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Board of Finance Public Budget Hearing #3 Final Minutes
Thursday, March 18, 2021
7:30 pm

The Board of Finance Public Budget Hearing was held virtually at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 18, 2020 in Fairfield, CT.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Edward Bateson, Jim Brown-Chair, Lori Charlton, Christopher DeWitt-Vice Chair, Mary LeClerc-Secretary, Sheila Marmion, John Mitola, Jack Testani, James Walsh

ALSO PRESENT: CFO Jared Schmitt, Health Director Sands Cleary, Social Services Director Julie DeMarco, Bigelow Center Director Brenda Steele, Town Librarian Dr. Helene Murtha, Library Board Chair David Gray, DPW Interim Director John Marsilio, WPCF Superintendent Bill Norton, Parks & Recreation Director Anthony Calabrese, First Selectwoman Brenda Kupchick, FairTV

I. Call to Order

Mr. Brown called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Brown led the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. Discussion on the Following Budgets:

Health and Welfare

6010 Health

Health Director Sands Cleary said his budget has a modest increase. He said there are no new positions or other increases and it is a relatively lean budget. He said the nurses have a unionized staff which have contractual increases. Mr. Cleary said last year there was \$40,000 in overtime costs from August to February for mostly weekend activity. He said costs related to working the clinics are for the nurses are hired to work them. Mr. Cleary said the State has two small grants: \$10,000 for clinic supplies and \$7,000 for additional supplies like laptops and chrome books. He said the department has until May to submit costs. He said there is also a grant for \$102,000 for contact tracing. He said he has six positions for contact tracers who started last May and will go to 11/2022. Mr. Cleary said there will be another grant the State will apply for through the Federal Government, but he hasn't heard how much that will be.

Ms. Marmion said it was great news that the Town will be getting more money and wondered how Mr. Cleary plans on using it. Mr. Cleary said he is working with the State. He said kids under the age of 16 won't be vaccinated by the fall so they will still need to do contact tracing. Mr. Cleary said he is always looking at educational activities and will continue current efforts. He said the total amount of funds expected is \$300,000 through 11/2022.

Mr. Cleary said there will be an additional ELC grant, but he is waiting to hear from the State regarding that grant. He said he is confident the Health Department Covid costs will be covered by grants. He said everything is documented and an expenditure report is submitted to the State by the Finance Department.

Regarding revenue projection, Mr. Cleary said there are new establishments coming to Town. He said sadly, some of the others will not be reopening. He said the impact on the food service industry has been significant. He added that revenue and permits have been flat.

6050 **Human and Social Services**

Mr. Brown talked about how much Human and Social Services has done throughout the pandemic with lunch deliveries, zoom programs and more. Director Julie DeMarco introduced new Bigelow Center Director Brenda Steele and told the Board that Ms. Steele has been working with Sands Cleary to help oversee the volunteer Call Center. Ms. DeMarco said her budget is relatively flat. She said her department is using email and social media to publicize programs.

Mr. Mitola asked why Ms. Steele's job isn't listed in the budget book and asked about her salary. Ms. DeMarco said she had requested the position last year, but this is not the year for a FT position even though she feels it is needed. Ms. DeMarco said Ms. Steele is part-time, but Ms. DeMarco would like to make it a full-time position.

Ms. Marmion commented that Ms. DeMarco has done tremendous work throughout COVID-19 and wondered if she had applied for grants. Ms. DeMarco said she has applied for grants and has received money. She said going forward, the CARES act grant has not been discussed, but conversations will be started.

Culture and Recreation

7010 Library

Town Librarian Dr. Helene Murtha introduced David Gray who told the Board he has been on the library board for four years as a trustee and is now Chair. He said the Fairfield Public Library is a landmark treasure that offers stability. He said the staff has not missed a beat during this pandemic. He said the library offers free content to the community in digital and analog programs and more. Mr. Gray said he knows there are challenges with the budget, but he is asking for consideration to maintain the stability.

