**TOWN COUNCIL WORK SESSION**

# January 4, 2016

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

The legislative work session of the Jamestown Town Council was called to order by President Trocki at 6:30 p.m. in the Rosamond A. Tefft Council Chambers of the Jamestown Town Hall at 93 Narragansett Avenue, Jamestown.

1. **ROLL CALL**

The following members were present:

Kristine S. Trocki, President

Mary E. Meagher, Vice-President

Blake A. Dickinson

Michael G. White

Thomas P. Tighe

Also present:

Andrew E. Nota, Town Administrator

Christina Collins, Finance Director

Michael Gray, Public Works Director

M. Teresa Paiva-Weed, State Senator District 13

Deborah L. Ruggiero, State Representative District 74

Cathy Kaiser, School Committee Chair

Peter D. Ruggiero, Town Solicitor

Cheryl A. Fernstrom, Town Clerk

1. **TOWN COUNCIL WORK SESSION**

**With Senator M. Teresa Paiva-Weed and Representative Deborah L. Ruggiero to review legislation, issues, concerns and challenges affecting the Town of Jamestown during the 2016 session of the Rhode Island General Assembly**

President Trocki welcomed our legislative delegation. Rep. Ruggiero gave an overview of important events and legislation affecting Jamestown in 2015:

* The Legislature passed enabling legislation for a $1,500,000 bond for purchase of the PAC property, which did not go forward.
* The RI Turnpike and Bridge Authority completed installation of a median barrier on the Newport Pell Bridge.

Three topics for review in 2016 that will impact Jamestown:

* Rhode Works – the Governor’s Package for enacting tolls for road and bridge repair.
* Building Permit Fees – a State Building Code Standard Committee established this summer determined a new fee schedule and electronic permit filing.
* RI Resource Recovery Corporation – increase in tipping fees beginning in 2017 (first time in 25 years).

Sen. Paiva-Weed noted she works closely with Rep. Ruggiero and it is a privilege to serve the citizens of Jamestown, her district and the State. The other of issue that would impact Jamestown:

* Charter School Funding - inequity of the current funding formula with an emphasis on Charter Schools.

Sen. Paiva-Weed referenced the Task Force formed to study aid formulas. The per-pupil cost of Charter schools includes fees and services not provided, such as transportation, that need to be adjusted. The Task Force reports back on January 31st, legislation may result, and she will keep Jamestown informed. Sen-Paiva Weed stated this is not the year for tax cuts but to move the economy forward by investing in our cities and towns, schools, roads, bridges and infrastructure. Rep. Ruggiero serves on the Task Force, which meets next on January 11th. The big issue is English language learning, primarily affecting Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls and Woonsocket (75%). When funding is afforded some communities, it hurts others, including Jamestown and Middletown. RI does not have a funding formula, which is under review. Discussion ensued per-pupil fixed costs at $1,340 for public districts; $940 for Charter schools; and $565 for special education (which may need revision based on need). Discussion ensued of whether funding is equitable and fair. Alternative schools, including the Nursing Middle College, Career and Technical Schools, and Beacon School for the Arts were noted.

1. **DISCUSSION/QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

Councilor Dickinson commented on tipping fees (at the Central Landfill) and how it affects Jamestown. Sen. Paiva-Weed commented on the 25-year moratorium on tipping fee increases. Costs have increased, recycling plays a major role going forward, and a slight increase is expected. The proposed increase is more than what the General Assembly will pass, slated at 61% for Jamestown (from $32 per ton to $65 per ton) and 78% for Middletown. The average tipping fee in New England is $54 per ton. House Finance plans hearings to review and provide oversight. The commercial haulers take trash to recycling areas (2) in Massachusetts that have closed, creating competition. Discussion ensued of the alternative to revise commercial tipping fees as opposed to spreading the cost among the 39 cities and towns. Sen. Paiva-Weed commented no one wants the landfill to fill up and be forced to close. Municipalities should focus on incentives to improve and implement municipal recycling programs, including pay-as-you-throw. We cannot recycle our way out of this and municipalities must become creative. The central landfill is near capacity, will be capped in 2038, and does not collect enough money to cover operating expenses.

