

**TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- MONDAY, MARCH 20, 2023**

The council met in a workshop session on Monday, March 20, 2023, and called to order at 6:34 p.m. This meeting was held in person at the Town Council Chambers.

PRESENT: Council Chairman, Nathan Calouro  
Vice-Chairwoman, Mary Parella,  
Councilman, Antonio "Tony" Teixeira  
Councilman, Timothy Sweeney  
Councilman, Aaron Ley

ALSO PRESENT: Town Administrator, Steven Contente  
Town Treasurer, Sara Hassell

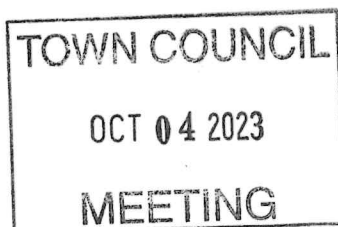
1. Ordinance #2023-05 - CHAPTER 25 - STREETS, SIDEWALKS AND OTHER PUBLIC PLACES - ARTICLE I. - STREETS, SIDEWALKS AND PARKS - Sec. 25-16 Seasonal outdoor seating on State Street TO BE REPEALED AND REPLACED WITH new Sec. 25-17, Seasonal use of public streets for outdoor dining by business establishments. **(1<sup>st</sup> Reading)**

Sweeney/Teixeira-Voted unanimously to consider this action to constitute the First Reading of Ordinance #2023-5. And to advertise in the local newspaper.

Prior to the vote taken, Vice Chairwoman Parella and Councilman Ley noted that they would be looking for clarification in section (D) in relation to *"Approval to maintain the outdoor dining area during the day of the Bristol Fourth of July Celebration in any year shall also require approval by the Bristol Fourth of July Committee."* and Section (B) in relation to the incorporation of Design Guidelines and manual.

2. Paul M. Lafleur, President Bristol Rotary Club Inc re Request for a Bingo License at the St. Elizabeth's Church Hall for March 29, 2023, (~~time TBD~~) 6:30 pm.

- a. Recommendation - Town Administrator and Fire Chief
- b. Recommendation - Town Administrator and Chief of Police



Teixeira/Sweeney-Voted unanimously to grant this license per the recommendations received and conditions, if any, as delineated, and also subject to conformance to all laws and ordinances and payment of all fees, taxes, and levies.

**TOWN ADMINISTRATOR OVERVIEW**

**General Budget Discussion**

**Steven Contente, Town Administrator**

Town Administrator Contente presented an overview of his fiscal budget recommendations to the Town Council. He noted that the Bristol municipal appropriations including the debt services increase and the non-property tax revenues increase resulting in a net municipal expenditure decrease over the last fiscal year.

Town Administrator Contente noted the use of the new budgeting software presented limitations and expressed the need to explore different software options.

Town Administrator Contente stated that the overall tax property rate would increase by .36 cents but was subject to change as the tax roll has not yet been certified. He explained that based on the proposed budget, the Tax Assessor reviews the tax roll and adjusts the tax rate based on any revised assessments and what is required to support the budget. The tax rate is then determined by the tax assessor and finalized at a later date.

Town Administrator Contente explained that an investment of \$1,470,000 was included in the municipal expenditures for capital project investments that included \$1,000,000 for road resurfacing; and that the school district was fully funded.

Town Administrator Contente noted the town has major capital improvements at the wastewater treatment facility and collection systems and estimated a sewer use increase fee from \$580 to \$605.79.

Town Administrator Contente noted that his proposed budget focuses on strong investment in infrastructure. He added that he appreciated the council's consideration of the recommended budget.

Councilman Teixeira proposed seeking options to level fund the proposed sewer use assessment for \$605.79 to \$600.

Vice Chairwoman Parella expressed the need to explore options for additional source funding, such as the use of the fund balance, to minimize the burden on taxpayers with the goal of reducing the tax increase from .36 cents to approximately 0.20 cents.

Members of the council discussed the proposed sewer estimate and explored options for potential adjustments to leveling the sewer estimate from \$605.79 to \$600, as a potential cost-saving

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measure to minimize the impact on residents. After further discussion and consideration of various factors, including the current financial situation of the Town and the potential of allocating funds from the Town's Fund Balance. It was noted that the use of any town funds to offset the sewer assessment or tax rates would not be recommended for long-term use, however, could potentially be used as a one-time offset.

