



Town Council Meeting Minutes



Monday, January 9, 2012, at 6:00 PM, in the Town Hall Meeting Room

Chairman Rothhaus called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm. Present at the meeting were Chairman Rothhaus, Vice Chair Boyd, Councilor Mahon, Councilor Yakuboff, Councilor Koenig, Councilor Dwyer, Councilor Flood and Town Manager Eileen Cabanel.

Chairman Rothhaus made the following announcements: Tuesday is NH Primary Day. Upcoming meeting schedule: January 12th is a regular Council meeting at 7:00 pm. Budget meetings will be held January 16th, 19th and 23rd at 6:00 pm.

Public Comment

Mr. Norm Carr asked if he would be given the opportunity to speak regarding the Adult Community Center's budget. Chairman Rothhaus confirmed that he would be given the opportunity to speak.

The Town Council held a public meeting to review the 2012/13 budget, to include the following departments:

Library: Town Manager Eileen Cabanel asked the Library to cut \$25,000. Barbara Tucker spoke about the vital and indispensable role that the Library plays in the community. She advised the Council that the budget proposed to the Town Manager was approximately \$2,500 below last year's budget. She stated that the Town Manager cut an additional \$25,000. Barbara Tucker stated that the Library is ok with the proposed Town Manager's budget; however, they would like to get back the 6 hours they lost last year. Barbara Tucker spoke about a petitioned warrant article that would test the waters for a new library. They have contracted a consultant to conduct a feasibility study. The petitioned warrant article will ask for \$90,000 for plans and other studies. The draft warrant article was distributed to the Council. Barbara Tucker elaborated on what the \$90,000 would be used for. She stated that it costs approximately \$45,000 for a new set of plans. She stated that if the feasibility study does not favor a new library, the funds would not be used. Councilor Dwyer stated that his position is similar to his position on the South Fire Station. He believes it would best serve the Library to get the feedback from the voters before spending any funds. Barbara Tucker stated that the \$90,000 is for plans only and they are going to the voters because they have no money to start with. She stated that if the feasibility study comes back with a favorable response, they will begin a fundraising campaign to raise the funds needed to build a new library without coming to the taxpayers. Councilor Yakuboff asked for clarification on the hiring of a consultant to conduct the study. Barbara Tucker advised the Council that the funds used for the consultant did not come from the taxpayers, it was money in the building development fund raised by the cardboard boat race, book sales and other events. Councilor Yakuboff asked how much the feasibility study would cost. Barbara Tucker stated approximately \$18,000. Councilor Mahon clarified that the money raised is the same amount as the money spent for personnel time on the cardboard boat race.

Welfare: Town Manager Eileen Cabanel stated that the only change made to the Welfare budget was a housing reduction in the amount of \$10,000. Pat Murphy spoke about the stabilization in the cost of housing needs in the community. She advised the Council that this budget reflects \$500 in funding for the Big Brothers Big Sisters organization that the Town has not funded in recent years. Councilor Koenig clarified that the social services funding is appropriate because of the services that these groups provide to Merrimack residents.

Town Clerk/Tax Collector: Town Manager Eileen Cabanel explained the increase in the Town Clerk/Tax Collector's budget is attributed to the health insurance increase, office supplies and equipment needs. Town Clerk/Tax Collector Diane Trippett stated that the office supplies increased due to the downshifting from the State. Mrs. Trippett advised the Council that while she understands

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the Council's position, she would have liked to increase part time wages. She stated that she will, in the future, request an increase in part time wages. Mrs. Trippett stated that meeting the service needs at the counter has been difficult. Vice Chair Boyd inquired about night hours. Mrs. Trippett explained that from 1959 to 2004, the Clerk's office had evening hours, during which employees were paid overtime. She stated that in the final years of the evening hours, customer transactions were tracked and it was determined that after 5:15 pm, there were no customers. Mrs. Trippett stated that she has not heard any complaints about the absence of evening hours. There was a brief discussion regarding the concerns associated with the pilot program, where car dealerships will register vehicles for their customers.

