

TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

April 27, 2009

A special session of the Jamestown Town Council was called to order at the Jamestown Town Hall in the Rosamond A. Tefft Council Chambers at 93 Narragansett Avenue at 7:00 p.m. by Council President Julio J. DiGiando, for the purpose of discussing the 2009-2010 Fiscal Year Budget. The following members were present:

Michael White, Vice-President
William Kelly
Robert W. Sutton, Jr.
Barbara Szepatowski

also present:

Bruce R. Keiser, Town Administrator
Heather R. Lopes, Deputy Town Clerk Pro Tem
Christina Collins, Finance Director
Lisa Bryer, Town Planner
Arlene Petit, Town Clerk
Michael Gray, Town Engineer
Steven Goslee, Public Works Director
Thomas Tighe, Police Chief
Cathy Kaiser, School Committee Chair

Bruce Keiser began the meeting with a summary of the Town Administrator's Report for the Fiscal Year 2009-2010 Proposed Budget as follows:

The revised FY2009/10 Proposed Budget includes reductions in the School Committee's appropriations request amounting to \$151,126. The accounts adjusted by the School Committee include: Retiree Health Insurance (- \$37,836); Employee Health Insurance (-\$105,358); Workers' Compensation (-\$5,612); and Maintenance Insurance (-\$2,280). With these revisions, the Proposed Town / School Budget amounts to \$20,905,864, an increase of \$174,645 or 0.9% over FY2008-09.

The tax levy required to support the proposed spending plan is \$17,092,824, or \$249,529 (1.5%) more than the current year. Fortunately, housing starts, particularly at the high end, continued at a vigorous pace in 2008 and have added \$33.3 million in new value to the tax roll. This sizable growth largely offsets revenue losses that will result from the State's elimination of general municipal aid and declining receipts from real estate tax transfers, building permits, and investment income.

The development of the FY2009-10 Budget has required that the Town pursue a variety of options to maintain municipal and school services and avoid placing greater tax burdens on local residents and businesses. I believe the Proposed Budget represents a successful, joint commitment between Town Departments, the School Administration

and School Committee, and the Town Council to maintain services and restrain property taxation. Crafting a budget with a zero tax increase in a challenging year is not easy. However, we are able to achieve this goal due to the following favorable events:

- The availability of a healthy cumulative fund balance to paydown outstanding debt and thereby reduce annual debt service requirements;
- Acceptance into a municipal health insurance collaborative to reduce health insurance premium expenditures;
- Careful review of prior year departmental spending trends and limits on new budget requests to essential and highest priority needs only;
- Ability to commit Town DPW forces to initiate landfill closure in FY2009-10 and defer out-of-pocket capital spending to the following fiscal year.
- Prioritizing capital project needs in order to limit annual capital appropriations to the current year level;
- As noted above, expansion of the tax base due to a strong market for new housing construction in 2008.

The meeting was opened for Town Council discussion by Council President DiGiando at 7:08p.m., beginning with the School Department budget.

A motion was made by Councilor Szepatowski, seconded by Councilor White to approve the Jamestown School Department budget for the calendar year of July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010 as presented to us by the Jamestown School Committee.

Comments were made regarding the impressive work done by the School Committee to lower the cost by what was recommended by the Town Council. Councilor Kelly stated concern regarding the possible lower student enrollment for the next year and what that may mean for future budgets. Cathy Kaiser stated enrollment numbers are very difficult to figure but it is estimated that enrollment will be down approximately twelve to fifteen (12-15) students. Councilor Szepatowski asked if any changes were made to the transportation costs, Ms. Kaiser stated there had not been any change. Councilor Sutton stated the same concerns as Councilor Kelly and he is prepared to accept the school budget as presented. Council President DiGiando asked what the outlook is for retirements in the near future. Ms. Kaiser stated that had the pension reforms gone through at the State level there was a possible loss of six (6) teachers. The potential is there for retirements coming in the near future.

The vote to approve the Jamestown School Budget for the Fiscal Year 2009-2010 as presented was unanimous.

A motion was made by Councilor Szepatowski, seconded by Councilor White to approve Fiscal Year 2010 Town of Jamestown budget as proposed and put forth on April 24, 2009.

