

TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES  
BUDGET/MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE  
Town Hall Council Chambers  
May 21, 2009- Thursday

Present: Kenneth DiFazio, Chairperson  
Ed Harrington  
Arthur Mathews  
Michael Molisse

Also Present: Michael Smart  
James Wilson, Chief Financial Officer  
Maureen Duffy, Town Auditor  
Kathy Deree, Assistant Town Clerk  
James Clarke, Director Planning & Development  
Jeff Richards, Director Licensing & Inspection  
Joanne Lamothe, Director Library Services

Recording Secretary: Mary Briggs

Chairman Kenneth DiFazio called the Budget/Management Committee meeting to order at 6:45 PM. The purpose of the meeting is to review the General Government FY10 budgets with applicable department heads including Town Council, Town Clerk, Mayor's Office, Municipal Finance, Planning and Development, Licensing and Inspections and Library.

**09 015A- Town Council**

Auditor Maureen Duffy reported on the Town Council budget, which has been cut more than \$8,000 from FY09. The auditor position has been reduced to part time, which will significantly impact the auditing work to be completed. Miscellaneous expenses have been increased by \$2,000.

Chairman DiFazio asked Council President Smart for the justification of the \$2,000 increase in miscellaneous expenses. Councilor Smart noted that last year the Council ran short of supplies. Chairman DiFazio asked, for the record, what accommodation will be made for auditing needs not covered in this budget. Councilor Smart responded that any additional auditing needs will be met by either requesting appropriation from the Mayor, increasing the Auditor's hours, or contracting out the needed auditing services.

Councilor Mathews noted that this is below budget, and if a supplemental budget is proposed in the fall, he would like it on the record that the Town Council Office not be reduced further. He does not believe there is room for any additional cuts. Councilor stipend's, conferences, publications, and member dues have all been cut. The only other area to cut is the Councilors' salaries, and he is not willing to cut there. Councilor Smart

agreed that this department is as low as it can be. He also noted that the Auditor's predecessor was a part-time employee during his last 2 years. This was part of the reasoning for streamlining the current position; however, he does agree with Councilor Mathews that this department cannot support further reductions, and if there is a supplemental budget proposal, they will need to discuss this situation with the Mayor.

There was a brief discussion with Mr. Wilson regarding the MUNIS report. Lisa VanWinkle's hours were discussed. Councilor Molisse asked if Diane Hachey's hours have been reduced. Councilor Smart responded that she is at the same level as in the supplemental budget of FY08. Mr. Molisse asked if she is in the office 8 hours per day Monday through Friday. Councilor Smart noted if she attends meetings, she works flexible hours during the week. Mr. Molisse asked if there is adequate coverage in the Council Office while Diane or Lisa are out; Councilor Smart noted that although Maureen Duffy may provide some convenience in coverage, he does not believe that is within the purview of her job description as Auditor. There will be times when callers to the Council Office would receive an automated message with instructions for calling in emergencies. This is becoming common, he noted, with many cities and towns experiencing budget cuts in that there will need to be restrictions in office coverage. Councilor Smart's intent, however, is not to reduce the Council budget any further. Councilor Molisse agreed.

Councilor DiFazio noted that if the Council were asked to reduce further, the only option would be with the Councilors' salaries.

Councilor Mathews noted that the Mayor's original budget intent was to not have furloughs; if the Senate's budgets numbers hold up, and the town receives no increase in local aid from the sales tax, would the Mayor then revisit layoffs and furloughs? Mr. Wilson noted if that occurs, all options would be on the table. His recommendation would be that furloughs be the least sought option since they are difficult to account for and manage. Councilor Mathews responded that his personal preference would be furloughs before layoffs. The town will be required to cover a greater portion of health care coverage in the event of a layoff under the stimulus package.

Councilor Harrington agreed with the Councilors before him. He noted that across-the-board cuts are not reasonable. Some departments have smaller budgets and cannot sustain cuts. The Town Auditor is being reduced from 35 to 25 hours, while Human Resources is funding \$9,800 for education reimbursement and dues membership. If the cuts are in the forecast, he is hoping they are more judicious in nature.

Mr. Wilson repeated that everything will be on the table. Ms. Duffy noted that Lisa will be changing her hours due to child care issues in the fall, and Maureen will be reduced to 3 days per week after July 1<sup>st</sup>. The Council will need to keep in mind that if Diane should take vacation time during this period, there may be days that the Council Office will be closed, due to lack of coverage. Chairman DiFazio noted that will not be too difficult, so long as steps are taken to have the proper message on the phones.

