



Town Council Meeting Minutes



Thursday, January 7, 2021, at 6:30 PM, in the Matthew Thornton Room

Chairman Koenig called the meeting to order at 6:30pm. Present at the meeting were Chairman Koenig, Vice Chair Boyd, Councilor Harrington, Councilor Rothhaus, Councilor Albert, Councilor Healey, Town Manager Eileen Cabanel and Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali. Councilor Woods was excused.

Chairman Koenig led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Merrimack Representative Vacancy Update

Submitted by Town Clerk/Tax Collector Diane Trippett

Town Council received an update on the Special Election request to fill the vacancy brought on by the passing of Speaker of the House Richard “Dick” Hinch, who represented District 21 (Town of Merrimack), pursuant to RSA 655:81-82, RSA 661:11 and RSA 661:2. Town Clerk Tax Collector Diane Trippett advised the Town Council that she heard from the Secretary of State informing her that the Town Council’s request to hold a special election has been approved. Diane Trippett explained that candidates must file next week. They can file directly with the Secretary of State’s office in Concord using the Park Street entrance. Diane Trippett explained that candidates can also file at the Town Clerk’s office in Merrimack on Monday and Tuesday only. She stated that the Primary Election will be held on February 23, 2021 and the Special Election will coincide with Town Meeting on April 13, 2021. Diane Trippett explained that if only one Republican and one Democrat file the town does not need to hold a primary election, the two candidates would be placed on the ballot. She stated that if there are additional candidates that would require the Town to hold a primary election. Town Manager Eileen Cabanel asked how the Town should advertise this development. Chairman Koenig stated that both the Merrimack Republican committee and the Merrimack Democratic Committee have been notified. Councilor Harrington suggested posting information on the government TV channel 21. Paul Micali stated that all the social media platforms could be utilized as well.

Public Comment

None

The Town Council held a public meeting to review the 2021/22 budget, to include the following departments:

Paul Micali stressed that each department budget includes the 53rd week of payroll, the increases to the retirement costs (NHRS).

Town Clerk / Tax Collector:

Diane Trippett reiterated that the primary increases in the Town Clerk / Tax Collector budget are the 53rd week of payroll, the increases to the retirement costs. She stated that there is a slight increase to their software support line item. Chairman Koenig questioned the \$9000 increase to the NHRS. Paul Micali explained that the Group 1 non-union employees increased 25%. Councilor Harrington thanked Diane Trippett for the smooth running of the presidential election. Chairman Koenig asked if there has been consideration given in the budget for the special election. Paul Micali explained that he is currently looking into that at the request of the Town’s moderator Lynn Christensen. He informed the Town Council that Lynn Christensen will be in next week to discuss.

Assessing:

Paul Micali presented the Assessing budget to the Town Council. He reviewed the department's organizational chart. He advised the Town Council that the budget is flat lined with the exception of the \$20,000 increase to the capital reserve funding. He advised the Town Council that the assessing department pursuant to State Law will be conducting the 5 year revaluation.

Media:

Nicholas Lavallee advised the Town Council that the last nine months has been challenging for the Media department. He is proud of his staff and their accomplishments. He appreciates his staff flexibility to meet the needs of the town. Nicholas Lavallee stated that some of the changes his department made during the pandemic will become the new normal relating to virtual participation in meetings. He outlined the changes to his budget that he did not expect to do so soon. Mr. Lavallee outlined the upgrades needed to the Matthew Thornton conference room. He stressed the need for maintenance work and some rewiring. He informed the Town Council that his department needs to replace laptops. Councilor Albert inquired about the needed upgrades to the Memorial Conference room. Mr. Lavallee stated that those upgrades are included in the current budget. Vice Chair Boyd asked for clarification on the part time wages per diem line item. Mr. Lavallee explained that line item is for the Media on-call individual. That position allows flexibility to staffing. Vice Chair Boyd asked for clarification on the Comcast internet usage cap. Mr. Lavallee stated that the cable franchise agreement is relative to cable television services. He is aware of the data cap on internet usage. He urged any residents to review their current Comcast plan and monitor it for changes. He also urged residents to contact Comcast. Councilor Harrington stated that the Town does receive franchise fees from Comcast that funds the Media Department.

