

**Special Meeting of the Town of Richmond Selectboard**  
Selectboard Minutes  
11/8/2021

Members Present by Zoom: Bard Hill, David Sander,  
Members In-Person: Christine Werneke, Jay Furr  
Absent: June Heston

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Others Present In- Person: Josh Arneson, Town Manager; Linda Parent, Town Clerk,  
and the meeting was recorded by MMCTV

Others Present by Zoom: Kathy Daub-Stearns, Admin.; Kendall Chamberlain, Water &  
Sewer; Ravi Venkataraman, Planner; Dennis Gile, Fire Chief; Peter Gosselin, Highway;  
Rebecca Mueller, Library; Ian B, Suzanne Parent, OCCC; Angelike Contois, MMCTV; 215-  
421-5990

**Called to Order:** 7:00 PM

**Welcome by** Christine

**Public Comment:** none

1. Mary Houle said agencies applying for appropriations that do not complete the forms completely should not be considered.
  
2. Mary Houle asked if corrective actions could be confirmed or denied related to the personal and personnel information that was disclosed. Josh replied that no actions had been taken since that time. Mary said she found that very distressing.

## **II. Review and Discussion of the FY23 Budget**

### **a) Review of changes to budget since last meeting and discussion of current consumer price index**

Christine said the reason the index was being discussed was to try and ground the increase in the budget with the index.

Josh reported:

- that the Selectboard stipend was increased
- that insurance would be broken out into the different departments at a later time and was currently lumped into one sum
- that the adjustments were highlighted from the previous meeting

Discussion included:

- that Bard asked what the % increase was at this point. Josh replied 3.52% over the prior year.
- that the increase last year was 1.32% before the appropriation and conservation increase that was passed on Town Meeting Day
- that with the use of unrestricted funds the rate was kept low

Discussion included:

- that Christine said the CPI is 4.1% and this was a way to measure inflation. Bard said at the time it was not clear what the economic impact would be on anyone
- that the reappraisal would not be factored into the budget since it would not be completed for a few years.
- that Ian Bender said there had been a lot of one-time money, he did not think the CPI was the indicator but what people are actually being paid stating wages were not going up to match the CPI. Christine thought that was a good point and asked what the Board was thinking about as a target. June thought keeping the increase close to last year's was the way to go and be conservative when looking at the budget. June thought 2% was a reasonable goal for this pass at the budget. Christine agreed saying it did not mean it could not go higher or lower. Bard agreed that for now the performance target would be 2%, June thought the Board should be strategic about what there was in unassigned funds that could be used to reduce it below 2% to help reduce what is needed to be raised in taxes. Bard observed that was consistent with discussions last year.
- that even small increases could still result in big tax bills because the increases are cumulative, and school taxes were not set by the Selectboard
- that Connie thought after having the numbers from the auditors going through the budget from the top down was her suggestion. She said the 3.52% increase included her recommendations for use of unrestricted funds.

## **b) Planning and Zoning**

Ravi reported:

- that the engineering number was updated to reflect engineering review for DRB projects

Discussion included:

- that legal was switched over to a reserve fund with a cap of \$8,000 and no funds needed to be raised with that change and this would be a new reserve account. June thought restricting the money only for this use was something they were trying to get away from, Josh explained that this was instead of raising \$8,000 each year, June thought having it go to unrestricted funds was better. Bard said that we use the term restricted but was not legally restricted, the Selectboard could move it without going back to the voters. Josh said the Town Center Fund is an example of a fund that would need voter approval. Christine thought having a way to build in some offsets would be the way to go. Jay wondered what the cap for unassigned funds should be. Connie said she had big plans for the unassigned funds. Christine asked to have half the legal offset by unassigned funds. Ravi said there may be a day when all the legal funds will be used even though we are usually under budget.

## **c) Fire Department**

Josh reported:

- that there were no changes

Connie reported:

- that there were changes that were offset by each other

Dennis Gile reported:

- that the department needed a larger truck and the cost could be \$200,000

#### **d) Police Department**

Kyle reported:

- that he updated the fuel savings to reflect the Tesla purchase but did not have an accurate dataset to use so he used his best guess with a result of a 10% decrease adding there could be more savings from maintenance. Christine asked to have the gas and electric lines separated, Connie agreed.

Discussion included:

- that Jay asked if insurance for the Tesla was more expensive, Josh replied insurance was based on value, so it probably was more expensive. Having a financial review of the performance and cost of the Tesla will be done in the future.

#### **e) Highway and Recreation & Trails**

Christine reported:

- that the amount for paving Volunteers' Green was engineering only with actual paving to be done in the summer of 2023, Jay pointed out that conversations with the abutting landowner were needed.

Discussion included:

- that Jay asked about the tennis court fund, Connie said some money was raised for it but the idea never went anywhere, Bard agreed with Connie's recollection. Connie hoped some of the small funds, like this one, could be discontinued and would get advise from the auditors. Linda said there was a resident that should be consulted, Bard said if someone gives us money for a specific purpose what authority would the Selectboard have to do something else with it. Connie said it was why she was asking the auditors.