### **09 015G-Town Clerk**

Kathy Deree presented the budget with Mr. Wilson for the Town Clerk's office. One position, a clerk, has been cut, with the remaining members assuming those duties. This is an unfilled vacancy. Total employees in the Town Clerk's office are three, one of which is for the Board of Registrars. There are increased wait times for tasks, which the public should be aware of.

### **09 015B-Mayor's Office**

Lee Hultin and Mr. Wilson presented the overview of the Mayor's budget. The driving factor for the increase in fire and municipal insurance line item is that the item was underfunded in FY08. This year it had to be budgeted to cover the increased cost. The premium runs from November to November, and last year they were able to negotiate a lower rate, which resulted in a cost savings to the town. This is expected to hold through the next year, which is why a small decrease in the cost is projected in the FY10 budget.

Councilor Mathews asked what the salary increases in the budget represent. Ms. Hultin noted they are step increases. Councilor DiFazio asked about the Mayor's salary. Mr. Wilson noted that the Mayor's salary is set by ordinance, as are the School Committee members' and the Councilors'. No change in the Mayor's salary can be implemented without Council action, and then upon the expiration of the current term. Councilor Mathews noted that as a point of interest, the charter prevails for the Council's salary as well, and that any change to their salary, such as having agreed to waiver of their stipends, was technically in violation of the charter. Mr. Wilson noted that it should be taken up in the upcoming Charter review.

### **09 015D-Municipal Finance**

Mr. Wilson provided an overview of the Municipal Finance budget. He noted that members of his staff were present: Pat Cook, Accountant ;Pamela Pantermoller, Principal Assessor; Paula McLeod, Collector; and Scott Bois, Coordinator of Financial Services. Mr. Wilson is Chief Financial Officer, Treasurer and Procurement Officer for the town all by virtue of cuts. His law degree and various certifications permit him under state statutes and DOR guidelines to function in each of these capacities. He has delegated some of the duties inherent in these positions. The Town Accountant budget must be kept separate per the Charter.

In this budget, there is the addition of a half- time position. In the fall, the Town Accountant resigned to take another position. Pat Cook, who was the assistant at the time, was appointed to the position, leaving a vacancy in the assistant position. Knowing there would be financial difficulties looming, Mr. Wilson left that position unfilled and unfunded for FY10. A part- time employee is covering the ministerial tasks.

Councilor DiFazio requested clarification to entries in the MUNIS reporting. Auditor Duffy noted a discrepancy in a position listed under procurement incorrectly, which was listed in finance.

Assessing has 3.5 positions. Assessor, secretary and a part- time position-resulting in no

change in staffing. There was a brief discussion of the department's interaction with the public and whether there has been an increase in frustration with the state of the economy.

Councilor Mathews asked if there is an increase in the number of taxpayers applying for abatements. Average amounts per year are 300. A 2-page informational package was mailed this year, which explains the process. Valuations are set on January 1, based on the assessment on January 1<sup>st</sup> of the prior year. Levy limit is not driven by values. Values are expected to go down, but rates will be increased to the levy limit. Councilor Mathews noted it also depends on what shift the Council approves, as well. Weymouth taxes to the limit set by DOR. The last time taxes did not go up was in 1981 or 1982. Councilor Smart asked if this is the first time the town mailed two semi-annual bills together instead of separate mailings. Approximately \$11,000 savings were garnered by not sending out the second bill this year. Councilor DiFazio asked what percentage of taxpayers pay their taxes through mortgage escrow. Mr. Wilson was not sure of the figure, but noted that under statute, the town is still mandated to mail out the tax bill to the homeowner.

Mr. Wilson noted that collections has been the division in which the most time has been spent. Over the last year all collection functions have been allocated to the town hall building and all treasury functions to the McCulloch building, and once a month they are reconciled to each other, followed by a super reconciliation by the CFO. There are several layers of checks and balances throughout the year. Mr. Wilson will be interested in seeing if the audit will bear this out. Staff and training time has been utilized to accomplish this.

