



CHELMSFORD FINANCE COMMITTEE
MINUTES

March 12, 2020

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2020-06-05
12:24 PM
TOWN OF CHELMSFORD
PATRICIA E. DZURIS
TOWN CLERK

MEETING: A meeting was held on Thursday, March 12, 2020 at 7:30 PM at Town Hall Office Building, 50 Billerica Road, Chelmsford

PRESENT: J. Clancy, D. Goselin, E. Chambers, K. Duffett, A. Langford, and A. Tanini

ABSENT: V. Parks

ALSO PRESENT: P. Cohen, J. Sousa, G. Hall, R. Jackson, G. Persichetti, S. Jahnle, L. Prescott, P. Dzuris, P. Pedulla, and V. Crocker-Timmons

HANDOUTS: FY21 Veterans Agent Budget Request, PEG Access Cable Television Enterprise Fund Budget, Vault and Storage Room Upgrades Record Management Preservation Plan, CPF Debt Service Schedule

The meeting was called to order at 7:31 PM.

Approval of Minutes:

March 5, 2020:

J. Clancy suggested that the Finance Committee push off approving of the minutes of March 5, 2020 until next meeting as all members had not had a chance to review them. The Finance members agreed.

Warrant Article 7 – Air Quality Studies:

G. Hall thanked the Finance Committee for the opportunity to provide information regarding their rationale for an air quality study. He reported that last October at the eleventh hour the Board of Health issued a letter to the Planning Board regarding the air quality in the areas of Chelmsford near the asphalt plant. He read a letter from the neighbors in this area seeking answers from the Board of Health regarding this issue. The neighbors requested scientific data and answers to the risks in these areas. The letter referenced an article from the Action Unlimited which accused the Planning Board of malfeasance. He provided information regarding the Westford study on the asphalt plant which was based on modeling and dismissed out of hand by the Chelmsford Board of Health as being only one study. He said the neighbors wanted a second study to validate or dismiss the Westford study as well as a new study of the Oak Street plant neighborhood. He said that there were three fiscal considerations to this article: 1. the moderate cost of the actual study, 2. the fiscal hit to the town and residents in terms of

property values if the neighborhood is determined to be hazardous and 3. the fiscal exposure to the Town of potential lawsuits from the affordable housing near the plant. G. Hall stated that the ballpark figure for the studies would be \$50,000 which would be money well spent.

He reported that M. McCall the Assistant Town Manager had obtained the Westford Report which he could send to those who were interested. He added that they would soon have two additional studies requested by the Board of Selectmen. He thanked M. McCall and the Board of Selectmen for obtaining the studies. He noted that \$50,000 may seem like a large sum, but to put it into perspective he noted that the Town had provided two \$75,000 grants to jump start two restaurants and recently spent \$89,000 on pickleball courts. He added that \$50,000 to preserve property values, insulate the town from lawsuits and protect the health of town residents was money well spent. G. Hall stated that if anyone in the audience wanted a copy of the reports they could email him at GTHall@comcast.net.

Veterans Agent FY21 Budget:

R. Jackson reported that the FY2021 budget was pretty much the same as last year. She added that the only difference in her request was that she was requesting the addition of an assistant veteran's agent. She stated that the main line item of her budget was the Chapter 115 benefits which were paid out to veterans or spouses with 75% being reimbursed by the state. She stated that the budgeted amount was \$145,000 for FY2021. She reported that for 2019, \$109,000 had been paid out and \$77,000 was received back from the state. R. Jackson stated that the assistant would be a part-time position which would help with case management for veterans or other eligible community members. She said that she wanted to highlight the significant amount of VA federal benefits that came to Chelmsford residents. She said that in 2019 the amount paid to 507 veterans or beneficiaries on a monthly basis was \$629,063 or \$7,548,756 for the year. She added that these benefits were not automatic, but usually needed to be applied for. She said that she processed as many claims as she could, but an assistant would help with this process and reach more people. She added that it was most important to get veterans onto federal benefits. K. Duffett asked how many hours R. Jackson was looking for an assistant to work. R. Jackson replied that it would be for 24 hours and would add between \$20,000 and \$35,000 to the budget. A. Tanini asked for clarification as to if this request was part of the presented budget. R. Jackson replied that it was not part of the approved budget. P. Cohen confirmed that there were no new positions in the FY2021 budget. E. Chambers asked if services were not currently being met. R. Jackson replied that with the addition of an assistant they could not only maintain current services but could reach out to people who did not know that they were eligible. A. Tanini asked how the assistant could be approved if it was not part of the current budget. P. Cohen replied that an amendment could be made from the floor at Town Meeting. J. Clancy thanked R. Jackson for all the work she did for the veterans.