Announcements

Chairman Koenig announced the following meeting schedule:

Budget meeting Wednesday January 13, 2021 at 6:30pm

Regular Town Council meeting on Thursday January 14, 2021 at 7:00pm.

Budget meeting Wednesday January 20, 2021 at 6:30pm

Regular Town Council meeting on Thursday January 28, 2021 at 7:00pm.

Legislative Update

Chairman Koenig read an update from State Representative Maureen Mooney

- 1.) At yesterday's historic drive-in House session, Deputy Speaker Sherman Packard (R-Londonderry) was elected Speaker of the New Hampshire House of Representatives.
- 2.) Today, Governor Christopher T. Sununu was sworn-in for this third term.
- 3.) The following House Committee appointments were recently made:

Rep. Mooney - Election Law Committee

Rep. Healey - Public Works Committee

Rep. Notter - Science, Energy, Technology Committee

Rep. Tausch - Judiciary Committee

Reps. Mayville, Rung, Blasek - Resources, Recreation, Development Committee

- 4.) The newly sworn-in Executive Council met today and took up the Merrimack Town Council's letter requesting a Special Election for State Representative. The request was unanimously approved - filing period January 11-15, 2021; Primary Election on Feb. 23, 2021; Special Election on April 13, 2021. If there is no primary, then the Special Election is on Feb. 23, 2021. Further clarification on the Executive Council's action on this matter should be consulted in the meeting's minutes or by listening to the recorded audio of the meeting on the NH Secretary of State's website.

Fire:

Paul Micali advised the Town Council that the Fire Department is in the process of hiring a second assistant chief to be in charge of emergency management and operations. He stated that once the assistant chief is hired, Fire Chief Matt Duke will have his command staff in place. Paul Micali explained there are two unions within the Fire Department. He stated that the wage increases relate the 53rd week of payroll and the contracted wage increases of 2%. Paul Micali made the Town Council aware that the other non-union department budgets do not include a wage increase. He recapped the decrease in vehicle maintenance and the increase to the vehicle replacement capital reserve account.

Fire Chief Matt Duke explained that the Fire Department budget includes minimal changes in anticipation of the proposed additional four fire fighters that will be brought forward for the Town Council's consideration. Councilor Harrington asked if there are any open positions within the department. Chief Duke stated the only open position is the part-time fire inspector. Councilor Albert asked for clarification on the department's practice of utilizing a captain and a lieutenant on every shift. Chief Duke explained that they are at different locations and operate independent of each other. Councilor Healey questioned the increase to dues / fees, maintenance buildings and grounds and office equipment. Chief Duke explained that he has moved a few costs to a more appropriate line item. Councilor Healey asked for clarification on an increase to software. Paul Micali advised the Town Council that this software tracks the certification of employees within the police and fire departments. Councilor Albert questioned the line item for other outside services. Chief Duke explained that annual testing and maintaining a current list of personnel who are eligible to fill a vacated position serves the Fire Department best.

Vice Chair Boyd asked Chief Duke to explain the importance of New Hampshire Emergency Medical Services State Reporting. Chief Duke explained that all medical calls are required to be reported and this service allows the department to report all calls for services.

Code Enforcement:

Paul Micali recapped the increases due to the 53rd week of payroll and retirement (NHRS). Chief Duke explained the office supplies line item increase is to cover the cost of updating the building and health codes. The health officer is full time which increased fuel usage slightly. Vice Chair Boyd asked how covid-19 has affected the Town's health officials. Chief Duke advised the Town Council that the new health inspector is doing a fantastic job. He stated that she has built a good working relationship with the restaurants in town. She educates the restaurant industry on what needs to be done. She has become a tremendous resource for the restaurants in town. Chief Duke is comfortable with the funding included in the budget. Councilor Albert asked if the Town is tracking code violations. Chief Duke assured the Town Council that offenses are tracked and logged appropriately.

