



## Town Council Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 6, 2022, at 6:30 PM, in the Matthew Thornton Room



Chairman Koenig called the meeting to order at 6:40 pm. Present at the meeting were Chairman Koenig, Councilor Harrington, Councilor Healey, Councilor Woods, and Town Manager Paul Micali. Vice Chair Rothhaus was excused, but he is observing the meeting and will text Mr. Micali with any questions or comments.

Councilor Hunter and Councilor Murphy arrived to the meeting at 6:44pm.

### Public Comment

There was no public comment.

The order in which the departments presented was changed, with Media not presenting tonight and Assessing being moved to present before General Government. Community Development budget was presented first.

#### • Community Development (#1)

Mr. Micali began by stating that for Community Development, there are a total of 4 full time employees and 1 part time employee. He then stated that there was a decrease requested for clerical wages voted on 2021-2022 to 2022-2023, primarily because of the 53<sup>rd</sup> week of payroll and because these are non-union positions so there are no non-union raises in the budget. He then stated that those that do have union contracts and contracts that are in effect will receive a 2% cost of living increase for this year.

Community Development Director Tim Thompson then presented, stating that overall he is about \$5,700 lower in the budget this year than he was last year, primarily because of the 53<sup>rd</sup> week of payroll not being applicable. Otherwise, he stated that he tries every year to level fund the budget as much as possible, and there have been some shifting around of some line items this year, such as a need to purchase a couple of new large hanging file cabinets as they continue to fill the space that they have with the continued development plans in process. He anticipates two new cabinets costing about \$7,500. He then presented some budget highlights:

- For the planning board and zoning board, they had 130 combined agenda items in 2021, which is an increase of 6 from 2020
- Staffing these boards has increase from 54 hours to 61 hours
- A major project coming up this year for the staff and planning board will be the revamp and redesign of their subdivision regulations. The basic framework for this has been completed, and he is working with engineers and DPW staff to ensure that all the drainage and roadway standards are up to date
- For staffing, he shared that they did have one change: Sharon Haynes was moved up to General Government, and he has hired Stefanie Brinn who previously worked at NHTI in their admissions office.

Councilor Healey asked about overtime, stating that last year they were budgeted for 750 but this year they are down to 300. Mr. Thompson replied that they only used \$93 dollars out of the budget last year, primarily because they had previously had an on-call recording secretary for their meetings, but his staff now does this as part of their regular day-to-day duties, so the overtime line is there in case they have to work extra to meet deadlines.

Chairman Koenig asked about the pricing of the large hanging file cabinets, in which Tim replied that this would cover the cost of two large cabinets that hold about 500 sheets of mylar, which they are required by state law to keep. Chairman Koenig then asked how long they have to keep them for, in which Tim stated that there is no limit, but they do scan in all the plans as they're filed.

Councilor Healey asked about the Heritage Commission, which falls under the purview of Community Development, asking why there isn't a place in the budget for this. Tim replied that he has never had a budget for the Heritage Commission as it's in general government. Mr. Micali stated that there is a budget of about \$300 in the general government's budget for the Heritage Commission.

Chairman Koenig then stated that Tim said that there were a same number of items in the Planning Board and Zoning Board for last year and 2020 and asked if this is above or below average. Mr. Thompson replied that they have been averaging about 100-150 applications combined for those boards per year as he tracks agenda items and not unique applications.

- **Town Clerk / Tax Collector (#2)**

Mr. Micali began by stating that he included a memo from Town Clerk/Tax Collector Diane Trippett about the number of new registrations and some salary information for her staffing. He then stated that Diane requested to go from four full-time window positions and one part-time window position to changing the part-time position to full-time. Mr. Micali said that based on the budget, he cannot see doing that this year, but he asked her to include this information and bring it to the Council. He then shared that you will not see the election budget in this budget as it is in general government, however one of Diane's responsibilities as Town Clerk is to oversee the elections. Mr. Micali then stated that overall; there was \$1,300 increase to the budget from 2021-2022 to 2022-2023.