Mr. DeWitt focused on the increases and said in the last year, the library hasn't been open a lot. He said he was surprised to see an increase in part-time employment. He said he was wondering why they would want to increase part-time employment and library materials. Mr. Gray said they are not only analog, but digital also and some increases have to do with digital. Dr. Murtha said library service never ceased and they went 100% digital. She said the library started having in-person hours and that is why it needs part-time help. She said the minimum wage increase is driving the increase too. Dr. Murtha said the library is still not where it was pre-COVID. She said there will be a surge to get physical books into people's hands and there will be a demand for a book. She said 40% of the increase is print and the rest is digital. She said the budget is preparing for post-COVID when it can open. Dr. Murtha said the library will have to maintain protocols of 6 feet and keep cleaning. She said in 2019 the library had to reduce staff and in 2020 it closed because it got flooded.

Mr. Bateson asked if this budget will allow the library to be open full time. Dr. Murtha said the library will have to reduce evening hours. There was a discussion about services being digital and virtual.

Mr. Walsh mentioned the payroll being flat, but he said there was a 14% increase in the salary for the Head of Adult Services and he wondered why. Dr. Murtha said it was contractual and Mr. Schmitt said it was related to a longevity payment. Dr. Murtha said the union contract pays more in the evenings and double on Sunday. She said there was a discussion about print materials versus digital and what it includes as well as endowment funds and how they are used. First Selectwoman Kupchick said early in the pandemic she had to lay off all part-time employees and the library had the most part-time employees. She said she and Dr. Murtha talked about planning to re-open safely and reducing hours. She thanked Dr. Murtha for all her hard work during the pandemic.

7111 Library – Fairfield Woods Branch

Dr. Murtha said there was nothing to add to the budget. Mr. Mitola asked why there was a \$20,000 difference between her budget and the First Selectwoman’s budget. Dr. Murtha said it was due to the minimum wage increase. She said revenue was down 9% due to COVID.

Mr. Brown asked Mr. Schmitt for the total effect of the minimum wage increase on the total budget which Mr. Schmitt agreed to get for him.

Public Works

5050 Building

Mr. Walsh recused himself from the Building Department budget review. DPW Interim Director John Marsilio said there is very little change from last year. He said he wants to add a part-time blight and condemnation inspector. He said the other increase is due to motor vehicle fuel. Mr. Schmitt said people who have physical conditions and homes in blight might be helped out by the Town. Mr. Schmitt said the budget should be showing an increase, but it isn’t. He said the Town is also hiring a floating person and depending on season and influx will go to different departments. He said that person will also assist with online permitting and answering phones. Mr. Schmitt also said the blight inspector might not be an actual person, but a service.

First Selectwoman Kupchick said the RTM established a blight fund. She said some people are fined, but some elderly residents cannot afford the fine. She said it is a compassionate move to approve a small amount of money to help those who need it.

Mr. Schmitt said there was not a big change in revenue since the quarterly meeting. He said there are not many identifiable projects for 2022. He said they take an average and it can fluctuate year to year and the department will probably exceed the budget for this year with the university projects.

6070 Solid Waste and Recycling

DPW Interim Director John Marsilio said this year is consistent with last year, with the exception of payroll. He said two positions were eliminated and one was added. He said the department has a savings of \$126,000. He said there is also a slight change in fees and professional services.

Ms. Charlton suggested breaking down line items involved in fees and professional services to separate costs going forward.

5011 Public Works Administration

DPW Interim Director John Marsilio said this year is the same as last year. He said there was a slight adjustment on payroll. He said he added a DPW Finance Manager as recommended in the DPW audit. He said he sees a need for a finance person to oversee this budget. Mr. Marsilio said after the BOE, Public Works has the second largest budget. He said the department has an ambitious capital program for structural needs that will require oversight. He said he will be evaluating all positions in Public Works so everyone has the opportunity to advance and train to move up. He said he would like to develop a process that is fair and offers opportunities to everyone.

