrs. Nadeau, Mr. Soly, Mr. Zwolenski and Mr. Boucher. Also in attendance were Town Administrator Hamilton and Town Solicitor Igliazzi.

PUBLIC HEARING BUDGET 2016/2017

Budget Committee Chair Elizabeth Faricy gave an overview of the recommendations made by the committee.

Mrs. Nadeau asked when the revenue from National Grid declines, will this budget be able to be supported. She wants to be sure the town will not be hard hit in 2018, 2019.

Mrs. Faricy responded the committee did look into that and they did see some savings in the town's bonding and there appears to be new developments coming into town.

Mr. Zwolenski questioned the funding for Other Post Employment Benefits.

Mrs. Faricy answered that the Budget Committee has been charged

with looking into that and is just beginning the process. They hope to have a meeting in July or August to present recommendations for funding that liability.

Mr. Soly asked if there was any contingency for veteran and senior exemptions going forward.

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The Budget Committee did not see any benefit to changing the exemptions for either at this time.

Mr. James Lombardi made several points. He advocated for restoring some positions in the school department budget; that reserves should be set aside as the National Grid revenue declines; that the town needs to grow business; that he is in agreement with the salary increases for senior administration and there should be substantial raises for Town Administrator, Town Council and School Committee because this may induce more people to run for office; that he does not agree with level funding the school department budget; and that a \$1 million revolving fund be set up.

Mr. Tony Guertin asked if someone could provide the revenue figures for National Grid. He also questioned the hourly rate for the videographer.

Mrs. Faricy responded that the rate is \$125.00 per meeting.

Mr. Parmelee added that the budget now includes videotaping of School Committee meetings as well as Town Council and the number of meetings has increased.

Chief Steven Reynolds asked the Council to consider moving \$6,000 to the Dispatcher Training line item for recruitment and training with the \$6,000 to be taken from the overtime budget. The Chief would like to begin training in January of 2017.

Mr. Paul Vadenais was concerned that not all revenue from all the departments is showing up in the budget, such as police cruiser details, third party billing and Pumpkinfest. He also asked why the town is rushing to float a bond for the municipal projects when the cost of the project is unknown. Mr. Vadenais questioned why the town was spending money on the fire department roof when the town does not own the building. He also questioned the monies set aside for the road repair, thinking that the town needs probably \$10 million in road repair and only spending \$200,000 per year will take fifty years. Mr. Vadenais asked why \$100,000 was being put into the OPEB account when it is fully funded in the budget. He felt the \$236,000 in the contingency fund should be itemized. Also he did not think it made sense to put \$100,000 into restoring the fund balance. If there is a surplus at the end of the year, then it could be transferred there.

Mr. Michael Rapko referenced a Call article that mentioned factors that could lead to an erosion of a town's credit rating could be an increase in pension liability, which is the OPEB reserve, and depletion of reserve funds. The Budget Committee was trying to take any extra money and set it aside in case of emergencies.

Mr. Gary Ezovski noted there is no detail on property taxes and he wondered what rates had been assumed to accomplish the relative spread between the residential rate, the commercial rate and the tangible property rate.

Mrs. Faricy answered that the newspaper advertisement listed the projected rates. Residential rates are projected to go down to \$16.40 from \$16.68, commercial rates down to \$18.25 from \$18.50 and tangible rates down to \$40.94 from \$44.56.

Public Works Director Raymond Pendergast asked if money has been put aside for playgrounds and acquisition of property. Three grants have been submitted but if the town doesn't receive them, he'd like to know if money has been set aside in a contingency account to enable him to complete as least two of the three projects.

Mr. Pendergast also discussed salaries. High pay raises have been proposed for some individuals, some of whom have been employed here for a minimal amount of time, and up to a sixteen percent increase has been proposed for another individual. As a department

head, he has never been asked to give himself a pay raise, but has always gone along with the Town Administrator's proposal. He felt that if he and some other department heads were going to receive a three percent

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increase, then so should the others plus whatever increase they did not receive last year. It is insulting.

Ms. Hamilton noted this was the first she was hearing about the discord and wished that she had known earlier. She would consider working with department heads so that everyone feels valued.

Mrs. Faricy commented there is a state report that lists salaries of certain department heads per community and North Smithfield falls in the lower portion. The Budget Committee was not trying to right the wrong all in one year, yet they were looking to begin the process in order to offer more competitive salaries. One of the issues is that the town salary and wage ordinance does not provide for ranges.

Mrs. Nadeau suggested asking the Budget Committee to start looking at salaries to attract and keep employees, a like-town comparison.

Mr. Soly felt there should have been a study done of all department heads prior to the budget recommendations.

Mr. David Lowe stated the town has lost seven to ten top step teachers because of lower pay scales.

Town Planner Robert Ericson agreed that salaries are low and there is a particular problem with finance directors. The town needs to understand what is competitive and what the marketplace is.

MOTION by Mr. Zwolenski, seconded by Mrs. Nadeau, and voted unanimously on a roll call vote to close the public hearing.

MOTION by Mrs. Nadeau, seconded by Mr. Soly, and voted unanimously on an aye vote to adjourn at 8:27 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra A. Todd, Town Clerk