Prior to a Council vote the following items were discussed:

It was the consensus of the Council to review the budget page by page. Councilor Kelly stated the first page of the budget shows the primary increases in figures are due to the contractual obligations of the Town of Jamestown, this shows a tremendous effort was made to meet a no tax increase by the Department Heads and the Finance Director along with the Town Administrator. Bruce Keiser stated the increases in the figures are contractual obligations but also come in the areas of electricity rate increase of 40% or \$38,500 into the budget. Program increases include \$45,000 to the Teen Center due to the loss of the grant from Rhode Island Foundation. The Senior Center increase in the amount of \$55,000 is due to the loss of State funding.

Councilor Kelly asked about the impact of the reevaluation for taxes. Mr. Keiser stated the reevaluation will occur this year and will apply to the tax bills sent out in July 2010. The change in tax amount will affect next year's budget. Councilor Kelly asked to define what constitutes the town revenue. Mr. Keiser listed revenue sources as receipts from the Town Clerk's Office; Building Permits; and Police fines. Councilor Kelly asked the definition of general revenue. Mr. Keiser listed the revenue sources as investment income; motor vehicle/excise taxes and state aid. State aid is figured as \$0.00 in this budget. The current fiscal year \$136,000 in state aid was budgeted. The town will actually receive \$56,000 for an expected total a loss of \$80,000 this year due to the action of the General Assembly. Discussion ensued regarding possible routes that may be taken by the State in the future and the effects these actions will have on the Town of Jamestown including the school department.

Councilor Szepatowski requested to add funds under miscellaneous for a juvenile hearing board that were removed from the budget. Council President DiGiando stated as a council they have agreed to seek the enabling legislation but have not approved a hearing board. This item would need to be placed as an agenda item before action can be taken. Discussion ensued regarding the benefits of Jamestown having its own municipal court. The Municipal Court for the Town was approved in 2006. It was found through extensive research the benefits to the Town would include; traffic enforcement, excluding DUI, the Town would collect \$2.00 more in fine revenue per ticket than is currently received; court fees could be set at \$35.00 per case; officer's overtime for attending various courthouses could be lessened. In speaking with several communities that handle their own municipal court, it was found to be a volume based revenue. It does not appear to be financially beneficial to Jamestown.

A review of legal fees budgeted and the amount of utilization of services was discussed. Councilor Szepatowski questioned the removal of funds for a grant writer. Lisa Bryer stated a good amount of this service is being performed internally. Christina Collins stated if needed funds could be used from emergency or incidentals if necessary. Clarification of the amount for Professional Services, \$13,000, was for the services of ADP, the payroll company who also provides tax return services to the Town of Jamestown. The amount listed for \$13,600, represents the fees for the yearly audit.

Councilor Sutton voiced concern over the removal of \$1,000 from GIS, asking if this affects the position of the Environmental Scientist. Bruce Keiser stated this does not

effect that position. Funds held in the capital reserve for GIS software would be used to supplement this amount. Councilor Szepatowski asked Lisa Bryer the reason for the removal of a planning department intern. Lisa stated the Masters Planning Program at the University of Rhode Island has closed. In response to this the hours of the Assistant Planner have been increased and this has worked well for the department. Councilor Sutton inquired whether the Retirement System figure (\$246,530) included the Police Pension. Mr. Keiser stated it does not. Councilor Szepatowski inquired about the amount for police longevity and it was stated in previous years the dollar amount was included in the salary and now it is a separate item on the budget. Discussion ensued over various items lowered or cut in the police budget. The reasoning for this is the loss of state funding and the use of grant monies. The increase in police salary is due to many officers going thru the step plan and these increases are substantial. Councilor Kelly noted the increase due to contractual obligations and inquired about how this will be dealt with in the future. Bruce Keiser stated unions are agreeing to sizeable concessions nationally and the three town contracts are due to expire June 30, 2010. Negotiations usually begin in the fall of the previous year.

Discussion moved to the Fire Department Budget. It was noted the department is well run and the volunteer numbers are rising. Discussion ensued regarding the possibility of having an EMT Cardiac on call and the usual salary for this type of position. Response times from a medical scene to Newport Hospital were reviewed and it was stated the police officers are generally first on scene and they carry and are trained to use defibrillation (AED) machines. Use of the monies received from fees was discussed for the electrical inspector and hydrant rental as well as the balance of the snow removal fund. Christina Collins stated the snow removal budget was \$40,000 over budget due to supplies and overtime.