Mr. Trippett then took over the presentation along with her Deputy Town Clerk/ Tax Collector, Brenda Dulong, stating that they are looking to increase their staff due to the growth in Town as well as the growth in online transactions. She then shared that their window has been busy with new residents needing help with registering to vote or register their car. She then stated that in 2019, there were approximately 1,400 residential units in the works, and as of 2021 there are now 1,270 units that are unoccupied at the moment. Additionally, Diane shared that the increase in online transactions has led to an increase in communications with the finance department as well as monitoring to ensure the transactions can be processed, which takes about 4 or more hours a day. Further, Diane shared that they have seen an increase of over 900 vehicle registrations and 300 voter registrations within the past year or two strictly from the new developments. With the addition of the previously mentioned 1,270 units, she is anticipating about 3,800 new registrations annually once the units are occupied. Diane then stated that there are slight changes to the budget, and there are two new items to the budget for a total of \$1,600:

- Outside maintenance of office equipment. They are looking to contract with another provider for their online tax program, which includes an annual hosting fee of \$600. The justification for this provider is that their processes seem easier in regard to reconciling monies and receiving payments. This provider also allows the resident to see their actual tax bill online, which cannot be done with the current equipment, as well as sign up for alerts when the tax bill is released.
- \$1,000 for barcode scanners that will work with the clerk package and allow notices to go out with a barcode on them for ease of locating registrations in the system and eliminating errors.

Councilor Hunter stated that he is concerned with online transactions becoming even more popular as time goes on and how to make it more efficient in order to not take four times as long to process as regular transactions. He is not sure if there is a solution in the budget for this, but he believes they should start looking for alternative options to streamline the process even more. Diane shared that over time, the state has expanded registrations which have caused the increase in workload for the staff, as well as the processing being elongated due to issues with customers having holds or suspensions on their registrations, which they cannot see until they begin to process the transaction. Chairman Koenig asked how many transactions the office does annually, in which Diane shared that they average close to 36,000 registrations annually.

Councilor Murphy asked for clarification about mailing property managers their tax bills, in which Diane stated that they mail to the property owners, but the property managers don't always get the bills as they're contracted by the property owner to pay their bills, so they are therefore reaching out to the office for a copy of the bill. Councilor Murphy then asked if there is an online transaction fee for registering online, in which Diane stated that there are fees for ACH of about \$1.50-\$2.50 and there is a 2.79 percentage charge if they use a credit card. Chairman Koenig asked to clarify who gets these fees, in which Diane stated that the online companies get the fees, not the office. Councilor Hunter asked if it would be worthwhile to reach out to a larger city, such as Manchester or Concord, to see if they have a process they're using to expedite the online transaction reconcile process, in which Diane stated that most of the other cities and towns are using the same process that they are.

Ms. Dulong then shared her workflow process, stating that they first get a detailed report from their company that takes the online requests that highlights customer information and what registration is needed (car registrations, dog licensing, etc.). She then has to keep track of the total dollar amount for that day, as well as ensure that finance has received the money at the bank as they do not want to process something that hasn't been put into the bank. She then shared that there are five different payment vendors, so she has to print these reports as well as reports from their system to ensure everything matches up. This is all done in addition to balancing the windows and taking care of in-person customers. Councilor Healey asked if the DMV sent any money to the clerk's office since they are taking on so many additional car registration duties, in which Ms. Trippett stated that they do not receive anything from the DMV, but she said that there has been a law passed in which they charge \$3 for each transaction as an agent of the state, so this is their compensation for the additional work.

Councilor Healey stated that with the election coming up in the next few months, she anticipates a large number of requests for mail-in ballots and is wondering if this is in the budget, in which Mr. Micali stated that the postage portion is in this budget and Diane increased the postage budget this year to cover some of these extra costs. Diane also shared that they budgeted \$300 for part-time help for 200 hours for the fall elections.