It was noted that the upcoming property tax workshop scheduled in a couple of months may contribute to reducing the expense associated with residential assessment.

(\*) The Council agreed by consensus to place an asterisk at the budget line so that the Council might consider the possibility of allocating \$100,000 from the Fund Balance to potentially reduce the tax rate, (\*)and to further review options for level funding the sewer assessment.

**701-POLICE DEPARTMENT**

**Kevin Lynch, Chief of Police**

Police Chief Lynch provided an overview of the police department's budget.

Police Chief Lynch explained some of the programs the department was spearheading such as new hybrid vehicles, recruitment drives, citizens police academy, the community night out event, drone technologies, accreditations, and a digital fingerprint system.

Chief Lynch explained that salary increases were mainly due to contractual obligations and detailed wage increases due to ancillary resources needed for such events as the Christmas Festival, Fourth of July celebration, and other related needs for the security of town-related events.

Police Chief Lynch further noted that the patrol expenses assisted with solar traffic calming devices that were to be located in town. A copy of the traffic calming device pamphlet was distributed to the council.

It was explained that education was an unfunded state mandate and that the need for more education was essential to support the younger workforce.

Discussions ensued regarding potential future building improvements.

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The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

**702-Animal Control**

**Kevin Lynch, Chief of Police**

Animal Control Supervisor Deborah DaSilva provided an overview of the department's budget. She explained the increase in building maintenance line items was to support the much-needed building improvements such as backflow testing and sanitation pumping in addition to HVAC maintenance, painting, and repairs of the concrete walkway.

Discussion ensued regarding adoption increases at the shelter.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

**703-HARBOR PATROL**

**Greg Marsili, Harbormaster**

Harbor Master Marsili explained the details of the marina expansion project. He noted the department's ongoing efforts of maintenance on existing docks that are mainly due to weather deterioration.

Harbor Master Marsili explained the need for a part-time harbor master to assist with the increased responsibilities and duties of the marina and fuel station.

Discussions ensued regarding potential parking issues due to the Marina expansion and the lease termination of the prudence ferry parking lot. Town Administrator Contente noted that he has been working with the town of Portsmouth and the prudence planning commission to find alternate parking resources.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

**601-COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

**Diane Williamson, Director**

Town Planner Tanner spoke on behalf of Director Williamson who was unable to attend the meeting due to an injury.

Town Planner Tanner provided an overview of the department's budget noting that the new assistant planner position was recently filled and would be a great asset to the increased demands of the department.

Town Planner Tanner noted that the Bristol Historic District line item was to support HDC and included advertising which was recommended to be moved to the advertising line item.

Discussions ensued regarding the Tree Planting Program.

Chairman Calouro asked for an update on tourism and promotions. Municipal Operations Manager Eric Dickervtiz clarified that both the Bristol Merchant Association and Explore Bristol made requests for an extra allocation of \$1000 within this year's budget. However, with an intention to be fiscally responsible and save taxpayers' funds, he suggested that the town utilize a \$7500 grant obtained from Discover Newport, distributing it evenly between both organizations.

Discussions ensued regarding the collaboration to support tourism-related activities through digital event advertising. Additionally, Operations Manager Dickervtiz noted his initiated contact with American Cruise Lines to aid in promoting local merchants through advertising efforts

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator

**602-Building Inspection**

**Stephen Greenleaf- Building Official**

Building Official Greenleaf pointed out an increase in revenues, crediting the rise to the state permitting system platform's support, which enhanced the evaluation of construction project amounts, coupled with a rise in construction projects. He also highlighted that this year, the weights and measures function was brought in-house. Moreover, the town appointed a temporary building inspector as the assistant building inspector to aid with inspections and provide emergency coverage. The elevation in mileage costs was explained as being linked to escalating gas



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prices and the inclusion of the assistant building inspector as an additional beneficiary of mileage reimbursements.