Parks and Recreation: Town Manager Eileen Cabanel advised the Council that the Parks and Recreation budget is level funded. She advised the Council that steps were taken to rectify the mold problem at the Wasserman Park Function Hall. She advised the Council that she asked the Code Enforcement Department to evaluate all of the buildings. She stated that she would like to establish a revolving fund where the proceeds from the Summer Camp would pay for upkeep of the Park. Town Manager Eileen Cabanel advised the Council that Parks and Recreation Director Sherry Kalish has been looking into ways to keep the program sustainable and affordable for residents. Mrs. Kalish conducted a survey asking participants if they would be more favorable of a rate increase, or, would they be willing to bring lunch to camp. Councilor Flood stated that Parks and Recreation department offers so much to the community. She suggested a Capital Reserve account for maintenance. Councilor Flood is concerned about the continual decline in funding for the Parks and Recreation Department. She spoke about the recent move of the Parks and Recreation Department office to Town Hall. She stated that she would prefer to make the heating improvements at the Parks and Recreation office and move the office back to the Park. Councilor Flood spoke about the loss of revenue (\$21,000) from the Function Hall. Chairman Rothhaus stated that a decision needs to be made regarding the direction of Wasserman Park. Town Manager Eileen Cabanel stated that she is currently focusing on the stabilization of the maintenance issues so that when the decision is made on what to do with Wasserman Park, the maintenance issues will be in check. The next step would be to address the erosion problems. She stated that there are avenues that can be explored through the State.

Councilor Dwyer echoed Councilor Flood's comments. He stated that infrastructure improvements are needed. He believes Wasserman Park is a jewel in Merrimack.

Councilor Koenig questioned the status of the O'Gara Drive tennis courts. Town Manager Eileen Cabanel explained that the O'Gara Drive courts came from grants. She advised the Council that the Town has a use agreement with the School District that is in effect until 2013. She advised the Council that a determination needs to be made whether the tennis courts are used enough to justify the \$29,000 need for repairs. Town Manager Eileen Cabanel stated that her proposed budget does not include the cost for maintenance. Councilor Mahon spoke about the improper installation of the tennis courts and the cost of the tennis court lights. Paul Micali advised the Council that the bid received for \$29,000 is for resurfacing only. Councilor Dwyer suggested contacting the School District to determine what they want done with the tennis courts. Councilor Flood believes that the grant language would require the Town to relocate the courts.

MOTION was made by Councilor Dwyer and seconded by Councilor Yakuboff to instruct the Town Manager to contact the Superintendent's office to determine the desire of the School District pertaining to the tennis courts on O'Gara Drive and the use of the property. **MOTION CARRIES 7-0-0**

MOTION was made by Councilor Flood to reinstate \$5,500 to the Parks and Recreation Department budget from the \$11,000 cut. Town Manager Eileen Cabanel suggested that the motion be withdrawn and continue with the review of the departments' budgets. She suggested that Councilor Flood make a

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motion later when the Council is deliberating. Councilor Flood agreed and withdrew her motion.

Councilor Mahon inquired if the Rotary has made a decision regarding the 4th of July midway. Finance Director Paul Micali stated that he should hear back from Pete Giacapuzzi after he presents the request to the Rotary Board. Town Manager Eileen Cabanel advised the Council that her staff, along with the Parks and Recreation Department is working on the 4th of July parade and fireworks. Councilor Flood suggested changing the part time position in the Park and Recreation office to full time to handle the 4th of July festivities. Town Manager Eileen Cabanel stated that she does not believe the position would need to be full time. She stated that her staff has time designated to organize the event. Town Manager Eileen Cabanel stated that if needed, extra time could be afforded to the part time position to handle the task.

Councilor Mahon asked if there are plans to convert the MYA building to natural gas. Mr. Micali stated that it will be done in the spring.