Chairman Koenig asked Diane to discuss the availability of hiring another part-time person, in which Diane stated that their part-time positions have not worked out so well in their department as people move on to other positions or towns that pay more money, and it takes around 6-12 months to get someone fully trained. Chairman Koenig then asked if they have a part-time employee currently, in which Ms. Trippett stated that they do not, they moved into the full-time position when it opened up. There was some discussion regarding the salary of the full-time position as well as the transaction process, with Mr. Boland chiming in and stating that there is a lot of time involved in the online transaction process.

- **Media (POSTPONED - Not presenting this evening)**
- **Communications (#3)**

Mr. Micali shared that the Police Department is looking to increase their dispatchers to add on one more full-time position into the budget for about \$76,000, as well as requests to purchase large equipment and maintenance costs associated with the equipment. Police Chief Brian Levesque then began his presentation by discussing the current police communications system that was originally discussed at a previous Town Council meeting several months ago. He shared that currently, Monday-Friday overnights, there is only one dispatcher available for police and fire and this is not efficient if there are multiple calls coming in at the same time. Chief Levesque then provided the breakdown of the \$76,000 expense as follows:

- \$40,000-\$44,000 for wages
- \$19,500 for health insurance
- \$13,000 for dental insurance
- \$6,300 for retirement

Councilor Healey asked what the dispatchers do overnight if it's a quiet night, in which Chief Levesque stated that they will do paperwork and data entry for all the tickets and warnings issued, as well as running criminal records for pistol permits. He then shared that currently, a patrolman will come in to give the dispatcher a break to heat up their food or use the restroom, but if there is a critical incident and patrolmen are not available to come cover the break, then the dispatcher does not get a break. Chairman Koenig asked how much training requirement there is for someone to be able to fill in as a backup dispatcher, in which Chief Levesque replied that all patrolmen, firefighters, and supervisors go through some training and know enough to answer the phones but cannot do the actual dispatching system/tones for the emergency or any data entry. Councilor Harrington wanted to clarify for the public that these communications and calls include both police and fire, which is why dispatch can get busy during the night as they are handling both departments as well as 911 calls.

Next, Chief Levesque discussed the communications equipment, which is the 800mghz communications system with Nashua that totals about \$1.4 million for the whole project. He shared that the department has come up with a way to break this project up into two phases:

- Phase 1, which should be completed by the end of the month, includes all mobile/portable radios being programmed and the dispatch piece installed to connect their dispatch center to Nashua. This has already been agreed upon and the money is set aside for this.
- Phase 2 includes building a site in Merrimack, most likely at Parker Rd water tower, in which they will purchase a structure to house all the new equipment and connect the phone lines. This is about \$760,000.

Chief Levesque then shared that because they are operating under Nashua's communication system, they will be held to Nashua's standards, which includes subscriber fees. These fees include the latest software, equipment, and a maintenance plan through Motorola (which includes a \$30 per month per device radio fee) and total \$78,000 altogether. He stated that the alternative to this was over \$5 million to create their own 800mghz radio system and not share with Nashua. Lastly, Chief Levesque discussed the new records management system's annual fee of \$34,000 and how the new system cost about \$250,000. Their current fee is \$16,000, but this new system is more user friendly and robust, so he believes it is well worth the money. Councilor Healey asked Chief Levesque what a radio voting system is, in which he replied that this is the current system they are on, and it bounces from towers to choose the best site to transmit off of. Chairman Koenig asked about the budget increase for office supplies and operating supplies, stating that the cost went up from \$395 in 2018-2019 to \$3,500. Chief Levesque stated that this is mostly due to budgeting in for changing out radio batteries and cycling the radios, but he will look into this more with the Town Manager.