DPW, Solid Waste, Sewer, Stormwater, Public Facilities FY21 Budget:

S. Jahnle reported that the Stormwater Enterprise was on the third step of the phased process presented at Town Meeting a few years ago. He indicated that the budget had been cut in half on the Town Meeting floor and this step was the final step to bring up the staffing levels and equipment for stormwater projects as originally proposed. He added that this would result in a 50% sewer rate increase for residential going from \$40 to \$60 annually and a commercial rate increase of 40% across the board. He pointed out that the residential rate was a little less than the \$65 which was originally proposed, and a couple of the commercial tiers would come in

several hundred to a couple of thousand less than what was originally presented. He explained that the additions would include three more labor positions and a \$200,000 catch basin cleaner truck to be operated by staff. He added that the current bid for outsourcing catch basin cleaning was \$23 per catch basin. He explained that with 4,500 catch basins in town in a couple of years they could pay for the truck. He added that it would also simplify the inspection process for the EPA permits using two staff members, one cleaning the basin and the other inspecting. S. Jahnle stated that a Vactor truck was also included in the budget which could be used for hydro-excavation, cleaning stream beds and catch basins and accessing wooded areas with an attachment. J. Clancy requested that the DPW budget and information be emailed to the Finance Committee. G. Persichetti apologized for not sending the budgets and said that he would send the information out. G. Persichetti reminded the Finance Committee that the Capital Plan included \$150,000 for the GIS flyover update. S. Jahnle added that the amount was split with \$50,000 each coming from the Town, Sewer Enterprise and Stormwater Enterprise.

G. Persichetti reported that the Sewer budget was basically level funded. He noted that he had brought the electrical charges line item up based on actuals. He said that the increase was due to the electrical charging stations in town. He added that the outlay included the \$50,000 for the GIS flyover and the usual \$20,000 for the SCADA system which now managed all pump stations.

G. Persichetti reported that the Administrative/Engineering division was level funded. He noted that administration was down slightly because the safety specialist was no longer in his budget but had been moved to the Town Manager's budget.

G. Persichetti reported that the Highway division was also level funded without a lot of movement in the budget. He stated that there were no changes in the street lighting budget.

G. Persichetti reported that under Solid Waste, recycling was not bringing in money. He said that transfer stations were closing or were slow with lines and waiting times. He stated that they continued to work with the two outfits available to get the "best deal on the street" right now.

G. Persichetti reported that the Parks division had 1.5 FTE's and had a few minor changes such as an increase in vehicle maintenance. He pointed out that \$16,000 from the mower purchase in 2020 was out of the budget for FY2021. J. Clancy asked how the mower was working. G. Persichetti replied that the new mower was "great".

G. Persichetti reported that the Public Buildings budget was level funded. He stated that they now carried a \$8,800 budget line item for Bolt which was the electric car charging units. He added that there was an increase in the cleaning contract due to the annual increase and the addition of the downstairs offices being added to the contract.

G. Persichetti reported that the Old/North/Auxiliary Buildings division budget increased by \$10,000 from \$30,000 to \$40,000. He explained that this was due to the costs associated with elevator inspection and repair. He added that the state had mandated pre-elevator inspections.

