

TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19, 2025

The council met in a workshop session on Monday, March 19, 2025, and called to order at 6:30 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, Carl Carulli

704 FIRE

Michael DeMello- Chief

Chief DeMello presented the Fire Department's budget, highlighting several key areas of focus. He explained the \$100,000 increase in the EMS stipend line, which is intended to address rising costs and to catch up on underfunded expenses accrued over the past five years. Two new budget lines were introduced—for NFPA testing and EMS equipment maintenance—in an effort to improve transparency.

The Chief also noted an increase in special events costs, particularly related to the Fourth of July and field hospital. He addressed the growing maintenance needs of the headquarters on Metacom Avenue, which is now 16 years old and showing signs of aging infrastructure. He pointed out that underfunding maintenance for the department's four buildings has been a long-standing issue.

Additionally, Chief DeMello discussed the allocation of internet and telephone costs across departments. He explained that these services are currently bundled and allocated based on departmental needs, but noted the increasing complexity of these costs, particularly due to enhanced security requirements and future technological demands. The discussion also touched on potential cost savings through the elimination of unnecessary hardware and improved security measures.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

405 BOARDS & COMM.

Bristol 250th Commission

Alayne White presented an overview of the Bristol 250th Commission's budget request, including a discussion of funding for both the Bristol Historical Society and the 250th Commission. She explained the need for \$10,000 to support the Commission's planned activities and noted the potential for securing additional grant funding. The importance of maintaining clear communication with the state regarding potential funding sources was also emphasized.

Town Administrator Contente mentioned that he had been under the impression that the funding request for the 250th Commission was combined with the request from the Historical Preservation Society. It was clarified during the discussion that the 250th Commission had submitted a separate request, which the Town Administrator had not previously been aware of. Eric Dickervitz confirmed that a separate request had been received, although it may not have been communicated to or acknowledged by the Treasurer's Office.

(*The Council agreed by consensus to place an asterisk at the Bristol 250th Commission budget line item to review the funding request further and consider reallocating funds if needed at the conclusion of the overall budget discussions.

801 HUMAN SERVICES

Ed Carusi presented the Human Services budget, highlighting the department's ongoing collaborations with local churches and community organizations. He noted that one of the most significant challenges facing the community continues to be the high cost of utilities and rent, which places increasing strain on residents seeking assistance.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

805 HUMAN RESOURCES

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Chairman Calouro noted that certain budget items under Human Resources were informed they were not required to be present during the grant budget request discussions and assured them that their absence would not impact their consideration. He clarified that while attendance was not mandatory, anyone wishing to address the council was welcome to do so, but there was no obligation to speak. Noting that the majority of the requests were level funded.

(RECEIVED AT MEETING ITEM) It was noted for the record that a revised operating summary sheet for Department 805 - Human Resources was provided and distributed to reflect the Town Administrator's budget proposals. The original submission included in the budget workshop books had inadvertently omitted this information.

(A) Woman's Resource Center of RI

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(B) East Bay Center

Robert Crossley provided a brief overview of services that benefit from the council's consideration and thanked the town council and administration for their continued support in their efforts.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(C) EBCAP- East Bay Community Action

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(D) Visiting Nurse Home & Hospice

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(E) Community String Project

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(F) King Philip Little League

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(G) Franklin Court Tenants Association

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

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(H) Boy Scouts of America

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(I) Bristol Art Museum

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(J) Saint Elizabeth Adult Day Centers

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(K) The Samaritans, INC.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(L) Coggeshall Farm

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(M) Meals on Wheels

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(N) Art Night

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(O) Bristol Rotary

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(P) East Bay Food Pantry

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(Q) Benjamin Church Senior Center

Town Administrator Contente noted that his recommended allocation was slightly higher than the amount requested, as he applied a rationale similar to the 3% increase given to many other departments. He also explained that the Benjamin Church Senior Center differs from smaller human resource grants due to the scope and nature of the essential services it provides to senior residents

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(R) Bristol Garden Club

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The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(S) Eastern RI Cons. Dist.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(T) B.C Tenants Association

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(U) Friends of Toms Grove

Councilman Ley noted that the Friends of Tom's Cove are seeking additional funding to complete their final project. He recommended that the group come before the Council at a future meeting to formally request support and suggested the Council consider using contingency funds—without altering the overall budget—to assist with the initiative.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(V) Bristol Middle Passage Marker Project

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(W) Special Olympics

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(X) East Bay Softball

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(Y) Friends of St. Elizabeth Food Pantry

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(Z) Friends of Linden Pace

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(AA) Bristol Historical & Preservation Society

Town Administrator Contente clarified that a formal application for \$5,000 had been physically submitted; however, an updated request to reduce the amount to \$2,000 was communicated verbally and not submitted in writing. He noted that the reduction was made due to recent contingency funding already provided by the Council and Administration.

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The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(BB) Wildlife Rehab Association of RI

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

(CC)Mosaico, CDC

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)

Overall Town Internet and Telephone

The Council held a discussion on improving transparency in the allocation of internet and telephone costs across town departments. It was noted that the current budget reporting bundles internet and phone expenses under a single line item within each department, making it difficult to assess specific usage and costs. Despite varying technological needs—such as the Fire Department's use of Wi-Fi in rescue vehicles—there is no clear departmental breakdown. Proposed changes include separating internet and telephone costs, placing internet expenses under the Town Hall Complex line (504), and allocating cell phone and iPad costs directly to the respective departments. The Council emphasized the importance of providing a more detailed breakdown to increase transparency, hold departments accountable for their technology usage, and clarify the true cost of communication services. It was noted that this approach could also help identify areas for potential future savings. Additionally, the Council and Administration agreed to explore Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and other cost-effective telephone service options, while recognizing the different technology requirements among department.