Councilor Dickinson commented Jamestown will take the brunt of any increased tolls as it already pays to cross the Newport Bridge. Other communities do not pay bridge tolls, Jamestown pays one of the highest per-pupil costs in the state, and our schools are financed through revenue from property taxes. Sen. Paiva-Weed and Rep. Ruggiero state amending the formula will target charter school funding and will save municipalities money. English language learning funding would be $5.5 million. Education is the Senate’s priority, and they are not looking to increase local taxes, but increase State funding for education and modify charter school funding. The State will not move forward economically unless we invest in our students.

Sen. Paiva-Weed stated there are two things holding back RI’s economic success:

* Workforce job development and training
* Our infrastructure

Due to the poor conditions of our bridges, RI’S infrastructure was rated worst in the nation. Governor Raimondo knew the tolls proposal would be controversial. Class 7 and Class 8, large trailers, would be affected by the new tolls (which exempts most of the box trucks and commercial vehicles in RI). The toll for the Sakonnet Bridge, which is part of the RI Turnpike and Bridge Authority, was eliminated. Sen. Paiva-Weed would like to see that bridge’s maintenance transferred back to RIDOT and be part of the responsibility of the entire State. She and members of the Senate are looking for equity, and she and Rep. Ruggiero don’t want Newport and Jamestown to be responsible for paying for bridges when other municipalities don’t. Sen. Paiva-Weed and Rep. Ruggiero commented on poor bridge conditions and the reason for the proposed borrowing was for bridge repairs, which are less expensive than replacing them. The Federal government came forward with an additional $400,000,000 in funding, which should result in less borrowing for RI. No one is debating that our bridges need repair. It is fair to establish tolls for Class 7 and Class 8 trucks, as the trucking industry that pays 20% of the fees causes 65% of the damage to roads, bridges, and infrastructure. Taxpayers are subsidizing truckers who do not pay their fair share. RI and CT are the only east coast states that do not toll trucks, and CT is looking at implementing tolls.

Councilor Dickinson commented on the gas tax of 33 cents per gallon that goes into the RIDOT budget and asked what happens to that funding. Rep. Ruggiero commented RI has over 1100 bridges, and what is proposed is a mechanism to ensure designated revenues for infrastructure, with 500 bridges slated for repair in the first 10 years. Rep. Ruggiero further commented on current conditions and needed funding. Sen Paiva-Weed commented we are not able to rely on the gas tax like we once did, and we are asking the highest users to pay. Councilor Dickinson asked what will stop the State from charging residents to use the roads? Sen. Paiva-Weed stated our Governor is shaping up RIDOT and has done good things. This fund would focus on repairing over 500 bridges and rebuilding 150 deficient ones, bringing RI to 90% bridge sufficiency in 10 years. We owe it to our children and future generations. The closing of the Pawtucket Bridge was noted, where trucks were willing to pay hefty fines to cross rather than go around it. The proposed tolls would only be $3. Both Sen. Paiva-Weed and Rep. Ruggiero stated they don’t want cynicism to block what would have a positive impact on future generations. At present, the taxpayer is carrying the cost burden.

Sen Paiva-Weed stated this the year (general election) to place any Bonds on the ballot, so get them to us. Councilor Dickinson thanked them for their input. Sen. Paiva-Weed and Rep. Ruggiero encouraged the Town Council and Administrator to call anytime to addresses issues and concerns. They are honored to serve, and thank the Council for inviting them this evening.

1. **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to discuss the work session was adjourned at 7:07 p.m.

Attest:

Cheryl A. Fernstrom, CMC, Town Clerk

Copies to: Town Council

Town Administrator

Town Solicitor

Finance Director