Discussions regarding the waste removal included favorable recycling efforts and the negative impact of using plastic bags for yard waste. It was suggested to have a public campaign for spring cleanups, noting the availability of yard waste bags that were obtained by a grant through the Public Works Department. Water testing costs were discussed and it was stated the contract will be going out to bid. The need for the position of the public works mechanic was discussed and it is deemed necessary to retain the position. The facilities and equipment at the new highway garage are believed to assist in more mechanical work and maintenance on town vehicles being done in house.

Councilor Szepatowski asked if the Town receives a report from the Welfare Services Director regarding the number of families helped within the Town. Bruce Keiser stated there is no report, although it would be beneficial to look into. It was mentioned several agencies work together with these situations including local churches, East Bay Community Action, and New Visions of Newport County. The Department of Employment and Training lists rates by community, of which Jamestown is listed as having a 6.9% unemployment rate in March. This percentage represents 211 households that have a member unemployed. These numbers are up by approximately 70 people from 2008 and 2007.

Councilor Kelly shared his concern with the absenteeism of the animal control officer position. Councilor Kelly stated a large number of calls were handled in the absence of the animal control officer and this raises the question of whether the position, at a salary cost to the town of \$69,104 including benefits is necessary. Upon request, as a matter of public record, the attendance percentages for the animal control officer over the last six years showed time out of work as follows:

- 2003 absent 80% of the time;
- 2004-2005 absent 30% of the time;
- 2006-2007 absent 52% of the time;
- 2007-2008 absent 50% of the time.

The number of calls handled by the animal control officer versus the number of animal related calls handled by the police officers equals approximately \$1,000 per call based on the compensation to the animal control officer position. Councilor Sutton stated the point should be made noting the number of days without an animal control officer, not the individual's attendance. Mr. Sutton also stated the ordinance does not state handling of cats and this job should have no association to cats. Discussion ensued regarding the effect on the work load of the police department this would have as well as the need to prioritize calls. Councilor Kelly mentioned the earlier conversation of an EMT Cardiac on the island at an approximate cost of \$45,000 per year and being unable to fund this. Restructuring or eliminating the ACO position may make available the funds needed to invest in this aspect of public safety. Councilors DiGiando, Sutton, and White did not feel elimination of this position was a Town Council issue but rather an administrative decision.

A motion was made by Councilor Szepatowski, seconded by Councilor Kelly, that the budget be approved with the exception of the animal control office position, and a report be presented by the Town Administrator and Police Chief regarding the changing or elimination of the position by Thursday, April 30, 2009 and a public hearing be posted prior to and held on this day. A vote was taken with a result of 2 aye and 3 nays. Councilor Szepatowski and Councilor Kelly voted aye and Councilors DiGiando, White and Sutton voted nay. Motion fails to pass.

The Town Administrator was advised to furnish the Town Council with a report regarding this position as well as any position within the Town that has a chronic absence. The Council advised they also need to be made aware of the course of action that is being taken with these employees.

The Town Council moved discussions to the Capital Improvement Fund. The Fort Getty Storage Shed was discussed. It has been determined to use the shed as cold storage with no employees being stationed at this location. Restroom facilities are proposed in the Fort Getty Master Plan for that area of the park, these will be available for utilization by employees once completed.

Bruce Keiser proposed to increase the highway lift amount by \$5,000 to \$45,000 and reduce the street repair amount by \$5,000 to \$10,000. The difference for street repairs will be funded by the receipt of \$39,000 from the State for pothole repairs.

A motion was made by Councilor Sutton, seconded by Councilor Szepatowski, that the Capital Budget as printed be amended to show the line item for the highway lift to be increased by \$5,000 to \$45,000 and that the line item for the general repairs and maintenance of roads be reduced from \$15,000 to \$10,000.

The vote to approve the amended Capital Budget for the Fiscal Year 2009-2010 was unanimous.

The motion approving the Operating Budget was put to a vote with the following results:

Council President Digiando	Aye
Council Vice President White	Aye
Councilor Kelly	Nay
Councilor Sutton	Aye
Councilor Szepatowski	Nay

The vote passed with 3 in favor and 2 opposed.

A motion was made by Councilor White, seconded by Councilor Sutton, to approve the complete Town of Jamestown town and school budget for the amount of \$20,905,864.01.

A vote was taken to approve the overall budget with the results as follows:

Council President	Aye
Council Vice President	Aye
Councilor Kelly	Nay
Councilor Sutton	Aye
Councilor Szepatowski	Nay

The vote passed with 3 in favor and 2 opposed.

A motion was made by Councilor White, seconded by Councilor DiGiando, to adjourn the meeting at 9:25 p.m. So unanimously voted.