

MINUTES OF THE JOINT TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING AND BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING, 7:00 P.M., MONDAY, MARCH 28, 2016, ROOM 207-209, TOWN HALL, 84 SOUTH MAIN STREET, CHESHIRE, CT 06410

1. Roll Call.

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m. by Budget Committee Chairman Tim Slocum and a quorum was determined to be present. Those present: Council members Peter Talbot, Sylvia Nichols, Paul Bowman, Rob Oris and Tom Ruocco. Also present from the Water Pollution Control Authority was Chairman John Perrotti. Staff present from the Town: Michael A. Milone, George Noewatne, Walter Gancarz, Rich Kaczer, James Jaskot, and Gina DeFilio.

2. Pledge of Allegiance: The group pledged allegiance to the flag.

3. Proposed 2016-2017 Operating Budget - Water Pollution Control Department, Public Works, Public Property,

Mr. Milone reviewed some housekeeping details, providing Council with amended agendas and distributing a summary of open items.

Mr. Milone introduced the Water Pollution Control Department (WPCD) budget, explaining that it is mostly a status quo budget, with savings in utilities and through various efficiencies, but because it is operationally a new facility, it will take a full cycle to more accurately estimate expenses.

Michael Ecke entered the meeting at 7:12 p.m.

Discussion ensued regarding the construction costs for manholes being moved from the capital budget to the WPCD operating budget, the Town Manager \$24,000 cut to sludge removal may need to be partly restored, and an increase to the user fee of \$10, raising the fee from \$383 to \$393 to help pay for the upcoming spike in debt service from the plant upgrade while still leaving sufficient WPCD fund balance. Mr. Perrotti explained that the WPCA sets the user fee, and that qualifying senior citizens have had their user fee frozen. Mr. Oris felt the \$10 increase was too high, and Mr. Slocum asked about the rate for commercial users, which Mr. Gancarz explained. Mr. Milone discussed a two-tiered fee, and reviewed the fee history in the budget book when Mr. Slocum asked about past increases.

Mr. Gancarz reviewed the budget line items, explaining the impact of the plant upgrade and new equipment, and emphasizing the need to take care of our pump stations, some of which are quite old. He explained that use of the plant is approximately 50% residential, 25% commercial, and 25% the prison. Mr. Oris questioned why there isn't more savings in labor with new, more efficient equipment, and Mr. Gancarz responded that there is more equipment, and the

aging pump stations still need to be maintained. Mr. Oris also commented that we should be saving more with a new facility, and Mr. Gancarz explained that there

are some new costs, such as \$80,000 to comply with new phosphorous regulations, reiterating that this budget was conservative since we have not yet had a full cycle with the new plant. Mr. Oris felt that, if this budget was conservative, the user fee didn't need to be raised so much. Mr. Slocum asked about the electrician position, and Mr. Gancarz clarified that it was still a part-time position, and the employee was very busy and well used. Mr. Milone explained electrical savings achieved through the ISO plan, by "going off the grid". There was further discussion regarding Mr. Oris's and Mr. Slocum's preference for the cost of manhole covers construction to remain in the capital road paving budget.

Mr. Bowman asked about the number of vehicles and heavy equipment for the sewer department. Mr. Noewatne explained there were 10 vehicles and reviewed the heavy equipment. The salary differential and performance award line item was clarified, as well as payments for higher classification work and for stand-by and call-ins, which are contractual. Mr. Bowman asked if there were any "spot" awards for employees who find creative solutions, and Mr. Noewatne explained that rewards were incorporated into the performance evaluation process.

Mr. Gancarz mentioned the rising cost of transporting and incinerating sludge, the donation from Elim Park for the Cook Hill Road pump station, and the ongoing process to exempt pump stations from zoning regulations to enable repair and/or expansion of a pump station without need to purchase a significant amount of abutting property, and the findings of the Claims Commissioner that the Town can sue the state with the lawsuit scheduled to commence in June 2016 to include the Town's efforts to secure State funding for the WWTP upgrade. The Town is also pursuing legislation to provide relief from being penalized for early phosphorous regulation compliance. Mr. Perrotti left the meeting, with Mr. Slocum's thanks for attending.

Mr. Milone introduced the Public Work and Public Property budgets, presenting them in tandem since they are so closely interrelated. He explained that Public Works budget increases have averaged 1.86% in each of the last five years, and this year's increases are due mostly to the streetlights lease, an increase in Regional Water Authority rates, and the cost for solid waste collection and disposition, as well as a delay in the savings from the performance contracting. The increase in salaries is due mostly to the request for an additional Mechanic position.

Mr. Bowman left the meeting at 8:18 p.m.

Mr. Noewatne provided a review of capital projects that were being supported by the operating budget, and the process for accreditation for the Department. Mr. Slocum asked what the benefits would be to accreditation, and Mr. Noewatne and

Mr. Milone explained that there would be some insurance savings, and also a commitment to quality, best practices and a high standard of professionalism. Mr. accreditation a possibility now. He explained that staff now has additional open space management projects, have brought most projects to completion earlier than expected and within budget; they are working on significant road projects and performance contracting projects; and hope to have a Council policy on pond dredging. He cited the success and effectiveness of splitting the Public Works Director and Town Engineer positions. Mr. Oris questioned the salary increase, and Mr. Milone explained that it was due to a previous under-calculation of Mr. Gancarz's salary, and Mr. Noewatne added that it also included a well-earned 5% salary increase for the Assistant Town Engineer.

Mr. Talbot requested a memo on the process for roll-out for the streetlights, which Mr. Noewatne will provide once the plan has been established.

Mr. Noewatne reviewed GIS and the savings realized by in-house work being done by a very capable staff, explaining how they coordinate with the utilities on road work for savings and efficiencies.

Mr. Noewatne introduced Fleet Manager Rich Kaczer, who presented justification for the requested Mechanic position, and explained the large amount of work and responsibilities for his group who serve all Town departments and the Board of Education, reiterating that the Town has added 41 vehicles and another 50 pieces of equipment in recent years, and that the mechanics have worked hard to keep vehicles in top operating shape and extending their lives, with significant savings to the Town, especially because of the welding skills of one of the Mechanics. Mr. Oris asked about overtime savings, which would be realized in both Snow and Ice and Highways, and Mr. Slocum commented that a new employee is a long-term cost to the Town. Mr. Oris questioned why we need this position now when we've been getting by, and Mr. Kaczer explained that there is work that is not getting done and some maintenance that was being neglected because staff couldn't get to it, and reiterated that this position have been in the budget request for the past several years. Mr. Slocum stated that he felt the new position being requested should be for a Welder, not a Mechanic.

Mr. Noewatne reviewed budgetary lines items increases and decreases, mentioning: this was a milder winter than in the past but we still had eight ice events; ash trees continue to fail; Eversource is removing some trees that will benefit the Town's West Main Street sidewalk project; solid waste tonnage has remained fairly constant; maintenance needs of buildings that, as Mr. Oris pointed out, are getting older.

Mr. Milone reminded Councilors that the budget public hearing was being held tomorrow evening.

4. On a motion by Peter Talbot and seconded by Sylvia Nichols, the Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:38 p.m.

Submitted by:

Arnett Talbot, Acting Clerk