

(The following is not a verbatim transcript of comments or discussion that occurred during the meeting, but rather a summarization intended for general informational purposes. All motions and votes are the official records).

SPECIAL FINANCE COMMITTEE – MAY 15, 2020
(BUDGET HEARINGS)

A special meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Friday, May 15, 2020 via web-ex.

CALL MEETING TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 A.M. by the Chair.

Present Councilmember Paul J. McAuley
 Councilmember John P. Donegan
 Councilmember Edward J. Brady
 Councilmember Christopher G. Paplauskas
 Councilmember Kenneth J. Hopkins
, Council Vice-President Michael W. Favicchio, Chair
 Council President Michael J Farina

Also Present: Councilmember Steven A. Stycos
 Daniel Parrillo, Director of Administration
 John Psilopoulos, Deputy Director of Administration
 Christopher Rawson, City Solicitor
 Steven Angell, Assistant City Solicitor
 Robert Strom, Finance Director
 David DiMaio, City Council Budget Analyst
 Rosalba Zanni, Acting City Clerk

EXECUTIVE

Director Strom appeared to speak and stated that his Assistant, Gianna Vannini, forwarded the City Council members actuals for Fiscal Year 2020 for today and tomorrow's hearings.

Director Strom stated that now through May 14th for this year, we are right on line at approximately 86½ %. For next year, it went up a little due to the Mayor's salary, dues to the RI Cities and Towns and we also increased Hospitalization through the whole budget.

Chair asked what the current salary is for the Mayor. Director Parrillo stated that it is still at \$82,000. The proposed budget shows salary at \$102,000.

Councilmember McAuley stated that at this point, he would like to delete the City Council and Mayor's salary increase due to the difficult times we are in and he understands it cannot be done through the budget because it would only be for six months. He is only looking to postpone it until we get into a better financial situation. He questioned if this would have to be done by Ordinance. Director Strom stated that this should be addressed to the Solicitor. Solicitor Rawson stated that this could be done by Ordinance in January.

Chair questioned increase in Hospitalization. Director Strom stated that we received an increase from United and specifically Blue Cross would be going up 45%.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

LAW DEPARTMENT

Director Strom stated that for Legal Expenses, this year we are tracking better than we have in the last six years.

Solicitor Rawson stated that we are tracking pretty well this year given that we are self-insured and we do not have a large budget overall.

Chair asked if that includes some of the settlement money that has been paid out. Director Strom stated, no, that is just legal fees. Some of the settlements are paid out of the Claims budget.

Councilmember Stycos questioned reduction in Part-Time Help. Director Strom stated that that is for Anna Marino who has retired, but comes in on a very limited basis to help the Solicitor with paperwork.

Solicitor Rawson stated that there are six Solicitors of a budget of \$190,000 with no benefits:
Assistant Solicitor Marsella handles Zoning, Planning and Municipal Court matters.
Assistant Solicitor Iglizzi handles issues in litigation.
Assistant Solicitor Angell handles contract matters.
Assistant Solicitor Verdecchia handles City Council meetings.
Assistant Solicitor Orton handles Municipal litigation.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

INSURANCE CLAIMS & RISK MANAGEMENT

Director Strom appeared to speak and stated that Gianna Vannini, Claims Clerk, and Solicitor Rawson are also present to answer any questions. He stated that this budget is in line and we will have a balanced budget. The Expenses are true to form and there was a settlement of \$200,000 that was put in a separate line item under Settlements. In this year's budget, we are not anticipating any settlements so that line item was not included. There is a slight increase in Worker's Compensation Premium.

Councilmember Stycos stated that Council President Farina had asked during the School Department hearing that if this budget is passed as requested for the School and the State reduced the amount of State Aid from what is in the budget because of Maintenance of Effort, we would be on the hook for the balance. He asked if this is correct. Council President Farina stated that this is a big concern and question for him and the Solicitor would have to research that, even though Director Balducci stated yes.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

The meeting recessed at 9:45 a.m.

The meeting reconvened at 10:00 a.m.

FIRE DEPT. & FIRE ALARM

Director Strom appeared to speak and stated that Chief MacIntosh and Deputy Chief Warren are also present to answer any questions.

Director Strom stated that the budget for 2020-2021 shows an increase of \$1.8 million due to Salary increase which are contractual, Overtime, Severance, Hospitalization, Grant Match and Hydrant Rental.

Chair asked who maintains the hydrants. Director Parrillo stated that he believes Providence Water does.