Town Administrator Contente noted that the decision to bring the sealer of weights and measures function in-house was prompted by challenges the town faced in securing a state-appointed sealer of weights and measures during the construction of the marina fuel pumps. He further explained that the expenses previously allocated for outsourcing this line item were balanced out by providing a stipend to the appointed sealer of weights and measures. This adjustment helped maintain a somewhat neutral impact on the line item.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

### **402 TOWN ADMINISTRATOR**

#### **Steven Contente, Town Administrator**

Town Administrator Contente stated that there were no significant changes to the Town Administrator's department budget. He clarified that the Council would notice a rise in the salaries line item, but this change represented a reallocation of funds between line items. He explained that his budget proposed a modify the salary line item by transferring the operational manager's position from the town hall complex line item to the town administrator's line item. He went on to explain that this alteration aimed to streamline responsibilities and enhance efficiency within the budget structure.

Town Administrator Contente noted the increase in Labor & negotiations line items. He explained that the funds would be used for labor matters in the upcoming negotiations of three union contracts. He further clarified that while the funds for labor contracts & negotiations are listed in the Town Administrators' budget, the funds are used by several departments to assist with legal advice and consultations.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

### **501 FINANCE**

#### **Sara Hassell, Town Treasurer**

Treasurer Hassell outlined that there had been reductions in salaries resulting in a decrease in payroll taxes. She pointed out that supply costs had risen, contributing to an increase in the supply budget. In terms of revenues, she mentioned that they

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remained consistent, attributed in part to the absence of vehicle taxes and the introduction of payment plans for residents. Additionally, investments have experienced a significant increase, and efforts have been made to negotiate more favorable bank interest rates.

Town Administrator Contente expressed his intention to transition the current part-time bookkeeper role into a full-time position starting in January. He elaborated on the introduction of new security protocols and the increasing complexity of tasks, necessitating an adequately staffed team to manage these responsibilities effectively.

Discussions ensued regarding the necessity to enhance the existing budgeting software. The idea of utilizing Gooding funds to help cover the expenses of implementing new budgeting software was put forward. The significance of robust reporting capabilities was deliberated upon. It was emphasized that a thorough evaluation of the expenses related to the new software was required. Additionally, the town would need to assess the software solutions employed by other municipalities and consider input from department heads in order to make informed decisions.

(\*) The Council agreed by consensus to place an asterisk at the Finance budget line so that the Council might consider the possibility of budgeting for finance software.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

**502 Debt Service**

**Sara Hassell, Town Treasurer**

Town Treasurer Hassell outlined the details of the debt payment schedule and a 10-year outlook. The spreadsheets were organized to distinguish between the enterprise fund and the general fund, with the inclusion of the recent infrastructure bond. The spreadsheets detailed bonds and their respective amortization schedules. She proceeded to elaborate on the concept of general obligation bonds. She further highlighted that the estimate for borrowing for capital projects was also incorporated.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

**503 Fixed Charges**

**Sara Hassell, Town Treasurer**

Treasurer Hassell highlighted the contributions and expenditures related to the OPEB (Other Post-Employment Benefits) trust. She drew attention to the medical costs that have experienced a 6.1% increase.

The Town Administrator further clarified that although the fund is vested at 114%, the interest rates of return are not as robust as in previous years. The actuaries acknowledged the town's ability to withdraw and utilize funds due to the 114% vesting, while also recommending a contribution of \$170,000. It was highlighted that disbursements for benefits can be taken as long as the fund remains above 100% vested. Further discussions ensued regarding disbursement restrictions.

Discussions ensued regarding market investment projections. The point was raised that the council should exercise caution when considering borrowing from funds like the OPEB account and funds balance account. This is to ensure that the town is not faced with the necessity of contributing additional funds in case market rates experience a decline.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

**504 Town Hall Comple**

Operations Manager Dickervitz highlighted that there had been an increase in the expenses related to maintaining and updating the town's website. This increase was attributed to the transition to utilizing Civic Plus as the chosen platform.

Operations Manager Dickervitz explained that the rise in costs to software and license line item was mainly attributed to the enhancement of cybersecurity measures and the transition to fiber.

Town Administrator Contente noted that the reduction in electric costs was attributed to the reduction of the 9 Court Street building.



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Town Administrator Contente noted there was no increase in the State House lease during this budget as the item will be presented to the council at the next council meeting to discuss negotiations in the lease terms.

The council made no changes to the budget as recommended.

### **406 BOARD OF CANVASSERS**

#### **Board of Canvassers**

Clerk Cordeiro provided the council with a summary of the key points from the Board of Canvassers budget discussion. It was emphasized that even though 2023 was not initially designated as an election year, a special election for Congressional District 1 is anticipated to take place. She explained that the Board of Canvassers would be making a recommendation to the Board of Elections to combine polls due to the expected low voter turnout.

