

REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING

May 13, 2020

Ms. Georgiadis asked that since the job is stuffing envelopes, perhaps tasks could be modernized, to help streamline the office.

Ms. Browne explained that they have been ahead of the curve with a new records management system installed a few years ago. Since she instituted electronic recordings, fewer people physically come into the office but the same requirements are in place regarding indexing, printing and returning documents. Also, Hurricane Katrina showed how important archiving vital records is after many local records went missing during the disaster. Ms. Browne has implemented microfilming, scanning and offsite storage of all of the Town's vital records.

Ms. Georgiadis referred to the Secretary of the State's recent announcement that she would be sending absentee ballot applications to all registered voters. She asked if that would alleviate work for the office.

Ms. Browne pointed out that every qualified voter receiving an application only eliminates one step of the two-step requirement. The applications still have to be processed, input and ballots mailed. Ms. Browne also stated that since the Presidential Preference Primary was postponed twice, there are savings in the current fiscal year budget. 6,000 absentee ballot applications are expected for the primaries and again for the general election. Close to 4,000 dog licenses would now be handled through the mail.

Ms. Wackerman noted that Ms. Browne has been invaluable to her with the RTM.

Conservation: Conservation Director Brian Carey addressed the Conservation budget.

Janine Alianiello, District 10 asked if grants are available for land purchases if there is no money available to purchase land in the conservation budget.

Mr. Carey said the town has added 15 acres of open space since 2015. The H. Smith Richardson Trust is used to secure open space grants through the State. The Land Acquisition Commission is constantly looking for available open space. Last year the Town purchase four acres adjacent to the marsh on Oldfield Road and we are still waiting for reimbursement from the State.

Jill Vergara, District 7, asked if Mr. Carey feels confident doing both the jobs of Conservation Director and Director of Public Works. She asked if this could be made permanent, eliminating one position.

Mr. Carey said he can do both jobs but it is up to the administration to do whatever works best.

First Selectwoman Kupchick noted it is inappropriate to discuss personnel matters in public session.

DPW Administration: Acting Director of Public Works Brian Carey said the administration office is in Independence Hall and the bulk of the budget is salaries: Director, Asst. Director, Superintendent and office staff. The acting superintendent Doug Novak was hired at a lower salary so there are savings there.

Pamela Iacono, District 8, asked if there are open positions that are not going to be filled.

Mr. Carey said there are no open positions on the Administration side, but on the Operations side.

DPW Operations: Acting Director of Public Works Brian Carey and Acting Superintendent Doug Novak were present. Mr. Carey addressed the reduction to the paving budget made by the Board of Finance. He said they are keeping a line on spending and keeping services as high as possible.

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Ms. Iacono asked about job openings. Mr. Carey said there are three open spots due to retirements and relinquishments: a laborer, and maintenance and repair employee and a foreman. Ms. Iacono asked since there is a hiring freeze and the union has a no-layoff clause in their contract, if the only way to reduce staff is by attrition to which Mr. Carey responded yes.

Ms. Georgiadis asked about the compactor to which Mr. Carey said that is a Solid Waste and Recycling issue and Director Zembruski and Director of Engineering Hurley were not asked to appear this evening.

Ms. Georgiadis asked if the incorrect compactor had been addressed to which Mr. Carey replied the replacement is due in June.

Mark McDermott, district 7 asked about the fleet maintenance line. He asked the mileage of the town cars.

Mr. Carey said the mechanics keep a record of mileage and oil changes. He said the mileage is in the thousands, but not the tens of thousands. It is not more than 50,000 per year. Some of the cars in the fleet are rarely used if at all.

Mr. McDermott proposed that no cars be added to the fleet and that we start using personal cars with mileage reimbursement, and get out of the "town-car" business.

Jay Wolk, District 5 asked if the cars are "hand-me-downs," to which Mr. Carey replied all town vehicles are recycled police cars. Mr. Wolk asked if it is difficult to find parts. Mr. Carey said the cars are basically driven into the ground then sold to salvage or junked outright.

Mr. Wolk asked if Mr. Carey was agreeable to the bonding of paving costs. Mr. Carey said that is a decision of the administration. He has worked in towns where they bond and where they put it in the operating budget.

Ms. Iacono said Mr. McDermott was correct in his views on fleet management. We need to start to look at things a different way and research using personal cars. A cost analysis should be done. We should start to pare the fleet down and phase out the program.

Ms. Iacono also said she is not in favor of bonding paving. She understands it will be done that way this year but we must not make a habit of it and we have to stop cutting the paving budget.

Mr. McDermott suggested looking into using rental cars instead of the current fleet.

Ms. Georgiadis said that rental cars are unsafe due to Covid, plus personal cars offer better mileage. She also said we need to know the long-term detriment to bonding paving.

Elizabeth Altobelli, District 10 said that grants for electric cars should be looked into. Mr. Carey said the Town has looked into electric cars in the past and that they are more expensive to maintain.

