

Town Council Meeting  
April 7, 2016  
Work Session on School and Municipal Budgets

Present: Councilman Laboissonniere, Vice-President Carlson, Councilman McGee, President Shibley, Town Manager Waters. Councilwoman Duxbury was absent.

Review of Evacuation Plan  
Pledge of Allegiance

#420 Municipal Court: Judge Arthur Capaldi stated that he is asking only for the minimum required by the ordinance and agrees with what the Town Manager has presented. Judge Capaldi has not asked for a raise, has been at the same rate of \$15,000 for many years. He only requests that a raise is supported for the clerk who does the office work and mans the phones every day.

He added that *expenses* have been consistent, the difference is in the income from the court over the last years, and that depends on what cases the court handles. The revenue stream has nothing to do with the activity of the court. Traffic court makes money on fines; no court is in the business of making money.

Councilman McGee thinks Municipal Court provides a great service for the town and its citizens, especially where people don't have to take time out of work to go to court for things such as dog issues and zoning violations.

510 – Probate Court Judge Jean Boulanger stated that the proposed budget before you is similar to prior years and covers what the court has to do on a day to day basis. Probate Court meets twice a month; we are always dealing with other attorneys preparing to file things in Probate Court and we accommodate them however we can. You will see me here a couple of days before Court, going over and reading what will be before me.

Police Department Colonel MacDonald has revised the request for a new police department as a combined request along with the Human Services Department, for a combined location at Wood Street. He showed a proposed layout for the building, stating that Wood Street is centrally located to both Route 3 and Route 117. In this proposed scenario he would ask for about \$8 million (2/3 of what we asked for last time) and in the end would result in two new and/or renovated buildings. The Northeast Collaborative has been out to see this, and already did this type of project in Lincoln, where it cost about \$3 million for a new building. In addition, we like the fact that we will be connected to a building with elderly population. Would install cameras, security and the cost would be less than a stand alone structure.

Pat Shurtleff, Human Services Director, thinks this is a good fit for Human Services. Ms. Shurtleff works quite often along with the police department. In the past there was talk about maybe moving to the annex; however, where we are located now we have an established bus route and ADA transportation. There would be an impact on the daycare program by moving to the annex.

Vice-President Carlson likes the idea and the fact that the need would be more like \$8 million rather than up to \$14 million. A proposed drawing of the new facility was made available at the meeting. However, the town would need to move the buses to a secure parking facility.

Manager Waters thinks that perhaps we should plan on an \$8 million number, then work within that budget. Mrs. Shurtleff advised that the Northeast Collaborative has already seen this building. Vice President Carlson asked if there might be any grants available and Mrs. Shurtleff advised that it is difficult to get money for municipal buildings. Colonel MacDonald thinks there could be money out there, possibly from EMA.

If it is going to be on the November referendum, it would need to be solid for the ballot by the first week of August. Councilman McGee believes we need to have a PR push, to show it would be money well spent.

Councilman Laboissonniere added that, to play devil's advocate, we have had our fingers in the dike for quite some time with the old police building. Any time there is a renovation, you run across problems that you didn't know you had. Sometimes a new facility is cheaper than renovating an older facility. Is the Northeast Collaborative adept at this, have they inspected this building?

Mrs. Shurtleff replied that they are adept and in fact have already inspected the building. Little by little we have done a lot of things there. We have about 200 people come through that building a day, using water, bathrooms, etc. The Police Department doesn't have that level of traffic, so I think the new building will have the upgraded features. Mr. Laboissonniere asked if the town is going to

consider a new human services building, then why aren't we doing new police department building? Colonel MacDonald thinks a new police department would cost a lot more than a human services building. As far as a timeline, Colonel MacDonald thought the human services building would be done during the summer of 2017 and the police department renovation in the summer/spring of 2018.

With regard to the police budget, Colonel MacDonald talked about the "COPS" grant, with the goal to get more officers into the schools. The "COPS" grant is a good tool to do that, but we need to apply by May and should have the answers before the FTM.

We would like an officer in the Middle School, and a DARE-style program in the elementary schools. We used to have a DARE program and it worked very well.

The COPS grant is structured: one officer is paid 25% by the town for three years, then the fourth year 100% is paid by the town. Superintendent Levis would like to find a way to fund 25% for one officer for the three years. He thinks this is a great opportunity, however, without the grant though, this won't go forward.

Councilman McGee asked Col. MacDonald's about his request for a part time EMA director. Col. MacDonald indicated that in the package he sent to Council, he states that this position would be 50/50 and he (p/t EMA director) would write his own grant. If we agree on a \$15,000 or \$20,000 salary for this person, in the grant you would get half of that back, and put it back in the general fund.

Col. MacDonald also explained the need for a part time dispatcher. It would be strictly part time, not a police officer, but a dispatcher, eliminating extra overtime.

## PARKS AND RECREATION

Vice-President Carlson remarked that she has heard that people are upset about way the summer camp and field trips are going to work this year. She realizes there are people who have no choice and will have to pay for the trips; this is a large monetary commitment. She asked Mr. Primiano to keep a close eye on this. President Shibley advised that he has not received any complaints about the summer program.

As far as revenue, Mr. Primiano said they have taken in about \$83,000 so far. There was discussion about funds that are kept separate (tee shirt, transportation fund, etc.) and impact fees. When asked about responses to the summer job employment opportunities, Mr. Primiano responded that he has seen quite a few applications, but there are needed key positions, such as lifeguards, which call for special certifications.

