

TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2023

The council met in a workshop session on Wednesday, March 22, 2023, and called to order at 6:36 p.m. This meeting was held in person at the Town Council Chambers.

PRESENT: Council Chairman, Nathan Calouro
Vice-Chairwoman, Mary Parella (arriving at 7:10 pm)
Councilman, Antonio "Tony" Teixeira
Councilman, Timothy Sweeney
Councilman, Aaron Ley

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

704 FIRE

Michael DeMello- Chief

Chief DeMello provided an overview of the department's proposed budget. He explained the increase in salaries due to the fully funded EMS coordinator position; and noted that there was an anticipated \$100,000 increase in this fiscal year's revenue.

Discussions ensued regarding fire department volunteer opportunities.

Discussions ensued regarding fire and EMS calls.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended.

405 BOARDS & COMM.

North & East Burial Ground

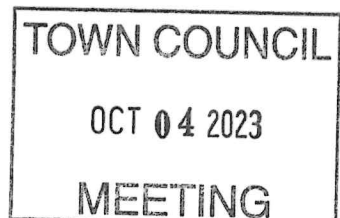
It was noted for the record that the North & East Burial Ground line had been zeroed out due to a lack of activity over the past three years.

Personnel Board

Town Administrator Contente noted that after discussions with the personnel board chairman the board was seeking level funding.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended.

Substance Abuse Coalition f.k.a. Prevention Coalition



TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2023

Sean Palumbo member of the substance abuse board addressed the council and provided a brief outline of the department budget. Mr. Palumbo highlighted the coalition's training opportunities and student assistance councilors.

Town Administrator Contente noted that the majority of the funds distributed to the coalition's budget are allocated from the opioid settlement funds.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended.

801 HUMAN SERVICES

Human Services Director Carusi provided a brief outline of the department budget. He provided the council with an update on services provided and the hardship imposed on residents due to the cost-of-living increases.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended.

805 HUMAN RESOURCES

(A) Women's Resource Center

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(B) East Bay Center

Robert Crossley was present and made a brief presentation on the services provided. He further thanked the town and council for their continued support.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(C) East Bay Community Action

Robert Crossley was present and made a brief presentation and thanked the town and council for their continued support.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(D) Visiting Nurse Services

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(E) Community String Project

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2023

(F) King Philip Little League

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(G) Franklin Court Tenants Assoc.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(H) Boy Scouts of America

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(I) Mosaico, CDC (Late Item)

George Lima was presented with a late item request in the amount of \$1500 and made a brief presentation of the grant request.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(J) Bristol Art Museum

The Town Administrator, Contente, emphasized that grant applications had been sent out and advance notifications were provided. Despite follow-up emails and calls, the town only received the applications shortly before the meeting. The Administrator pointed out that the responsibility for timely submission rested with the applicants, and they had been given ample time and assistance. Consequently, he was not currently recommending the consideration of the funding request.

No Funds were granted at this time.

(K) Harbor Lights

No funds requested

(Vice Chairwoman Parella arrives at this point in the meeting)

(L) St. Elizabeth f.k.a. Cornerstone Adult Services

Director, Jessica Gosselin was present and made a brief presentation of the grant request.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(M) The Samaritans

Brian Gamely addressed the council and made a brief presentation of the grant request, highlighting the suicide prevention initiatives.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(N) Coggeshall Farm Museum

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(O) Meals on Wheels

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2023

(P) Art Night

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(Q) Bristol Rotary

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(R) East Bay Food Pantry

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(S) Benjamin Church Senior Center

Vinny Saviano, the treasurer, and Donna Wilson, the Director, were present and made a brief presentation of the grant request, highlighting the assistance provided to seniors.

Councilman Teixeira requested elaboration on the increase of \$30,000 in the grant request. Mr. Saviano explained that the requested funds were to assist with additional assistance for unforeseen maintenance costs such as elevator maintenance, bus maintenance, and building maintenance outside of the capital projects.

(*) The Council agreed by consensus to place an asterisk at the budget line to hold for further consideration.

(T) Bristol Garden Club

Pamela Delaney addressed the council and made a brief presentation of the grant request.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(U) Wildlife Rehab Assoc. of RI

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(V) Eastern RI Cons. Dist.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(W) B.C Tenants Association

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(X) Friends of Toms Grove

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(y) Bristol Middle Passage Marker Project

Stephan Brigidi and Bernard Freeman addressed the council and made a brief presentation of the grant request.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2023

(Late Item)- Special Olympics

Pat Lannon addressed the council and made a brief presentation of the grant request in the amount of \$1000.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(Late Item)- East Bay Recreation Softball

Charlene Ferreira addressed the council and made a brief presentation of the grant request in the amount of \$1000.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

Recap

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

- **401 Town Council**

(*)consideration and review of Public Media funds.

The Council discussed the adjustment of annual expenses for video and live streaming, as technological advancements have rendered a full-time media position unnecessary. The idea of offering stipends, as seen in neighboring towns ranging from \$150 to \$175 per meeting, was discussed. It was observed that most of the tasks are currently carried out by town employee(s). The stipend proposal would be extended to the existing public media personnel. It was further clarified that any stipend would be intended for a single individual per meeting.