In collections, there is an increase of ½ position, which will be assigned to collections in order to deal with the sheer volume of mail. The town is also using a remote capture system for depositing funds. The Town Auditor questioned the reasoning for the expenses in the other professional services line, which has increased to 350%- Mr. Wilson noted that this was for three purposes; the town is hiring police details for collection periods, consultants have been brought in for training, and for continuing reporting obligations, now required by the state.

Councilor Smart asked if the town has investment advisors. Mr. Wilson noted that due to the short-term nature of the deposits, we do not. Banking is performed according to state guidelines. The philosophy is to keep as much money in local banks and is required to maintain funds in more than one bank.

Mr. Wilson noted that are two full time and three part time positions in procurement, responsible for the purchasing of all goods and services in town and compliance under MGL 30B. There was a brief discussion of the 2003 takeover of the school department financial functions and the savings to the departments. Chairman DiFazio asked if there were any other function consolidations planned for the future. Mr. Wilson responded that they are always reviewing where cooperative bidding and purchasing can be utilized. He provided a review of the purchasing quotes and bids procedures. The town is compiling a list of local vendors willing to bid/quote on projects, and will update this list twice a year.

Chairman DiFazio asked for justification in postage increases. Mr. Wilson noted that it not only represents an increase in postage rates, but also in the volume of mailings.

#### **09 015H-Planning and Development**

Jim Clarke provided an overview of his budget. Cuts were made as requested, in addition to shifts in salary allocations. The Auditor had requested a breakdown of the block grant funding and Mr. Clarke provided a handout to the Council, indicating rates, annual salaries, adjustments for part time positions, longevity figures, and apportionment to CDBG and Home Grants. Lead Paint Initiative will be gone after this year, but CDBG and Home are expected to continue. He noted there are no anticipated decreases in grants.

Auditor Duffy thanked Mr. Clarke for the schedule provided, and Chairman DiFazio noted that this spreadsheet is a clear, user- friendly document. Councilor Smart noted this was exactly the kind of document that the committee would like to see provided by the School Department. He asked that the Planning spreadsheet be provided to the School Department as a guideline for their presentation.

There was a brief discussion with Councilor Harrington of low-income loans which may be made available to homeowners. These loans would be used to make improvements in light of the proposed blight ordinance under consideration by Council. He also requested the percent of land developed in town. Mr. Clarke noted that the figure is about 89.6%, but includes open space unavailable for development, and controlled conservation. There are very few large undeveloped lots in the community. There is a downturn in applications to the Zoning Board of Appeals, attributable to the state of the economy. Permitting restrictions have also been tightened over the last several years.

There was also a brief discussion of the wind turbine ordinance, in light of the recent application of a property owner who has applied to erect a turbine on his property. Councilor Smart noted that regulations on fall zones, etc. for wind turbines are changing yearly. Mr. Clarke noted the Mayor has applied for site zoning, which is currently under consideration.

#### **09 015N-Licensing and Inspections**

Jeff Richards, Director of Licensing and Inspections, provided the overview. He noted that to level fund and include step increases, adjustments as to transfers and reductions in positions from full to part time were required. He reviewed the inspectional procedures. The department has also taken over the Weights and Measures function (Quincy was providing it previously) with the associated training. Mileage increase is the sum of each department's mileage consolidated at the end of the year. There is some interdepartmental borrowing of clerical services with both Conservation and Planning Departments.

There was a brief discussion on whether an application has been filed for the day care center located at 1082 Commercial Street. Chairman DiFazio asked that the Council be

kept apprised of this situation.

Mr. Richards noted that with the change in the economy and more people at home during the day, there is a notable increase in the number of complaints the department is receiving. Dog, fence encroachments, abandoned houses “not proper usage” or zoning infractions with neighboring industrial sites, are examples of situations the department is dealing with. Mr. Richards noted that most of these matters can take months to resolve, although the office is diligent in responding to complaints.

Councilor Smart requested Mr. Richards address the procedures between departments, particularly between Zoning and the Conservation Boards. Mr. Smart was referring to a specific project, which Mr. Clarke noted is being addressed. Mr. Richards noted for the committee that the Planning Department is the enforcement authority for the Zoning Board.

Chairman DiFazio reported that the proposed changes to the Zoning Ordinance, which is a huge undertaking and requires Council approval, is in the final stages of planning. The draft document will be available in the near future.

Councilor Mathews asked if Conservation language and the by-laws can be combined to a single document. Mr. Clarke agreed that there could be some meshing with the language of the two documents.