G. Persichetti stated that the main increase in the Facilities budget was the increase of \$50,000 in the building maintenance line item. He said that this included pre-elevator inspections and alarm

inspections. He added that they were doing away with the red wire alarm systems and these systems needed to be transitioned to a new system which included self-monitoring. He said that for any building needing to be changed the initial cost was \$400 per building and then about \$45 per building per month to monitor for a rough estimate of \$27,500 to monitor alarms.

G. Persichetti stated that with there were buildings with older equipment costing more to take care of and buildings with newer equipment making controls available from anywhere which cost more to keep up. He reported that they were going for the third year in a row seeking MSBA funding for a new school.

Article 10 – South Row School Partial Roof Replacement Supplemental Appropriation:

G. Persichetti reported that they worked with MSBA on this project. He said that they explored going outside of MSBA and put the project bid out and had a roof contract ready to go. He said that it ended up being better to stay in the MSBA with a budget of \$516,000 and reimbursement to the town of \$248,870. He said that they would use most, but not all of the funds since there were contingencies built in. He added that they would need to borrow the entire amount to be in the program. J. Clancy asked what the supplemental appropriation would be. P. Cohen replied that it was \$116,646.

Article 13 – Miland Avenue Sewer Pump Station Reconstruction:

S. Jahnle reported that the engineer design for the Miland Avenue pump station was in the fall town warrant and Article 13 covered the reconstruction. He stated that the amount requested for the reconstruction would be \$350,000 from free cash.

Article 16 – Chelmsford Forum Ice Chiller Refrigeration System Replacement:

G. Persichetti reported that there was an issue with the people running the Forum in that it would take them five to seven days before they would return a call. He reported that the estimated cost for a chiller was \$750,000 and they were looking into an electric motor system to work with it. He added that the current system had one of two parts often down due to the age of the system and additionally it was difficult to find parts for the system. K. Duffett asked what the source of the funding was for this Article. G. Persichetti replied that funding may be from a combination of sources including borrowing. P. Cohen added that it would be part of the debt service from the enterprise fund.

Article 26 – Ledge Road & Oak Hill Road Easements for Roadway Purposes:

S. Jahnle reported that due to the increase in traffic in this area the Board of Selectman was looking for a school bus or emergency turn around in this area. He said that there was the need to build a cul-de-sac at Ledge Road and Oak Hill Road. He stated that this would impact one owner at 75 Ledge Road, and they would need to get a 7,700 square foot easement. He stated that they did not have an assessment as of yet. K. Duffett asked what the source of the funding would be. P. Cohen replied that it would be a DPW appropriation under road construction.

Article 27 – Boston Road & Concord Road Easements for Roadway Purposes:

S. Jahnle reported that Article 27 was part of the MassDot improvement plan and would be a four to five-year process. He stated that MassDot would pick up the costs of construction if approved. He stated that it was the area near Triangle Service Center. He said the estimate for this intersection improvement was \$2.7 million. He said that they hoped that MassDot would go

out to bid the project in June or July. He added that this would “tee up” the area for an intersection even though a light would not be going in at this time. He said that the assessment for these easements had started and this article would authorize the Board of Selectmen to acquire the easements. He said that funding for the easements was available in the current year’s growth capital.

Community Preservation Fund FY21 Budget:

L. Prescott reported that this was an important year for Community Preservation because they were paying off the last of the bond for the two town halls which was \$5.8 million. She reported that the budget included a \$140,000 appropriation for each of the areas of open space, historic preservation and public housing. She stated that \$50,000 was budgeted for administration and \$200,000 for budgeted reserves. She reported that they expected a better match from the state next year as the registry of deeds raised their rates with 100% of the increase going to community preservation. She added that they would be ready to move if a land purchase opportunity came up.