#### **Highway**

Discussion included:

- that Bard said we have contemplated wage adjustments and asked about what to do as related to the budget; Christine said this was on the next regular Selectboard meeting agenda. She said the results would not be available in time so she thought looking at wages and looking at ways to implement recommendations should be done. Christine thought once the results from the study were back decisions would need to be made about impacts to the budget. Bard said the workforce labor market was evolving in real time, Jay thought Richmond might need hiring bonus' as other towns were doing.
- that Jay asked about the sidewalks and if unassigned funds could be used, Connie said that was the plan. Josh said that Pete was going to do most of the work. Josh will clarify with Pete once he was back from vacation.
- that June asked why the illuminated crosswalk was removed, Josh said there was one for this year but the survey from CCCRP was inconclusive about the need for another lighted crosswalk. Bard said when there are too many it degrades people's awareness of them so not having them too close was important. June said people are complaining about the danger of where they are crossing, Christine said using data was what was decided, and the traffic experts decided another lighted cross walk was not advisable but made other suggestions to correct the problems. Jay asked about putting a sidewalk in near the market to alleviate the problem, Bard said he remembered there being confusion about all the elements in that area and there was no plan but recognition something needed to be done

Connie reported:

- that her recommendation was to not take a three (3) year loan for the truck but pay for it out of unassigned funds
- that raising 10-15% of the funds for some of the equipment was for deposits on the equipment.
- that the capital plan was shown, Connie said there was a time Roger Brown wanted the town to not have loans and at the time it was not possible but now she thought could be done, there were a few options presented including taking loans. She said she realized "WOW Roger's idea could actually work" when she ran the numbers to see what would be needed to never have to take a loan for big pieces of highway equipment. Jay asked how much unassigned money there was if nothing was changed and thought digging into the \$871,000 for sidewalks could be done, Bard said FEMA was like an accounts receivable. Christine asked if Connie had three (3) years of information as well as YTD information for the unassigned funds to have an understanding of what the fund balance may be at the end of FY22, Connie said because of vacancies there were variables and health insurance could impact the balance to a great degree. Connie said her plan was very aggressive but looking at the financial future she thought it was the right thing, June said we are looking at FY21 and there is this \$871,000 balance and having seen the draft audit the net position the town has is \$17million dollars, Connie said we did not have \$5,000,000 in cash. June asked why we were only looking at using \$871,000, Connie said because there are reserve funds that will be used, and even after that there is \$4 million, Connie said we cannot spend that money, June said it is not all reserve funds, June asked what the total of the reserve funds was, Christine said that some of the reserve accounts are not legal reserve accounts, so if the \$871,000 was spent there would still be cash flow. June said in reality sidewalks could be offset. Josh showed an overview of the reserve funds from last years budget.
- that with all the offsetting suggested the proposed budget was still over 3%
- that Christine suggested Connie pull the information related to the unassigned fund for next week's meeting so members can be prepared better for the next budget meeting
- that every \$30,000 equals 1% of the budget rate
- that Christine thought it would be important to let voters know what the options are if a bond vote for sidewalks was done to offset more of the budget. Bard said there may be infrastructure funds that may impact the budget as well.
- that Connie will provide information at the next Selectboard meeting if possible.

#### **f) Library Department**

Rebecca reported:

- that there were not too many surprises
- that because of using substitute there were not vacancy savings
- that she was trying to get back to what normal used to be
- that there has been an increase in the in-person use of the library

Christine asked about the computer line and whether there was room to reduce the line based on need, Rebecca said for FY 22 she was already at 90% and that it included the price of database licensing. She said FY 21 was underrepresented.

#### **g) Town Administration and Assessors**

Discussion included:

- that June asked about the 53% increase for insurance, Connie replied that with Kathy Daub-Stearns' resignation the insurance was budgeted for a two (2) person plan

- that training and education was reduced by 80% because the trainings have been free or much less than expected. June wanted to keep the number at \$5000 to have the new committee be able to do the work we were expecting them to do. Jay agreed, Bard said that being clear about what the training outcomes we are looking for would be important, Connie said because there is not on-site training it is less expensive than when we were doing in-person.
- that Christine asked about maintenance and whether the amount could come down any, Josh thought there was an offset for it already, and there was.
- that Ian Bender asked about assigning money for the Racial Equity Group, Christine said that there was money budgeted for training that could be leveraged, and there were trainings that have been done with town staff and the police regarding equity and inclusion. Kathy let the board know the VLCT recordings of the training staff received were available.

### **Assessors**

There were no questions

### **h) Charitable Appropriations**

Discussion included:

- that Christine mentioned Mary Houle's comment and asked if anyone had reviewed the applications. June and Jay were going to review the applications. Josh showed them where to find the applications on the town website.
- that COTS did get their application in.
- that Connie noted that CUSI still had not requested the funding from last year
- that FPF is not a charitable organization and so should be moved out of appropriations but still fund them on another line item. Kathy will note the appropriations tracking and provide them information

### **III. Adjourn**

June moved to Adjourn; Jay seconded. Roll Call Vote: Jay, Bard, David, and Christine voted affirmatively. Motion passed. Meeting ended at: 10PM