### **09 015Q-Library**

Joanne Lamothe gave an overview of her budget. The library staff was the only CBA union which settled a contract in town in 2008. The contract would have been funded from an alternate source, but they were directed to level fund, with two years of CBA contractual obligations included in the budget. The CBA agreement provided for 0% in 2008, 2% in 2009 and 3% in 2010. The 2009 2% was a retroactive payment due to be paid July 1<sup>st</sup>. She noted that trust accounts have allowed her to level fund her budget without layoffs.

Councilor DiFazio noted that settlement of the contract turned out well for these workers. He also noted that to be consistent, if the committee requests departments such as the School Department to forego agreed upon raises, he would hope workers in other departments such as the Library would follow suit.

Councilor Mathews noted that if a supplemental budget is required, he would hope that the library union would consider not taking the 3% increase rather than lose staff or close buildings. This is his preference for all departments.

Ms. Lamothe noted that the library has a number of trust funds and a review of the original documents for intent of the donors was conducted. Accommodating the increase in salaries resulted in a decrease in the books and materials line item. Most of the bequests are specifically geared to the purchase of materials and books for the benefit of the library. The total shortfall will be met with \$55,718 from the trust funds. She noted

demand at the library has increased significantly, due to the state of the economy. They are becoming social service agencies in the market. More people are taking advantage of the library's offerings for job searches, internet use and electronic transmittal for employment applications.

Trust fund purchasing is not sustainable funding. Over the years the department has relied more on state aid to libraries for operating expenses, instead of supplementing library programs.

Chairman DiFazio asked for a list of the trust funds in the library's care. Mr. Wilson noted that they are itemized in the donation accounts section of the budget. He noted that the corpus of the trust cannot be used in a bequest, but only the accrued interest income.

Chairman DiFazio asked if the increase in library patronage is mainly due to internet availability and use. Ms. Lamothe noted the library is issuing an average of 75 new cards per week; an unprecedented number. There are currently 33,000 cardholders.

Councilor Mathews asked for a brief update on the condition of the buildings. Ms. Lamothe noted that the Tufts Library which, in addition to the asbestos issue that is to be mitigated, the building was built in 1965 and is suffering by virtue of age. It has a medieval sewer ejection system that has been a nightmare over the last six months. Aging infrastructure, leaking roof, boiler and elevator problems are all maintenance considerations with this building.

Additional parking was added a few years ago. Residents are flocking to the adjacent playground and thereby impacting the building services of the library. Mr. Wilson noted that the estimate provided several years ago for the renovation of the building was \$5 million.

Councilor Mathews noted that at some point in the future the building will need to be closed for renovations and that some plan will need to be in place for library services and relocation of the museum collection housed within the building. The Fogg building, which is currently undergoing renovations, may need to be brought back online as a branch library. Ms. Lamothe noted that based on the number of artifacts, there will be considerable cost to move and store the museum collection.

Chairman DiFazio asked if the Clapp Memorial building has ever been considered as a library building. Ms. Lamothe noted that there is a schematic design in place for a new library, initially proposed on the site of Libby Field, but that the Clapp building has not been broached as a possible alternative library building.

Pratt and North libraries also have infrastructure issues. There was a brief discussion of the activities in the branch libraries and the justification of supporting buildings in a period of diminishing budgets. Chairman DiFazio noted that consolidation of the buildings might be a consideration. Ms. Lamothe noted the days of the branch library have largely disappeared. There has not been a new library bond bill, but there isn't any

indication whether there will be money available in the future for new library construction. Mr. Wilson noted the very last item voted by town meeting was the library study and as a result, a design was produced for new construction. If there is funding to be made available, the town is prepared with a schematic design.

The committee had a brief discussion of the conditions of various other public buildings. Councilor Mathews noted the deplorable condition of the DPW building. Mr. Wilson responded that the DPW was accustomed to working in humble circumstances.

Ms. Lamothe noted that there have been seven meetings of the Fogg future use study committee. There has not been a decision made on what use it will be, however, she noted there is a deed restriction placed on the use of the building, which must be taken into consideration in any reuse plan.

Chairman DiFazio thanked Ms Lamothe for her presentation.

At 8:45 PM, there being no further business, Councilor Mathews made a MOTION to ADJOURN the meeting and was seconded by Councilor Harrington. UNANIMOUSLY VOTED.

Respectfully submitted by Mary Briggs

Approved by Ken DiFazio