Clerk Cordeiro further elaborated that the early voting arrangements are slated to occur at the Reynolds School building. She elaborated further, noting a rise in the popularity of early voting. During the previous election, they experienced a significant turnout of over 2,000 voters during the early voting period. This surge in participation led to disruptions within the town hall premises and posed challenges in maintaining regular daily tasks.

Clerk Cordeiro also highlighted that the Board of Canvassers is committed to actively conducting voter registration drives. She explained that requests for funds have been submitted to support efforts aimed at enhancing voter registration rates.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

### **407 MUNICIPAL COURT**

#### **Melissa Cordeiro- Town Clerk**

Clerk Cordeiro noted that much of the budget remained level-funded outside of the increases to salaries. She clarified that she had made revisions to the description of detailed wages to encompass payments for substitute bailiffs whenever the need arose.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

**401 TOWN COUNCIL**

Chairman Calouro brought attention to a recommended salary increase proposed by the Town Administrator. It was observed that the council salaries have remained unchanged for a considerable duration. The discussion highlighted that council members often participate in various functions beyond their regular council responsibilities, and many of these events incur personal expenses. The council voiced unanimous agreement with the salary increase, considering the modest amount involved, which amounts to a few hundred dollars.

The council engaged in a discussion regarding the discontinuation of public media funds. It was clarified that the necessity for a consistent media technician during public meetings has diminished due to the utilization of a Zoom room application, overseen by Operations Manager Dickervitz. However, it was further explained that the existing public media provider continues to ensure the broadcast feed for full channel viewing.

It was highlighted that Mr. Davis, the media technician, would be gradually phased out, with the transition commencing on July 1st. Vice Chairwoman Parella suggested initiating a conversation with Mr. Davis, considering his long-standing commitment and dedication to the role. Town Administrator Contente expressed the view that the present rate couldn't be justified or rationalized.

It was acknowledged that this decision is unrelated to job performance but rather pertains to the evolving function of the role. The requirement for external equipment has become obsolete, prompting the change.

It was highlighted that in similar towns, general technicians would receive a stipend ranging from approximately \$150 to \$175 per meeting, resulting in an estimated annual cost between \$4500 and \$5250, which also covers additional workshop expenses.

\*The Council agreed by consensus to place an asterisk (\*) at the Town Council's budget line so that the Council might consider the possibility of reviewing Public Media funds.

**403 TOWN CLERK**

**Melissa Cordeiro- Town Clerk**

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Clerk Cordeiro highlighted a rise in the land evidence line item, attributing it to the inclusion of a newly awarded service following the bid process. She elaborated that the new platform offers a broader range of services at a more economical rate.

Clerk Cordeiro mentioned the incorporation of a new line item to accommodate online business licensing. She provided details, stating that the initial fee for this addition is \$7200. This fee encompasses an annual charge of \$4800 along with a one-time implementation fee of \$2400. She clarified that this software is essential in aiding businesses to navigate the complexities of the license application process. Moreover, the system will contribute to record preservation and enhance interdepartmental collaboration.

She explained that the existing system for business licensing is intricate and lacking in efficiency, resulting in the town expending significant time and resources to ensure businesses fulfill their licensing requirements. The introduction of the online service is expected to bring about increased transparency and streamlined processes.

Councilman Teixeira inquired about the possibility of businesses being charged a fee to cover the costs. Vice Chairwoman Parella pointed out that the town doesn't charge fees to others for the convenience of online services, so a similar approach should be adopted for businesses.

Chairman Calouro expressed his favorable view of the process, highlighting the benefits of consistency, efficiency, and improved operations for both businesses and the town.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

### Recap

Chairman Calouro recapped the following question items to be discussed for consideration at a later time (asterisk items)

- (\*) The Council agreed by consensus to consider the possibility of allocating \$100,000 from the Fund Balance to potentially reduce the tax rate, (\*)and to further review options for level funding the sewer assessment.
- 501 FINANCE

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**Sara Hassell, Town Treasurer**

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• **401- Town Council**

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There being no further business, upon a motion by Vice Chairwoman Parella, seconded by Councilman Ley, and voted unanimously, the Chairman declared this meeting to be adjourned at 10:04 PM.

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Melissa Cordeiro, Town Clerk