



## Town Council Budget Meeting Minutes



Thursday, January 19, 2023, at 6:30 PM, in the Matthew Thornton Room

### **Call to Order**

Chairman Rothhaus called the meeting to order at 6:34 pm. Present at the meeting were Chairman Rothhaus, Councilor Healey, Councilor Hunter, Councilor Koenig, Councilor Murphy, Councilor Woods, and Town Manager Paul Micali. Vice Chair Harrington arrived at 6:50pm.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairman Rothhaus led the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Town Council will hold a public meeting to review the 2023/24 budget, to include the following departments:

### **Public Comment**

None.

### **Welfare**

Pat Murphy from Welfare was present to discuss their budget, stating the following:

- The total budget is \$175,588, which represents a 3.6% increase (\$6,248.00).
- There are 3 parts to the budget; the administrative, the general assistance, and the social services.
- Welfare is a mandated service that the town is required to provide in the municipality, and include basic needs for Merrimack residents.
- For general assistance, there is a 9.3% increase, mostly due to costs (such as rents, child care, and utilities) and the emergency assistance program losing its funding.
- For social services, there is a 3.3% increase, mostly due to agencies requesting an increase for basic needs to prevent evictions and arrears for individuals in need.
- Councilor Koenig asked about burials, which has increased, in which Pat has stated this is just part of a reality- people are dying and families having issues paying for burial services. There is usually only one or two cases a year, but there have been four this past year.
- Councilor Hunter asked about the Greater Nashua Mental Health Center, and how the requested budget was \$72,000 but they are budgeting for \$16,000. Ms. Murphy explained that the discrepancy is due to the fact that the center always asks for a lot more in their budget, but she tries to be conscious of what the agency's needs are and how to make the budget more equitable for them.

### **Library**

Debra Covell, Chair of the Library Board of Trustees, along with Yvette Couser, were present to discuss their budget, stating there are three major areas they wanted to bring to the Council's attention:

- They had cost increases beyond their control, specifically health insurance costs.
- They are trying to bring up their staff salaries to match local libraries.
- They were able to reduce some subscriptions that were not cost effective or sustainable
- Chairman Rothhaus asked what the anticipated cost increase for staff would be, in which Ms. Covell stated that full-time staff were given a 5% increase and part-time staff were given a \$2/hour raise as they work only a few hours per week.
- Councilor Koenig asked if there were some positions switched around this year, in which Ms. Covell stated there was one part-time employee who went to full-time, but since then a full-time employee has left so they are evened out and still looking at the best way to staff the library. There is currently only one full-time position open, and the head of Adult Services position was eliminated once the employee left.

- Councilor Koenig asked about the larger budget for database materials (\$29,000), in which Ms. Couser stated that this is because the cost of databases are going up, and they were actually able to cut out two databases that they were not finding had much usage. Further, “databases” includes all the services on the website, such as Ancestry, Genealogy, etc. and they do maintain a record of which databases are being used so they can justify the budget for this section.

### **Parks and Recreation**

Matt Casparius was present to discuss the Parks and Recreation budget, sharing the following with the Council:

- Camp registrations this past summer exceeded 1,050, with 95% of the summer being sold out.
- Registrations for this summer opened earlier this week, and within a single day there were more than 800 registrations.
- The budget is broken down into two components, the taxpayer side and the recreation revolving fund.
- The taxpayer side is mostly level funded and not a whole lot has changed since last year.
- Part-time wages have increased to be brought up to market rates, but the part-time summer maintainer position has been eliminated as it was not filled.
- Additionally, the farmers market was cut from the budget, so this is actually \$3,000 less than last year’s budget.
- Fourth of July budget went down by \$10,000 as the Rotary Club cannot do Family Fun day this year due to staffing issues.
- Mr. Micali shared that the Adult Community Center requested an increase of \$3,700 for their budget, mostly because of natural gas/heat, repairs and maintenance.
- Mr. Micali also shared that the MYA budget increased about \$3,500 due to their program costs increase.
- Vice Chair Harrington shared that for MYA, they have added a bookkeeper and are doing tax audits now, which came back clean due to being proactive and their due diligence.
- Councilor Healey wanted to add that for the Memorial Day parade and wreaths for the graves, this should also include flags for the graves as well.
- Under the revolving fund, Mr. Casparius discussed the director salary allocation, which is a fund for HR’s time for payroll, purchasing, etc. For this year’s budget, the allocation is \$59,191. The way they recoup this amount is to divide the \$59,191 into the major programs to ensure the money goes back as it’s required to.