Chief MacIntosh stated they are applying for SAFA Grant, but not sure if we can get that Grant. There are two firefighters who are before the State Retirement Board and, hopefully, will be off our payroll at the end of the month.

Councilmember Hopkins stated that prior to his retirement, former Chief Valetta stated concerns in construction in some of the fire houses, specifically repair of floors. He questioned where in budget this is listed. Chair stated that this may be a Capital Improvement issue. Director Strom stated that the Fire Station Upgrades of \$400,000 was in last year's approved budget and has not been addressed yet. Chief MacIntosh agreed with Director Strom and also stated that some of the monies have been expended and some repairs have been done.

Director Strom stated that the budget we are in now, we are running over budget in Overtime, Severance and IOD, but has seen some improvements specifically in Overtime.

Councilmember McAuley questioned if the department anticipates any COVID money. Director Strom stated that we have approximately \$133,000 in Overtime, which is 75% reimbursed and approximately \$15,000 in Medical Supplies. We are still adding to that list of money that we could get reimbursed at 75% from FEMA. We also added two more Rescues, which we could be reimbursed for expenses for.

Council President Farina stated that he has asked this question every year and has been told that they will work on it, and he asked again, what will we do differently to make sure we live with the \$4.5 million for Overtime? Director Strom stated that with the additional twenty firefighters and with people coming back from IOD, he feels that Overtime will drop. Director Parrillo stated that minimum manning is the driver for the Overtime.

Councilmember Stycos stated that in the past, it was suggested that the City encourage light duty work for injured firefighters. He asked if that is working. Director Parrillo stated that we currently have two firefighters for a short period of time. We are trying to work with the contract to reference consistent with what the doctors are stating in their doctor's notes. To his knowledge, we do not have anyone working on light duty.

Councilmember Stycos addressed the increase in Fire Hydrants, he asked how much of the increase is due to new developments and suggested that the City should probably look at having developers absorb the costs. Director Strom stated that we pay by the hydrant, but he does not know how much is due to new development. Chair stated that he would think that would have to be part of the Impact Fees. Director Strom stated that this is possibly something that should be discussed with Planning.

Councilmember McAuley asked what the total cost is for the chemical fire that occurred last year. Director Strom stated that the total cost, including Overtime, was approximately \$600,000 - \$700,000. Councilmember McAuley stated that he is confident that the \$4.5 million is potentially obtainable.

Council President Farina asked how many positions were assumed in next year's budget for retirement. Director Strom stated five. Council President Farina asked if those include retirements that will happen in the next ninety days. Director Strom stated, no.

Council President Farina asked if the SAFA Grant is in this budget. Director Strom stated, no. The six that they are applying for is not reflected in this budget. Council President Farina asked if the SAFA Grant is 100% reimbursable. Chief MacIntosh stated that it is 75% reimbursable the first year, 75% the second year and 25% the third year.

Council President Farina asked if there are any firefighters out due to COVID. Chief MacIntosh stated, no. We have not had one positive case in the Fire Department.

Councilmember Hopkins asked, out of the twenty recruits brought in, have we done any work to try to recruit minority or females. Chief MacIntosh stated that going forward, any potential hires would be hired off same existing list that has been established.

Chair asked if there are any minorities from the existing list. Chief MacIntosh stated, no.

Councilmember Stycos asked why Fire Alarm is going up so much and why the new system is not saving us money. Chief MacIntosh stated that the increase in Fire Alarm has mainly to do with the maintenance of all computers internally.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

POLICE DEPARTMENT; ANIMAL CONTROL; HARBOR MASTER

Director Strom appeared to speak and stated that Colonel Winqvist and Major Patalano are also present to answer any questions.

Director Strom stated that Expenses are tracking where they should be and they are at 87.32%. They have \$30,000 in additional dollars for COVID expenses, which they will be reimbursed at 75%. For next year, the budget has been increased by approximately \$40,000. The biggest increase is Pension Contribution and Hospitalization. Revenues are a little down because of COVID situation. We are hoping they will improve between now and the end of June.

Chair questioned status of the Police fleet. Colonel Winqvist stated that they are doing well thanks to the support of the City Council.

Councilmember Paplauskas asked, of the amount allocated, how many vehicles does that get? Colonel Winqvist stated that they hope to get eight front line vehicles.

Councilmember Hopkins commended the Department and anything that they need to keep our City safe, he will support.

Councilmember McAuley stated that he agrees with Councilmember Hopkins and they are all heroes in his eyes. The men and women in the Department treat people with the outmost respect.