5030 Public Works Operations

Mr. Brown said there is a capital outlay request for \$380,000 and asked Mr. Marsilio if the items have been requested before. Mr. Marsilio said it is for many equipment items and the vehicles to be replaced are at the end of their useful lives. Mr. DeWitt said he noticed there were snowplows, but wondered why the Town needs plows if it is usually outsourced. Mr. Marsilio said the Town is in need of plows and also CDL drivers. He said the goal is to get the plows and drivers so they will not need to outsource plowing.

5070 Engineering

Engineer Manager Bill Hurley said the department has the same budget as last year with the exception of fuel increases. He said his department applies for grants whenever possible and will apply for grants for the South Benson Pump Station. He said his department can use federal grants for bridges.

First Selectwoman Kupchick said the Town is looking for a part-time grant writer who will work in the Finance Department and assist all departments applying for grants. She said it is very time consuming and wants to make sure grant opportunities are not missed. She said this position will pay for itself and hopefully will become full-time in the future. Mr. Brown said he would like an update on funding coming to the Town before the budget vote on 3/31/21.

4070 Street Lighting

Mr. Hurley said the street lighting budget is flat and the rates are set by UI. He said typically, one to three lights are added per year. He said it will be a flat item unless rates increase.

13013010 WPCA

WPCF Superintendent Bill Norton said the budget had a slight reduction. He said there are large capital projects coming up, but nothing that will impact the sewer rates for taxpayers. He said his staff has done a great job of maintaining equipment. He said this was a year to put some projects off. Mr. Bateson said the regular payroll was flat, but when contracts expire, he expects to see an increase. Mr. Schmitt said any contract increases will be discussed at a later time.

Culture and Recreation

7030 Penfield Pavilion Complex

Parks and Recreation Director Anthony Calabrese said things are steady and the increases in payroll are due to the minimum wage increase. He said the budget covers the Jacky Durrell Pavilion as well.

7050 Parks and Recreation

Mr. Calabrese said there are changes in his budget in the capital outlay line for \$150,000 for the master plan, which is a 5-10 year plan, in the operating budget. He said all programs are self-supporting. He said the department is following State guidelines for camps.

7070 Waterfront and Marina

Mr. Calabrese said this budget has a minimum wage increase and maintenance and repair has increased. He said the new director is very proactive. He said the capital outlay is to acquire an ATV for lifeguards for emergencies between beaches. Currently, he said lifeguards have to drive to the different beaches for emergencies. Mr. Calabrese said the ATV will be stationed at Penfield Beach.

First Selectwoman Kupchick recognized Mr. Calabrese and all the work he did during the pandemic. She said she's been talking about the reorganization and employees giving their all, but Mr. Calabrese has given 200%. Mr. Calabrese said with the minimum wage increase comes wage compression. He said supervisors will need increases too. He said the majority of staff are minimum wage workers.

Mr. Calabrese said this is the first year the marina budget is separate. He said part-time seasonal wages will go up. He said there will be cameras installed at the boat docks that marina users have been asking for over the years. Mr. Calabrese said the feed will be accessed by police and the marina manager. He said the purchase and installation prices are listed.

7111 Carl Dickman Golf Course

Mr. Calabrese said seasonal minimum wage pay has increased like the other departments. He said a maintenance staff position was added. He said golf use has gone up and they are trying to keep up with the maintenance. He said equipment and topsoil have also been requested.

7113 H. Smith Richardson Golf Course

Mr. Calabrese said there was a decrease in payroll because the mechanic took the VERIP plan. He said he is confident going forward without the position. He said Fees and Professional services added funds to outsource repairs and \$78,000 was added to capital outlay for a new sprayer which has been cut in the past, but it is back in and needed.

Revenue was also reviewed as well as rentals and how COVID impacted some of the items.

IV. Adjourn

Mr. Testani made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:56 pm. Ms. Charlton seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Pru O'Brien
Recording Secretary