Councilor Healey asked about the cost of education and training, which has jumped from the last budget. Chief Levesque shared that staff is undergoing APTCO certification, which is the public communications organization that does training, which require 24 hours of training annually now to be certified.

- **Police (#4)**

Mr. Micali summarized that there are ebbs and flows throughout the budget, with retirement going up because of the salary increases, as well as vehicle fuel increasing by \$18,000 because of the increase in gas prices. Additionally, the price of police vehicles has increased as well, including outfitting the vehicles.

Chief Levesque then stated that there was a large increase in operating supplies due to the increase in purchasing ammunition and other items in the previous fiscal year using personnel savings that year, as well as the cost increase of purchasing ammo. Deputy Chief Matt Tarleton then discussed ammunition in detail, sharing that the department has to purchase frangible, non-toxic ammo for the academy training, which is done frequently. He then stated that frangible means that when the bullet hits the target, it breaks apart and fragments. This ammo has a special primer and costs almost twice the amount of normal training ammunition. Chief Levesque then shared that the department trains with different ammo, such as hollow point rounds, which are pricier than the range rounds that they use, as well as rifle ammunition, so the cost of ammo gets very expensive. There was then a brief discussion regarding the 3 open positions in the department, with Chief Levesque describing the hiring process and their plans to start advertising for the positions further up north to hopefully draw some new candidates in.

Councilor Healey asked about the building maintenance budget, stating that it went up about \$10,000 based on the last total expenditures, in which Chief Levesque stated that they've identified several repairs that need to be made, such as replacing the tile floor next to dispatch and lobby area.

Chief Levesque then discussed a few other budget topics, such as:

- The increase in education and training by \$5,000, due to the LEACT commission requiring 24 hours of training per year and they have to pay outside vendors to teach classes.
- Police vehicles, which went up \$21,000 for patrol vehicles and outfitting costs
- New handguns, since the department rotates out their guns every 5-6 years to ensure that there are no misfires or issues. The budget for this is \$45,000 and they will be trading in \$15,000 worth of their current handguns, bringing the total down to \$30,000 to outfit the entire department with new handguns (this includes the holsters, optics, and flashlights).

Chairman Koenig asked Chief Levesque to explain the telephone budget, stating that in 2021-2022 it was \$10,000, in which Mr. Micali stated this is because of finance and accounting but the amount is carrying on for this year. Chief Levesque then stated that this was in a different location in the budget last year.

Councilor Healey then asked about the travel/meetings budget increase from 2021-2022, in which Chief Levesque said that because of COVID they were not able to travel and a lot of meetings and training were cancelled.

- **Police Detail (#5)**

Mr. Micali stated that for this budget, they have set aside about 500 hours for police outside detailing, which is paid for by vendors (Eversource, PSNH, etc.) where certain roads need a police detail instead of a flagger for traffic detailing. Mr. Micali then stated that the budget for this year is \$487,000, which is up about \$6,000 from last year. This is done on an overtime rate and is basically an income for the town since companies are

hiring the police to do the detailing for their event or traffic management.

- **Assessing (#6)**

Mr. Micali stated that the Assessing budget is up around \$2,600 from the previous year due to a previous employee coming back at her rate of pay when she left. He also shared that regarding the Capital Reserve Fund for the revaluation, they were budgeting around \$15,000 a year, around \$675,000 to do a reval now, and revals are running about \$100,000.

Mr. Boland then took over the presentation, sharing that this is a three person department that is non-unionized and the total budget has only increased \$200 from last year due to an adjustment in wages from the assessing coordinator position.

- **General Government (#7)**

Mr. Micali began by summarizing that there are some salary adjustments to the budget due to shifting and hiring of various Town positions, such as Town Manager and Finance positions. With that being said, he stated that there is about \$33,000 in salary savings. He then shared the following budget changes:

- Compensated absences are down about \$21,000 due to less accrued sick and vacation time for staff that is eligible to retire.
- Legal costs are going up about \$30,000 due to labor contracts coming up next year and language changes/reviews, as well as a price increase in the hourly rate of the attorneys.
- Computer finance software is going up about \$21,000 to reflect the cost of the finance software more accurately.
- \$9,000 increase in bank charges and ambulance billing.
- Elections are going up about \$18,500 due to going from one election to three this year.
- Advertising is decreasing about \$5,000 due to HR using a new advertising software that will hit other websites such as indeed and other search engines.