Adult Community Center: Norm Carr and Dan Bittel address the Town Council regarding the budget of the Adult Community Center. Mr. Carr began by stressing that the Adult Community Center is available for rent and should be considered since the Wasserman Park Function Hall is no longer available. Mr. Carr spoke about previous budgeting practices. He stated that in the past, the Adult Community Center was successful in renting the facility, but, last year their rental income was drastically reduced because of the economy. Mr. Carr explained that previous agreements with the Town were that the Town would make up any difference. Mr. Carr stated that has not happened. He stated that the actual budget last year was \$21,260 and the Town Manager's proposed budget is \$12,500. Mr. Carr advised the Council that the proposed budget amount is not sufficient to keep the Adult Community Center operational. Mr. Bittel added that the previous Town Manager cut the amount of Town assistance by \$8,000. Mr. Carr explained that they have lost \$12,200 in rental income because of the economy. Mr. Bittel outlined areas that the Adult Community Center has reduced their expenses (janitorial, Christmas party and phone cost). Mr. Bittel would like the budget amount from two years ago restored to \$21,260. He stated that at that amount, they still might not make it. Mr. Carr advised the Council that they are trying to increase rentals, but it costs money to promote the Adult Community Center as a rental facility.

Councilor Mahon asked for clarification on the function of the Coordinator. Mr. Bittel explained that Coordinator handles everything for the Board such as emergency calls, rental agreements, insurance paperwork and day to day issues. Mr. Bittel stated that Coordinator works well with the seniors. Councilor Flood asked if the St. Joseph Services pays a rental fee to use the facility. Mr. Carr confirmed that they do pay, as well as the Rotary and the Senior Club. Councilor Flood questioned if current use of the building is appropriate or should consideration be given to other uses. Mr. Bittel expressed concern for the seniors currently utilizing the center. Councilor Flood clarified that she was not referring to the seniors. She believes that it is time to revisit the model and explore other options. Councilor Dwyer stated that he would not want to see the building closed. He would support revisiting the business model of the building. Councilor Yakuboff asked if the annual audit has been completed. Mr. Carr confirmed that he delivered the audit to the Town. Paul Micali stated that he has not received the audit and requested another copy. Councilor Yakuboff stated that looking at the audit is helpful in many ways. Vice Chair Boyd echoed the comments relative to the use of the building. He spoke of other venues in Town (Swans, Hot Rize and Florence's Restaurant) that permit meeting groups. Mr. Carr stated that the focus of the Adult Community Center is towards family events, church groups, and bible study meetings, rather than business meetings. Mr. Bittel urged the Council to visit the facility. He stated that the facility is used by other groups such as the Police Department and the School. Mr. Carr stated that if the Town believes the Center is no longer serving a use or function because of the cost, he urged the Council to dissolve it. Councilor Mahon stated that as a result of the economy, the Center is feeling the pinch and he supports a review of the business model.

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MYA: Mr. Terry Benhardt represented the MYA. He appreciates that the Council stopped the dramatic cuts. He asked the Council to reconsider the cut of \$3,600 proposed by the Town Manager. He advised the Council that the MYA has dipped into their reserves in the amount of \$65,000. Vice Chair Boyd asked Mr. Benhardt to speak to the trends that he sees regarding the loss of assets. Mr. Benhardt stated that enrollment has declined 5% in the last 2 to 3 years. He stated that the fundraising efforts pick up the shortfall in funding from the Town. Councilor Dwyer asked for clarification on the number of registrants. Mr. Benhardt explained that the MYA has approximately 2,200 members and 4,000 participants. Councilor Flood questioned where the \$65,000 came from. Mr. Benhardt explained that each program contributed. Councilor Yakuboff asked for clarification on the MYA's reserve accounts. Mr. Benhardt reviewed the accounts and the balances, totaling \$58,000.

Summer Day Camp: Parks and Recreation Director Sherry Kalish advised the Council that in a recent survey she conducted with other communities, she found that Merrimack is the only the community that offers lunch as part of their Day Camp Program. She stated that she conducted a survey of the families who attended last year and the results were evenly split. Sherry Kalish explained that the budget could remain the same as last year if the lunch service was eliminated, at a savings of \$21,000. She advised the Council that 3 positions would be eliminated. She advised the Council that if lunch is eliminated she would consider contacting a vendor who would provide food service. Sherry Kalish stated that currently residents pay \$162 and next year the rate would increase to just under \$200. Councilor Koenig indicated that he would support eliminating the lunch program.

MOTION was made by Vice Chair Boyd and seconded by Councilor Dwyer to adjourn the meeting. MOTION CARRIES 6-0-1 Councilor Mahon abstained

Submitted by Tracy Doherty