

FINANCIAL TOWN MEETING

June 22, 2020

Call to Order

Moderator John Murphy calls the Annual Financial Town Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Lawn Avenue Field Complex, 55 Lawn Avenue, Jamestown, and led the Pledge of Allegiance. A moment of silence was observed for Jamestown residents who passed away since our last Financial Town Meeting.

Town Council members present:

Michael G. White, President
Mary E. Meagher, Vice President
Nancy A. Beye
Randall White
William J. Piva, Jr.

Also in attendance:

John A. Murphy, Town Moderator
Jamie A. Hainsworth, Town Administrator
Christina D. Collins, Finance Director
Lisa W. Bryer, Town Planner
Donna J. Fogarty, Library Director
Edward A. Mello, Police Chief
Fred F. Pease, Town Sergeant
James R. Byer, Fire Chief
Andrew J. Wade, Parks and Recreation Director
Betsey Anderson, Senior Services Director
Peter D. Ruggiero, Town Solicitor
Erin F. Liese, Town Clerk

School Committee members present:

Keith J. Roberts, Chair
Sheila M. Reilly, Vice Chair
Sally Schott
Agnes C. Filkins
Kristine A. Lapierre

Also in attendance:

Kenneth Duva, Superintendent
Jane Littlefield, Director of Finance
Peter Anderson, Director of Buildings and Grounds

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and B.J. Whitehouse sang the National Anthem. Applause.

Budget Process, Meeting Procedures and Voting Overview

Town Moderator Murphy thanked Mr. Whitehouse and announced that there were 192 voters present. He also thanked the staff that was able to facilitate a different type of meeting in response to COVID. He outlined the requirements of voting by paper ballot if that should pass by 20% vote. He advised 39 voters would need to support a motion by written ballot. He further explained that the Town Council President will describe the General Town Budget, and the School Committee Chair will describe the School Committee Budget, and then you will be asked to consider each and whether or not to adopt it. He also advised there are 200 voters present.

Town Council President Michael White

Moderator Murphy introduced President White, who thanked Moderator Murphy and addressed the assembled voters.

When I gave my first FTM speech last year, I would never had imagined that this year I would be speaking from a platform with 200 people in their cars or out of their cars wearing masks outside on this field I play softball on 30 years ago.

Today I want to thank the Town Administration and all town workers for their dedication to performing their duties during this difficult time. He advised while everyone was on lock down the continued to work to keep the town running as it always been. They kept our town running and running smoothly during these trying times.

This year we brought a new entry to our process by appointing a new Town Administrator, Jamie Hainsworth. Not paying any attention to the fact that he was the new kid on the block, he jumped into the pool at full speed ahead.

In the year of the COVID, we reviewed the budget as presented by the Town Administrator in a few public meetings and then a few virtual public meetings through the Zoom application.

The process remained the same. The budget is created, designed and built by the Town Administration of Jamestown.

The long serving cast of department heads that he had to work with had, most likely, been waiting with their requests for next year's budget before he even got to his office. Jamie, along with assistance from the previous to his appointment, acting Administrator Tina Collins, separates the needs from the wants and accepts or decreases or rarely, increases the funding estimate.

Budget work is a year-round process, beginning in the fall and continuing until, Well, Today.... He advised people come to this town for the school and because this is paradise. It is a great place to live. Our job is to approve a budget that is careful and generous to continue what we already have established.

The Town and School combined Budget Program in **FY2021** is dedicated to continued commitment to the implementation, maintenance, and completion of:

- Senior programs-with a significant increase in programs and services which included serving as our food program for Covid-19 needed assistance.
- Maintaining the highest level of responsible and highly trained Police, Fire and EMS 24/7 services for the safety of our citizens.
- Shared Pedestrian/Bicycle Path from West Passage to the North Reservoir, which I am happy to say is nearing completion and await an opportunity.

We had to whittle down the budget in response to Covid-19 and decreased the budget. The tax increase will be 2 cents per thousand, so \$11.00 increase this year. That is a Guinness and half. I am willing to give up that. This is a different time and due to the nature of the economy as this crisis is not over yet. We will face challenges. We have built a budget that is solid and flexible as we do not know what is doing day to day. We have heard stories of business closed but also business doing well. On behalf of the Town Council, I respectfully request your support for the Fiscal Year 2020-2021 budget as it is presented. To keep Jamestown as we know it. Thank you. (Applause)

School Committee Chair Keith J. Roberts

Moderator Murphy introduced Chairman Roberts, who thanked Moderator Murphy and addressed the assembled voters:

Thank you all for coming, and participating in a very unique event that I'm sure we all hope is not required in the future. Although, weather permitting it would be nice to hold meetings outside. The 2019 - 2020 academic year started off like many others - more-or-less uneventful, and the return to school went as expected after a summer packed with successful capital improvement projects. By the way - if anyone would like to see the new roof at Lawn you can watch the video of Mr. Edmunds and Mrs. Kaufman performing for the 8th grade class. What a great performance - Billie Joe Armstrong would be proud. Yes, Mr. Edmunds and Mrs. Kauffman performed on the roof at Lawn School. While many things were going according to plan, one of this year's early challenges were field trips. With RIDE having renewed interest in enforcing old legislation around how field trips would be funded, the district could no longer ask parents to fund their child's field trip expenses. While many of the field trips wouldn't be an issue due to the lower cost, our bigger trips were likely not going to be able to happen. This meant no DC trip for the 8th grade, or Boston trip for 7th. There's nothing like telling a bunch of Jamestowners they can't do something. The 8th grade parents, students, teachers, and administration joined

forces to pull off something that few other districts were trying to figure out. The Jamestown community soon had 8th graders and their parents everywhere raising money, and the community responded the way that Jamestown responds. The support was overwhelming. Coffee sales, duck races, pasta supper, flamingo flocks being set up all over the island, silent auction, 'canning' in front of McQuade's, donations from community groups, local businesses, residents, parents, and I'm sure I'm leaving some out. Those 53 students and their parents got it done - all money was raised and in the school's hands before Christmas break. For those keeping track, that was less than 3 months from a \$48,000 problem to solution. It wasn't easy - I share a roof with one of the motivated students, and one of the many 8th grade parents that answered the call. It was impressive collaboration between all parties, and showed once again that teamwork, perseverance, and discipline prevails. Aside from all the various fundraising activities that were going on for all activities faced with these challenges, the fall was very busy, as usual. Our sports teams competed, our music program started to prepare for performances, and the Robotics team went through the season with 2 of the teams qualifying to compete at the state level. As the holidays approached so did basketball tryouts, as well as for the Lion King auditions - the follow-up to last year's performance of Annie, and the holiday performances at both schools. I have to say how impressive it was to watch a North Kingstown high school student, and Jamestown alum, Audrey Rhaupp work with Mrs. Kaufman, Miss Ferrick, and Mrs. Ahnrud to pull together a stunning performance. Our art teacher Mrs. Connolly and our be-loved Mrs. White (aka Mooma) worked magic on stage design and costumes. We have so much talent, and so much support for the arts that amazing things happen in Jamestown. It was also nice to see for a second year that our 7th and 8th graders performed with the Jamestown Community Band. I hope that is something that continues when the restrictions are lifted. Now that we are in the second half of the year the administration's calendar is in full swing to plan for the following year. We successfully completed the contract renewal with the Jamestown Teacher's Association in early March. It was my first time participating in the negotiations, but had heard that it had always been a very productive and collaborative process. It proved to be just that. As I've learned from other School Committee Chairs around the state, it's not that way in all districts. Further validation we have a great team motivated by student achievement. Our budget process was also now in full swing. The process kicks off in December, but is really in full motion between the middle of January and the end of February. The goal being to put the budget in front of the town council in March so that the town can get the overall budget submitted in April. As usual, Mrs. Littlefield did a fantastic job pulling it all together. It's worth noting that we use a practice called 'Zero Based Budgeting'. It's a great practice. It is time consuming, and resource intensive, but the result is a budget that is based solely on the upcoming year's needs. The process starts with a budget of zero, not last year's budget. The budget is built-up based on the anticipated student needs. I say anticipated because we don't know in February with 100% confidence which students will be enrolled in September. Our student population changes frequently throughout the year. The administration submits a budget that is based on everything they know to be true at that point in the year. The School Department is requesting a total of \$12,484,508. That is an increase of \$151,641 over last year. That represents an increase of 1.23%, and represents 59% of the total town

budget which is \$21,709,164. We also had started the process for building the strategic plan for the next 5 years. This was something that I had been looking forward to since getting involved with the School Committee 3 years ago. We had our first meeting the first week of March, and it was a great first meeting. I think there was roughly 40 people that were gathered to engage in making recommendations for the future. Then, Friday, March 13 the Governor made the decision to close the schools, and ordered everyone deemed non-essential to stay home. The administration and teachers around the state were all now working feverishly to figure out how they were going to teach the students remotely - Distance Learning. There was no playbook for this. There were no guidelines, no rubric, and no model to learn from. Within 2 weeks each district in the state had to put plans in place. While all the technology building blocks were available, people had to learn new tricks very quickly - students, parents, and teachers. Zoom, Google Meets, Google Classroom. Everyone had to learn in a way that they had never learned before. It was scary, lonely, frustrating, and confusing. Everyone was navigating this for the first time. Nothing was perfect. What would you expect when you are asked to start performing maintenance on the plane while in flight at 30,000 feet? I think everyone learned a lot, and I think there is still a lot to learn. But, we got through it. And, I know we will all continue to work together to conquer whatever the challenges we face. It's what we do. One of our teachers received a Golden Apple Award for her efforts this year specifically as it relates to distance learning. I don't want to just gloss over the impact that Covid-19 has had on all students, teachers, administration, parents, grandparents, and anyone experiencing what will soon become part of our history. It's really hard to have 3 months cancelled. Concerts, sporting events, graduations, dances and proms. Not postponed, but canceled. I'm so sorry to each of those that had a major milestone or event canceled on them. I was so proud to see our teacher's organize a parade for all the Jamestown students, and then for organizing another parade to celebrate our 8th graders. I would like to take a moment to recognize some of the recent awards/achievements received by some of our teachers and students: Teacher of the Year - Jane Mitchell, Kindergarten Teacher Support Professional of the Year - Lisa Tuttle, Teacher Assistant Golden Apple Award from RIDE and Channel 10 News- Wendy Mainella, Lawn Special Education Teacher Middle School Scholar-Leader Awards - Zachary DiBiase, Marissa Rogers National History Day Competition - Zachary DiBiase, Aiden Hageman, Zachary Hageman, Rhyss Raupp, Vivian Flaherty, Maren Keplinger, Marisa Rogers Nominated for the 2020 Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching (PAEMST) - Leanne Turenne, 1st Grade Teacher