Councilor Healey asked about employees incentives, stating that the budget increased quite a bit. Mr. Micali stated that this is because the incentives are wage adjustments in lieu of incentives. She then asked about pagers, in which Mr. Micali stated they have pagers at the wastewater treatment plant and although they will be doing away with the pagers eventually, they need to keep them for now to be compatible with the current software. Councilor Healey then asked about the Zoom subscription, with Mr. Micali stated that last year it was paid for out of budget since it was brought in during March of 2020 after the budget was already approved, and some meetings are still taking place via Zoom. She then asked about legal/other, with Mr. Micali stating that he hopes that many of the pending legal issues will be resolved. Councilor Healey then asked about the \$1,000 increase in travel/meetings, in which Mr. Micali stated that this is because of COVID and the lack of traveling during that time. Chairman Koenig then asked about the time clocks, specifically why they are costing \$6,500 per year, in which Mr. Micali replied that they were paying that out of budget, and this is to reflect the cost of the maintenance fee more accurately for the time clock software for the non-union positions. Councilor Healey then asked about the \$5,000 budget for Last Rest Cemetery, in which Mr. Micali stated that this is so the cemetery can do their expansion project so they remain a cemetery in the Town that residents can be buried in, per State RSA.

- **Revenues (#8)**

Mr. Micali provided the following:

- Interest pulled cash is going from \$213,000 to \$125,000 due to them trying to bring down the interest revenue down slowly. He then shared that he heard from the feds that they're looking to do three increases in 2022, so if that occurs the town will be able to hit the \$125,000 budgeted.
- Surplus is going down \$300,000, which was due to the 53<sup>rd</sup> week of payroll.
- Federal and state grants for fire are \$853,000, and this is one year of the SAFER grant.
- Current use is going down \$50,000, mostly because a lot of the projects will be out of current use in 2021-2022 and there are no other projects that will be taking land out of current use.
- Road improvements are being increased to \$135,000 from \$125,000 to accurately reflect the increase in population that they're getting from registrations.

Councilor Healey asked about the current use tax, specifically about how fund 53 for the conservation is capped. She asked what happens to the money, in which Mr. Micali stated that the excess goes into the general fund. Councilor Healey then asked what a timber tax is, in which Mr. Micali replied that it is if you cut more than an acre of land or so many trees linear foot, you get charged by the state for a timber tax and the town gets a portion of this.

Councilor Hunter asked about Mr. Micali to explain the tax overlay. Mr. Micali stated that this is an account where if somebody can prove that their property is valued at less than was assessed, the difference (if an abatement is created) is \$50,000 times \$17.17, which is where the overlay comes in as a negative. This helps with the abatement requests that come in, so you are budgeting for the reduction in your property tax revenue.

Councilor Murphy spoke about public health and her concerns related to the uptick of the transmission rates of Covid and the local hospitals being overwhelmed and overrun with treating Covid patients. She believes that the Town Manager and Town Council should take their role seriously, as referenced in Town Charter Article 7-7, to preserve and protect of the health, safety and welfare of our community. She would like more information to be made easily and readily available on our Town website and would like the Town Council to speak about this at a future meeting. Chairman stated that this can be an item that should be added and discussed at a future public Council meeting so that individuals can be more prepared to talk more in depth about this and take this up for consideration.

**MOTION made by Councilor Woods and seconded by Councilor Healey to adjourn the meeting.**  
**MOTION CARRIES 6-0-0**

The meeting adjourned at 9:40pm