### **Revolving Fund**

- Mr. Casparius also discussed a new program they are looking to launch under the revolving fund, which will have to be approved by the Council first. The program is for after school care at Wasserman Park due to a lack of after school options in the town. This program would start small and only be offered for Thorntons Ferry Elementary school. Currently, there are 4 after school programs offered at this school, but they sell out quickly each year as there are 500 students and the program only holds 45 children.
- Back in December, Mr. Casparius met with the Department of Health and Human Services and had them walk through the function hall and it was determined they could easily accommodate 45 children, with potential to go higher down the road. They are looking to have 25-30 children for the first year. The biggest obstacle for this program is the bus shuttling to the park, which would cost about \$200 per day, \$36,000 for the year.
- They would opt in to becoming licensed for the child care program as they are for the camps.
- They would like to get the program started in early spring so the program is open for the following year.

- He would like to propose a new position, Director of the camp program and school program, as well as cover the school vacation weeks.
- The salary and benefits of this proposed position would be 100% paid out of the revolving fund, so no tax impact.
- For the day camp budget, \$39,000 out of the \$59,000 would be for Naticook Camp.
- Camp Director salary would be \$21/hour to start, with the cost of benefits being \$32, 835. Naticook Camp will pay \$8,200 worth of their benefits, and the afterschool program will cover the line share which is \$22,000.
- The Council expressed their support for this program and also for Mr. Casparius for all the work he has put in to various programs for Merrimack over the years.

### **Fire**

Fire Chief DiFronzo was present to share his budget changes for the Fire Department, highlighting the following:

- Overall, the budget has gone down about \$10,000 from last year.
- Training opportunities are becoming less workable while on duty, so he budgeted \$15,000 to have an 8-hour training session per firefighter.
- Operating increases for supplies, materials, equipment (ladder truck and ambulance), etc.

### **Code Enforcement**

Chief DiFronzo presented the following for the Code Enforcement budget:

- \$50,000 increase in the computer section for software upgrades, specifically to become an online permitting organization since all permits are currently paper only.
- Rick Jones, Building and Health Official, was present to also discuss the online permit database, stating along with Mr. Micali that this will be beneficial to the town and make pulling permits much easier than the usual paper files.

### **Proposed Issuance of Debt**

- Mr. Micali began by stating that the drainage bond from 2007 has been paid off this fiscal year.
- There is one bond left in addition to the Wastewater bond, which is the highway garage bond that was purchased in 2017 for \$3.3 million and will be paid off in February 2038.

### **Capital Reserve Fund Deposits**

- Mr. Micali stated that he flat lined the capital reserve deposits for the general fund this year at \$1.9 million and the only increase is to Sewer from \$500,000 to \$550,000.

### **Fire Protection Area**

- Mr. Micali shared that the fire protection zone is in the southeastern corner of the town around BAE that is serviced by Pennichuck. This is the amount they pay Pennichuck to have hydrants in the area, and this is paid by the individuals in the area (\$112,000).

Mr. Micali then shared some information about the upcoming meetings, stating that there are two ratifications for union contracts to be discussed next Thursday with possibly a third contract being decided on tonight. He asked the Council if they would prefer to keep the meetings as is without a full budget, or bring a full budget to a public hearing which will be on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February. The Council discussed their options, ultimately deciding to schedule a review meeting on January 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Approved: February 16, 2023**

**MOTION** made by Vice Chair Harrington and seconded by Councilor Koenig to have the proposed additional budget meeting on January 25<sup>th</sup>, which is the Council's final review, at 6:30pm.

**MOTION CARRIES 6-1-0** *with Councilor Healey in opposition*

**ADJOURN**

**MOTION** made by Councilor Woods and seconded by Councilor Healey to adjourn the meeting.

**MOTION CARRIES 7-0-0**

The meeting adjourned at 8:22 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Jennifer Steagald