701-POLICE DEPARTMENT

(*) The Council agreed by consensus to place an asterisk at the Police Department budget line for clarification on the amount of that transfer in the previous year(s) in the motor vehicle line item 701-44310 and questioned whether the proposed budget increase was reasonable.

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702-ANIMAL CONTROL

(*) The Council agreed by consensus to place an asterisk at the budget line 702-43341 to acknowledge that an additional \$5,000 could be earmarked for reallocation elsewhere in the budget if needed

703 HARBOR PATROL

(*) The Council agreed by consensus to place an asterisk at budget line 703-45300 as a placeholder to potentially allocate an additional \$5,000 to help manage the cost of internet services.

803 Parks And Receptions

(*) The Council agreed by consensus to place an asterisk at budget line 803-41100 as a placeholder to potentially allocate an additional to increase the Secretary's salary from \$52,136 to \$57,000.

Bristol 250th Commission

(*)The Council agreed by consensus to place an asterisk at the Bristol 250th Commission budget line item to review the funding request further and consider reallocating funds if needed at the conclusion of the overall budget discussions.

The Council reviewed several recap items across various departmental budgets to identify potential reallocations. In the Police Department budget, line item 701-44310 (Motor Vehicle) and Animal Control line item 702-43341 were reviewed with the acknowledgment that an additional \$5,000 could be earmarked for reallocation if necessary. The Harbor Patrol budget, line 703-45300, was identified as a placeholder for a potential \$5,000 allocation to help cover internet service costs. Similarly, the Parks and Recreation budget, line 803-41100, was noted as a placeholder to potentially increase the Secretary's salary from \$52,136 to \$57,000. The Bristol 250th Commission budget line was also discussed as a candidate for reallocation to support the Commission's efforts.

The Town Administrator, Treasurer, and Town Clerk reviewed the overall totals and proposed the following adjustments: a

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reduction of line item 702-43347 (Animal Control) from \$10,000 to \$5,000; a reduction of line item 401-43400 (Town Council IT) from \$3,600 to \$1,600 (as noted in on the March 17th budget workshop); and a decrease in line item 701-43310 (Police Motor Veh. Exp.) by \$9,000, from \$75,000 to \$66,000. These reductions totaled \$15,600. The Administrator recommended reallocating these funds as follows: \$4,864 to line 803-41100 to raise the Secretary's salary to \$57,000; \$5,000 to line 703-45300 for Harbor Patrol internet costs; and the remaining \$5,000 to the 405 budget to support the Bristol 250th Commission. With the decreases totaling \$15,600 and reallocations of \$14,864 for a total budget deduction of \$736.00

Parella/ Teixeira- Voted unanimously to:

- Decrease line item 702-43347 (Animal Control) from \$10,000 to \$5,000
- Decrease line item 401-43400 (Town Council - IT& Software) from \$3,600 to \$1,600
- Decrease line item 701-43310 (Police - Motor Vehicle Expense) from \$75,000 to \$66,000

Total Reductions: \$15,600

- Increase line item 803-41100 (Parks & Recreation - Secretary Salary) by \$4,864 to bring the salary from \$52,136 to \$57,000
- Allocate \$5,000 to line item 703-45300 (Harbor Patrol - Internet Costs)
- Allocate \$5,000 to the 405 budget for the Bristol 250th Commission

It was noted that these changes reflect reallocation of existing funds and do not have any significant effect the total proposed budget amount.

The Council engaged in a discussion regarding the implementation of the new homestead exemption, which is being offered for the first time this year. It was noted that this is uncharted territory for the Town and raised several questions about its potential impact on property values, tax tiers, and the overall tax rate. Concerns were expressed about the implications of having three different tax rates and the need for various scenarios to be provided by the Tax Assessor. The timeline for finalizing calculations and presenting those scenarios to the Council was also discussed. Additional topics included the appeal process, the effect of statistical outliers on revaluation accuracy, and the varying impacts of the exemption on different types of property owners. It was explained that the

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mill rate for owner-occupied properties is likely to be lower than for non-owner-occupied properties. The Council also discussed the potential to impose fees on Airbnb properties to help address the strain on long-term rental availability, and raised the question of whether such measures could lead to litigation. It was clarified that the higher tax rate would apply to all non-owner-occupied properties and was not being targeted specifically at Airbnb owners.

Public appreciation was expressed by community member Peter Hewett, who emphasized the importance of attending budget workshops and encouraged greater public participation, noting the educational value of the meetings. He commended the Town Council for its diligence and professionalism, stating that many residents he speaks to are impressed with the Council's performance. Mr. Hewett offered specific praise to the Treasurer and Town Clerk for their attention to detail and transparency in preparing the budget, acknowledging the complexity of municipal financial management. He also shared his personal experience working with the Town Clerk on the Board of Canvassers and emphasized that his attendance at the workshops was a way of showing appreciation for the work of local government.

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 8:40 PM.

Melissa Cordeiro, Town Clerk