Councilman Laboissonniere asked Mr. Primiano to explain "donations" and Mr. Primiano replied that is mostly for summer entertainment, music programs and sponsorships. A local business might sponsor a local musical act, actually, Coventry just received a \$1,000 donation from Centreville Bank.

Councilwoman Carlson asked if impact fees can be used to offset budget requests from other departments and Finance Director Thibeault replied that they can be used to offset capital expenses. Mrs. Carlson asked DPW Director McGee if he has plans to use impact fees and he replied that he does, if the entire capital budget is not approved, there are some items that we need to get taken care, one being a flail mower and the other a water tank for the street sweeper. Mr. Thibeault added that some of the DPW impact fees are restricted because of a Superior Court agreement with the developer of the Oaks. Some impact fees will have to go toward paving of the immediate neighborhood. We are not going to use impact fees this year because we have the infrastructure bond. Planning Director Paul Sprague was asked how many permits are out there and what the town can look toward with regard to impact fees. Mr. Sprague replied that there are several developments going in with impact fees at \$7596 per unit, for a total of about 200 new units to look forward to.

President Shibley asked Library Director Lynn Blanchette how the childrens playground/park is coming along and she replied that she hasn't heard back from the grant yet.

IT Director Ed Warzycha advised that he had originally proposed to add \$30,000 to his budget for filming town meetings via "clerkbase". However, since he sensed a lack of support, he went to an alternate plan, which is to film in-house with a couple of fixed cameras, not live streaming. He will purchase new removable microphones and cameras so that the system can be used elsewhere in town. His plan is to begin the camera system with Town Council meetings and expand out to other meetings such as Planning and Zoning if it turns out to be worthwhile. Mrs. Carlson indicated that she would like to have a key word search available for Town Council minutes, for example. Mr. Warzycha replied that it is difficult because the minutes appear in PDF form and it is not secure to

publish word documents on the website. However, Councilman McGee feels there may be better places to put this money than filming meetings. Councilman Laboissonniere thinks that in a year where there is so much going on, he doesn't really see this as a necessary item. He agrees that it would be nice to have it, especially if the objective is to market the town, but if we are pushing a 4% tax increase then I don't know how necessary this is.

DPW Director McGee announced an Eco Depot for hazardous waste collection on Saturday April 9, at the Public Works Department, from 8 am to 1 pm in conjunction with a drug "give back" being conducted by the police department along with a shredding event. On Sunday, April 10, the annual rabies clinic will be held at the public works garage from 9 am to 12 pm.

### School Department

Vice President Carlson asked if the town gets any reimbursements for any of the special schools, an example would be medical reimbursements. Craig Levis, Asst. Superintendent, doesn't believe so, however, there could be some medical reimbursement for students with disabilities. Of the 97 out of district tuitions, about 35 students attend special ed programs at other schools.

Councilwoman Carlson had questions pertaining to all day kindergarten and the addition of teaching assistants. It is not mandated by the state, these positions are not required. So with the \$134,000 you want to add seven assistants to the nine we already have, making a total of 16. Do we need that many? Mr. Levis responded that we do; they are part time with 2 hrs in the morning and 2 hrs in the afternoon and they are not contractual positions. There is no intent to go full time with these positions. He feels that enrollment is on target, to justify the number of assistants. In addition, it is important for early childhood. This is not a change in how we service kindergarten students. There are some school districts who have full time paraprofessionals in the classroom. We are not looking for that. Some of these children haven't been in school before, this is all day kindergarten, a transition phase. We really believe this allows them a good start to their education and this is probably the minimum compromise, with what we are trying to accomplish.

Vice-President Carlson remarked that we are looking at \$44 million in salaries and benefits of the total \$68 million. It is shocking to me that 68 percent of the budget is going to salaries and benefits. Then next year on top of that, have to renegotiate the teachers' contract. That is a huge chunk of the budget. Mr. Levis commented that salaries are the majority of any school budget. He is meeting with Mr. Waters on a regular basis in order to be able to work together and plan to bargain in good faith. But I hear what you are saying and Mr. D'Amico and I will look for efficiencies.

Councilman McGee added that how much the teachers make is a tough sell to the taxpayers, especially when they look at that pie chart. It was also something he heard very often on the campaign trail. I am really hoping that we can bargain in good faith this time around.

President Shibley asked why we have students going to schools such as Chariho, Foster/Glocester, Pawtucket, Scituate, Warwick? What do they have that we don't offer? And it seems some costs are up to \$20,000 per student? Mr. Levis replied that some have special needs, and some have career vo-tech programs that Coventry doesn't offer. As far as the cost of education per student, it tends to cost more to educate special needs students, maybe an average cost of \$20,000, but there are 10-13 students costing over \$45,000. Mr. Levis added that we have had students that cost us well over \$100,000.

Mr. Laboissonniere feels that with a program where we can potentially spend over \$100,000 per student puts us in a state permanent fiscal crisis. What do other school districts do to bring in revenue to address these needs? What are their other funding sources? Mr. Levis remarked that when you do the right thing for the kids, it is cost effective. He has spoken with Manager Waters about doing a presentation as a community, on what you get for your tax dollars. I think people have a right to inquire and to know what they get for their money.

Manager Waters advised that if the budget stays the way it is now, the tax increase will be approximately 3%.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Carlson seconded by Councilman McGee to adjourn work session. All voted aye.

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Town Clerk