Ley/Teixeira- Motioned to appropriate \$3,500 to Public Media line item 401-43313; along with the agreement to provide a \$150 stipend to media personnel for each meeting. Voting in favor was Calouro, Ley, Sweeney, and Teixeira. Abstaining was Parella.

- **607- ENTERPRISE FUND**

TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2023

(*)consideration of allocating \$80,000 from the enterprise fund balance to reduce the sewer rate to level funding the sewer assessment.

Council members deliberated the consequences of transferring \$80,000 from the fund balance in order to stabilize the sewer assessment, ensuring it remains below \$600. It was observed that this action would result in a modest savings of just \$5. However, the primary concern was the perception of maintaining the assessment below the \$600 threshold.

Vice Chairwoman Parella suggested that it might have a more substantial impact if the funds were used to decrease the overall tax rate instead of focusing solely on the sewer assessment. An alternative proposal was to allocate \$100,000 to further reduce the sewer assessment from \$605.79 to \$597.38.

Teixeira/Sweeney- Voted
unanimously to allocate \$100,000
from the Enterprise Fund- Fund
Balance to offset the sewer rate
assessment from \$605.79 to
\$597.38.

• **501 FINANCE**

Sara Hassell, Town Treasurer

(*) 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.

Discussions ensued regarding the necessity to implement new budgeting software. Council members deliberated funding options to support new software. It was recommended that the source fund be used through capital improvement programs noting that the cost of the program may vary from \$250,000 to \$500,000. It was proposed that funds would be allowed to be borrowed from the Gooding Fund Balance until such source funding was solidified.

It was noted that the town would be going out to bid for the new accounting software within the next three months.

Parella/Sweeney- voted unanimously to
refer the matter to the Town

TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2023

Administrator and Finance Director to research the financial software opportunities and return with a proposal to the council within the next 90 days; also authorized borrowing funds from short-term funding sources.

- **(S) Benjamin Church Senior Center**

(*) The Council agreed by consensus to place an asterisk at the budget line to hold for further consideration.

The council deliberated the proposed 2% increase in funding and the range of services being offered. It was suggested that they consider meeting halfway between the requested amount of \$190,000 and the recommended amount of \$163,685 due to concerns about the financial burden and the challenges faced by seniors in managing their budgets. It was mentioned that this year's funding request is less than what they have previously requested.

Vice Chairwoman Parella contended that the facility, which was formerly part of the town's operations, has now become an independent nonprofit organization. She expressed doubts about the need for a 2% increase, as she didn't observe a significant uptick in services or senior participation to justify it. Mary raised questions about whether the services were predominantly utilized by Benjamin Church residents or by other residents of Bristol. She emphasized that if the town was going to allocate substantial funds, the facility should provide exemplary services and not operate in a quasi-public capacity.

Councilman Ley mentioned that government entities typically aren't heavily involved in senior services, and the town has successfully supported seniors during times of need, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. Councilman Sweeney highlighted the increasing senior population in Bristol and proposed allocating \$171,000 to the senior center. Councilman Teixeira noted that this increase could greatly benefit essential services like bus transportation, which is crucial for seniors.

It was emphasized that grant funds for public services are sourced from invested endowments rather than taxpayer funds.

TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2023

Sweeney/Ley- voted unanimously to appropriate an additional \$6315 to the Benjamin Church Senior Center increasing the total allocated amount to \$171,000.

• **607- ENTERPRISE FUND**

(*) The Council agreed by consensus to consider the possibility of allocating \$100,000 from the Fund Balance to potentially reduce the tax rate

It was noted that the proposed tax rate stood at \$13.36, and there was a desire to lower this rate. Vice Chairwoman Parella expressed her preference for not seeing an increase of more than .20 to .25 cents. She acknowledged that the tax roll still needed certification, which has historically led to alterations and reductions in the proposed tax rate.

There were concerns raised about the financial burden placed on residents due to increasing tax rates, especially considering hardships and inflation. A discussion ensued about the requirement to maintain a reserve fund balance between 12% to 14%, with the current balance at 14%. The question was raised: What would the tax rate be if we reduced the fund balance by \$100,000 to offset the tax rate?

The treasurer explained that a \$100,000 reduction would result in a tax rate decrease from \$13.36 to \$13.33, yielding a savings of .03 cents. This would amount to a yearly savings of \$25 and a monthly savings of approximately \$2. It was noted that the decrease did not constitute a significant or substantial reduction in costs.

However, it was also noted that while reducing the tax rate is understandable, there are concerns about potentially entering a structural deficit, and the town should exercise caution in this regard.

Vice Chairwoman motioned to allocate \$125,000 from the fund balance to off set the proposed tax rate. Seconded by Sweeney for discussion. Brining the that rate to \$13.32. Voting in favor was Vice Chairwoman Parella all others voting opposed. Motion Failed

TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2023

There being no further business, upon a motion by Councilman Ley, seconded by Councilman Sweeney and voted unanimously, the Chairman declared this meeting to be adjourned at 9:03 pm.

Melissa Cordeiro, Town Clerk