Article 25 – CPF: Preservation of Historic Vital Records:

P. Dzuris reported that the prior Town Clerk had started a project in 2013 to assess the environmental conditions of important records. She explained that starting in 2017 “small bites of the apple” were taken with digitization of documents. She explained that they prepared a project timeline including capital budget funding for things like shelving and climate control. She stated that Town Meeting had approved \$57,819 for the record management project as part of the capital plan and they had also received several CPC grants for historic preservation. She noted that the person who wrote the original plan in 2013 and had retired came back as a volunteer to assist in this endeavor. She stated that they had solved a lot of problems which they had with record keeping and now were seeking funding to complete the project. She stated that the end-result of the project would mean that records were protected within the town offices and also accessible to the public online. K. Duffett commented that this was an impressive project.

PEG Access/Cable FY21 Budget:

P. Pedulla reported that the PEG Access/Cable budget was level funded other than two exceptions. He noted that he had cut the budget last year out of an abundance of caution, but they were doing okay with a little extra funding set aside. He added that the two main threats to the budget were the potential FCC rule change and “cord cutting” both of which were at “status quo”. He added that their revenues peaked in 2017 and they were now back to where they were in 2016.

P. Pedulla reported that there was a \$24,000 increase in equipment maintenance from \$13,000 to \$37,000. He stated that this increase was due to the fact that he had only signed a one-year contract last year whereas this year he signed a four-year contract in order to take advantage of the savings. He explained that a one-year contract would be \$10,972 and a four-year contract was \$29,624 resulting in a savings of \$14,264.

P. Pedulla stated that the other main change in the budget was an increase of \$22,000 in outlay for building an internal wall in the Richardson Road facility. He explained that G. Persichetti had offered the bay right next to PEG to the Police Department. He explained that the cost

estimate to build a wall to separate the two sections was about \$20,000. He added that if revenue income stayed the same then they would be in perfect shape.

Article 18 – Chelmsford Telemedia Computer Servers:

P. Pedulla reported that they tried to save all Telemedia productions. He said that they had a 30 TB server which was now full. He said that the replacement cost for a larger server was \$20,000. J. Clancy asked what the capacity of the new server would be. P. Pedulla replied that he did not have the specifications, but it would be bigger. He added that they would compress the productions as they were mainly concerned with the information.

Review Budget Hearing and Spring Town Meeting Warrant Article Schedule:

J. Clancy reported that the Chelmsford Public Schools and Nashoba were targeted to come in next week with voting taking place the following week, but the committee would have to wait and see what happened.

Public Comment:

P. Cohen reported that there may be an emergency change to open meeting law due to COVID-19. He noted that there may be limits to the number of people who can meet, and meetings may need to become remote. He added that this was an unprecedented situation. He said that he had spoken to the town moderator and they were in a “wait and see” mode. He said that Town Meeting may take place as scheduled in April or it may be delayed until May or June. He added that some schools had already closed, but he had not heard anything about Chelmsford schools yet. He added that S. Gates had closed the Cultural Center and the Senior Center had suspended all social activities. He added that they would still be providing Meals on Wheels, critical transportation and adult social day care. He reported that the library was open for the time being, but all program activities had been cancelled. He stated that they were cleaning the facilities more frequently and avoiding meetings where they could.

P. Cohen reported that this was both a health and economic crisis and there would be financial impact to the budget moving forward. He added that he was confident that Chelmsford would end the fiscal year in the black and hoped that come summer and fall things would rebound.

P. Cohen reported that they would be going out for refunding on bonds in order to take advantage of historic low interest rates. He added that they would negotiate this in April and expected to see significant savings. He noted that it was the prudent thing to do at this time.

P. Cohen stated that they were staying on top of the situation and would keep everyone updated. J. Clancy asked what the best resource was to get information. P. Cohen replied that the town web site was the best resource for information on impacts to the town from the Coronavirus. He added that they may also use the code red phone system if there was a crisis situation.

K. Duffett made a motion to adjourn. A. Tanini seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 9:01 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Pamela A. Morrison