Lauren Bove, District 7 said the number one place to be infected by the coronavirus is in a shared car.

Mr. Wolk said we should pay as we go with paving and stop bonding. He pointed out that a \$3 trillion infrastructure grant will be coming.

Health: Health Director Sands Cleary said he budget includes increases in the substitute nurses account, which has been an upward trend over the past several years. Fuel costs are down but maintenance and

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repair is up. A new school nurse position has been added for North Stratfield School due to the new ECC program. He addressed an earlier concern about PPEs not included in the budget because he anticipates emergency funding from the State.

Ms. Georgiadis asked if the department can adapt to the new social distancing guidelines. She asked if he feels confident he has the funds budgeted to support local businesses.

Mr. Cleary said members of the department sit on several task forces and boards to assist in disseminating the governor's guidelines to all parties involved, such as restaurants and waiters' unions.

WPCF: Director Norton said the department is working around the clock. The facility is aged so the budget includes maintenance and repair and capital increases, along with contractual employee requirements.

Ms. Iacono asked why there is an increase in travel and meeting and memberships budgets.

Mr. Norton said that 17 of his 18 staffers are state-certified and there are fixed training hours required by the state.

Ms. Georgiadis asked how long the facility lasts. Mr. Norton said treatment plants are designed to last about 20-25 years and we are at that point now. They are targeting systems that are in danger of failing because they cannot wait for catastrophic repairs. A new facility is on the horizon. Over the next two or three years we will enter the design and replace plan, with state grants being utilized for funding.

Social and Human Services: Director Julie DeMarco expressed gratitude for her staff for delivering meals and groceries to those in need. The request for the director to go from part time to full time was cut by the Board of Finance. The fees and professional services increase is for exercise instructors who are very low-paid and we will lose them if we don't increase their salaries. The increase in the Director's salary is to bring it to comparable levels of the surrounding towns.

Board of Education: BOE Chair Christine Vitale explained there are savings in pension and transportation. An MOU is being developed with the Board of Finance regarding \$1.8 million due to Covid19.

Supt. of Schools Mike Cummings said the budget proposal was as bare bones as possible; however budget adjustments will be made with the least impact to program and instruction to shelter the students from reductions. In response to Ms. Georgiadis, Mr. Cummings noted that counselors are reaching out to students and families, and should mental health issues emerge then funds would be reallocated for that purpose.

Bill Gerber, District 2 asked if there would be a regional approach to re-opening. Mr. Cummings noted that our regional education center is CES; there is an understanding that solutions should not be limited by town borders so if students were to go to school every other day then there would be a need to synch plans so there is adequate child care for the days they are not in school. It is better to have a regional approach. Accommodations for staff or students who are immunocompromised have not been taken into account. The preliminary lease for the Walter Fitzgerald campus is being reviewed by the town attorney. The net reduction from the BOF is \$600,000.

Ms. Bove asked where funds will come from for cleaning and sanitizing facilities. Mr. Cummings said there could be savings in utilities; projects and instructional materials can be changed; we need to work with a flexible approach because there are so many unknowns.

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Mr. McDermott asked if there are any unexpected retirements to which Colleen Deasey noted there are 10 retirements, but people's plans have changed in both directions. Mr. Cummings noted that some children may not enter kindergarten this year. The \$600,000 budget reduction may be covered by utility savings. Ms. Iacono asked for a spreadsheet to keep track of the numbers. Mr. McDermott asked if money would be coming from the Cares Act to which Mr. Cummings said there would be but don't know when.

Sharon Pistilli, District 3 asked about environmental safety in the workplace. Angelus Papageorge said they are improving sanitizers and washing stations in the schools. The school resource officers and safety committee will be meeting on protocols as to opening windows as well as air conditioning with air quality issues.

Joe Seibert, District 5 asked about IEPs for students. Rob Mancusi said there are many students having difficulty with distance learning. Coaching, live video coaching, and mentoring are provided; it's not the same as an IEP in school but it is a working solution.

Alex Durrell, District 3 asked if this would affect redistricting. Ms. Vitale said the BOE has not discussed it in 2 months; the projections may also change because of the expected move from the city as well as some of the high density housing projects that have been approved.

Information Technology: Dave Kelley, IT Director explained his department pays for annual maintenance costs, phone bills and this year a separate project for a new permits and land use inspection system. The bids are due the end of May.

Mr. McDermott asked what adjustment will be made because of the capital cut to which Mr. Kelley said they will go from a 5-year cycle to a 6-year replacement cycle. Ms. Pistilli asked if desk tops could be replaced with laptops to which Mr. Kelley noted it is more secure with desktops. Employees are remoting in from town-owned laptops to their desktops.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business this evening the meeting recessed at 11:10 PM and will reconvene tomorrow at 7 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth P. Browne, MMC, MCTC
Town Clerk