Councilmember Brady echoed Councilmembers Hopkins and McAuley's comments.

Chair questioned the cut in School Initiative line item. Director Strom stated that this was based on discussions he had with Colonel Winqvist and Major Patalano.

Chair asked how many schools use heating oil, because there could be savings in locking in for oil for the schools. Director Strom stated that he does not know. That would be a question for the School Superintendent or the School Chief Financial Officer.

Councilmember Donegan questioned the decrease in Special Duty line item and questioned if that may be lower because those events will probably not happen in the foreseeable future. Major Patalano stated that we do not know what is going to happen in the future so we feel it should be level funded right now.

Colonel Winqvist thanked the City Council for all their support through the years and without that support, the Department would not be where it is at.

No discussion was held regarding Animal Control and Harbor Master.

MUNICIPAL COURT

Director Strom appeared to speak and stated that Municipal Court has been closed for some time due to COVID. They have been doing some business remotely and by mail. We budgeted \$635,000 this year and they are tracking on budget. They are at 72% at this time, which this does not include most of May and June. On the Expense side, they are under budget. For next year, the budget increased due to a third part-time person. The department expenses increased due to a new system which requires additional money which will in turn give us additional Revenues. The Revenues have been level funded for next year.

Elizabeth Bettis, Administrative Court Assistant, and Chief Judge Matthew Smith were present to answer any questions.

Judge Smith stated that he is happy to have the third part-time position filled with a person of color and Spanish speaking Latina. He stated the following items that will drive down revenues: The cancellation of St. Mary's Feast is going to be a hit; fewer drivers on the road and less tickets being issued.

Director Strom stated that the \$635,000 was predicated on meeting with Judge Smith and Ms. Bettis in March and that was the number that they felt was reasonable at the time. This year there will be a shortfall, but he is optimistic about next year.

Councilmember McAuley asked Judge Smith what he was tracking before the pandemic. Judge Smith stated that they were projected to meet their goal or probably exceed them. He also stated that they are taking great steps in getting Revenues in even though the office is closed to the public.

Ms. Bettis stated that they have done community service over the phone and suspense letter is also being sent out. Everything they can do over the phone, mail or online, they are doing to get Revenue in.

Judge Smith thanked everyone from Ms. Bettis down to the staff and Administration for all the work they do and with the support of Colonel Winkvist and Major Patalano and the men and women in the Police Department in helping Municipal Court in getting to where they are. They are second to Providence regarding total Revenues. Municipal Court has made a lot of progress and we have the first female judge and hopes the new Chief Judge, if he is not re-appointed, continues with progress with this department and not go backwards.

Councilmember Hopkins stated that there does not seem to be a lot of money coming in for building code violations. He would like to understand the system a little better. He questioned if the fines could be increased. Judge Smith stated that last year, he created a special calendar, which he sat on every other Thursday for non-traffic, non-moving violations. In the last year, there has been a significant improvement in new staff in the Inspections Department. Prior to that, the Court was not getting full cooperation from the staff. It is going in the right direction. He thinks a change in Solicitors might be in order without signaling anyone.

Ms. Bettis stated that they are not trying to punish people. Those may be people who are elderly and on fixed income or people who are new to the City and trying to fix up their home. It may be an issue where the Solicitor may not have the time to dedicate to that issue. This may be something that may help the Inspections Department drastically. There have only been fourteen cases adjudicated for minimum housing. She is certain there are more than fourteen homes in the City that have violations.

Councilmember Stycos questioned what the Revenues are for St. Mary's Feast. Ms. Bettis stated that she did some research and for the last three years, they usually take in \$6,000 to \$9,500 in Revenues in parking tickets and those tickets range between \$25 to \$200.

Councilmember Stycos asked if the Court has any recommendations to the City Council of things that could be changed by Ordinance. Judge Smith stated that he would like to see changes in all Municipal moving violations and not just overnight parking. He would like a little more authority to follow through and go after the out of town homeowners and out of town bank-owned properties.

Ms. Bettis stated that the animal Ordinances don't have any teeth to allow full enforcement. They are also receiving feedback from the public regarding parking passes, mostly from students.

Chair suggested that Judge Smith and Ms. Bettis submit any suggested Ordinances or ideas in writing to the City Council.

Judge Smith thanked the City Council for the opportunity he was given to serve as Chief Judge.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

The meeting adjourned at 1:45 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Rosalba Zanni
Acting City Clerk