General Government:

Paul Micali reviewed the General Government organizational chart that includes the Finance and Technology departments. He advised the Town Council that the same increases relating to the 53rd week of payroll and the retirement system are included. He advised the Town Council that the General Government budget went up \$137,000 due to fluctuations in salaries. He explained the shift from hourly to salary for the Technology Coordinator. He stated that the previous technology coordinator was an hourly employee who earned over time. Recently the job description has been amended and the position has been changed to a salaried position. He advised the Town Council that the amended job description gives the technology coordinator more of a voice relating to the technology needs of town. He informed the Town Council he has interviewed individuals for the new position. Paul Micali spoke about the help desk tracking system that the assistant technology coordinator recently implemented. He spoke about the significant increase in calls for technology service. Paul Micali stated that the new coordinator will have more responsibilities and the Town's technology will improve.

Paul Micali informed the Town Council that the General Government department is looking to hire a part time secretary to transfer responsibilities from the executive secretary to the part time employee. He stated that the shift will allow the executive secretary to assist the human resource director. He stressed that the pandemic has added a tremendous amount of work for the human resource department in addition to the current responsibilities. He state the part time position would be 25 hours per week with an annual salary of \$38,000.

Paul Micali informed the Town Council that compensated absences has decreased by \$25,000. He stated that in the next budget year there are no eligible group 1 employees. Vice Chair Boyd asked for a community comparison of salaries relating to the Technology positions. Councilor Healey asked how the General Government department would cope if the part time secretary position is not approved. Paul Micali stressed that it would be extremely difficult to provide adequate assistance to the Human Resource department. Councilor Healey asked what has been eliminated from the General Government budget to help offset or pay for the new position. Paul Micali advised the Town Council that this position is an increase to this budget. Town Manager Eileen Cabanel stressed the human resource department needs assistance. She stated that this position is one of the most important increases. She advised the Town Council that one person this week is dealing with six unions, grievances, all personnel matters, terminations, new hires, workers comp claims, FMLA claims and quarantined employees. Town Manager Eileen Cabanel advised the Town Council that she is concerned. She stressed that this is critically important. Councilor Albert concurred with the Town Manager and stated that he supports the request.

Paul Micali explained the increase of \$13,000 for office equipment maintenance covers the cost of adding the last four remaining departments (police, dispatch, fire and code) to the automated time clock system. Councilor Albert expressed concern about implementing this system for the first responders. Councilor Harrington echoed her concern. She feels that it will create morale issues. Councilor Albert would like to know what the departments feel about this. Paul Micali stated that he would be happy to have a discussion with the departments. Vice Chair Boyd inquired about the Town's potential exposure if the Department of Labor came to Merrimack. Paul Micali advised the Town Council that he is hoping to reduce any exposure and to streamline the payroll system for all town departments. Councilor Albert asked how often the Department of Labor (DOL) comes to Merrimack. Paul Micali explained the DOL would come if they receive a complaint.

Paul Micali reviewed the increase to software and support. He spoke about the Historical Society building improvements and election costs.

Vice Chair Boyd inquired about NHMA fees. Paul Micali advised the Town Council that the NHMA was a tremendous resource for the Town during the pandemic. Councilor Albert voiced his frustration about criminal record checks fees when the Police Department provides a similar service. Paul Micali stated that the criminal and driving back ground checks are required to be done through the State of New Hampshire.

Revenues:

Paul Micali reviewed significant changes to revenue. He reviewed the administrative service fees increase of \$45,000. He discussed the decrease of \$222,000 from the State of New Hampshire. He explained the decrease in sale of property revenue. Paul Micali spoke about the decrease of \$25,000 for current use revenue. Chairman Koenig inquired about vehicle registrations revenue. Paul Micali is confident about the \$5.6 million estimated for vehicle revenue. Town Manager Eileen Cabanel advised the Town Council that revenue amounts are very carefully vetted and conservative.

ADJOURN

MOTION made by Vice Chair Boyd and seconded by Councilor Healey to adjourn the meeting.

MOTION CARRIES 6-0-0

The meeting adjourned at 9:20pm

Respectfully submitted by Tracy Doherty

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