Here we are. June 22. School is out for the summer, and administration is working hard to figure out how we safely bring everyone back to school in the fall. I look forward to working alongside the team, and supporting the effort. A plan needs to be submitted to RIDE in the middle of July. Dr. Duva, as always, will keep us all up to date on what's next - so stay tuned. As previously mentioned, The School Department is requesting a total of \$12,484,508, which is an increase of \$151,641 over last year. That represents an increase of 1.23%, and represents 59% of the total town budget of \$21,709,164. Please remember that 95% of the funds being requested are required by contractual obligations, legislation, or policy. The 5% of the budget that could be viewed as 'negotiable' represents roughly \$625k. Every 100k of expense results in \$4 per 100k of the property's assessed value.

Therefore for every \$500k in property value, with a tax rate of 8%, that 625k represents less than \$30 of the \$4000 tax bill. I would also encourage anyone with questions or concerns on the school budget to reach out to Dr. Duva or Mrs. Littlefield. They have previously met with folks individually to provide transparency, and would be happy to do so going forward. No one is trying to hide anything. Quite the opposite. We also invite anyone to follow the process at its inception. The goal here is that there is no surprise or confusion as it relates to financing the education in Jamestown, and that we are all aligned. I also want to make sure that everyone understands that the School Department will not be making any additional requests to the town prior to the next budget year. Even with the uncertainties surrounding the return to the school the administration believes it will have the funds necessary to create the environment that adheres to the guidelines for a safe return to school. I'm respectfully encouraging you to approve the budget as proposed. It's worth noting that the school budget was unanimously approved by the School Committee, and the town budget was unanimously approved by the Town Council. We have an excellent program that is comprised of some of the best administrators and teachers in the world. I ask that you allow them to continue their mission, maintain forward progress, and continue to provide our students with the education they deserve. Thank you all for your time and attention this evening. I hope you all have a wonderful summer (Applause)

Voting on the Budget

Moderator Murphy stated in a moment I will call for motions on the two budgets, the general budget and school committee budget. He reviewed that you will be using your flags to cast your vote.

At this time I call for a motion on the general budget.

A motion was made by Town Council Vice President Mary Meagher with second by a voter in attendance to approve the entire Town Budget for \$11,263,100.

Vice President Meagher also clarified the budget numbers that Mr. Roberts spoke of.

Moderator Murphy asked if there is any discussion. (No discussion). Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor of the motion to signify by waiving the flag. **It passed unanimously.** (Applause)

Moderator Murphy calls for a vote on the school committee budget. (No discussion)

A motion was made by School Committee Member Sally Schott with second by Vice President Meagher to approve the school budget in the amount of \$14,551,236.

Moderator Murphy calls for all those in favor of the motion that was made and seconded to pass and adopt the school committee budget please signify by waiving the flag. **That budget is passed unanimously.** (Applause)

Voting on the Resolutions

Moderator Murphy states we have three housekeeping Resolutions:

- **Resolution Number 1 – Sewer Line Frontage Tax Rate**
- **Resolution Number 2 – Borrowing in Anticipation of Taxes**
- **Resolution Number 3 – Disposition of Collected Back Taxes**

Moderator Murphy asks if there is a motion to approve those Resolutions. (No discussion)

A motion was made by Town Council Vice President Mary Meagher with second by Council President White to approve Resolutions 1, 2, and 3 and also to waive the reading of them in their entirety.

Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor of that motion to signify by please signify by waiving the flag. **The Resolutions passed unanimously.** (Applause)

Resolution Number 4 – Setting the Tax Rate

Moderator Murphy announced we will now set the tax rate.

A motion was made by Town Council Vice President Mary Meagher with second by Council President White to set the Tax Rate and hereby order the assessment and collection of a tax rate on ratable real estate and tangible personal property in the sum of not less than \$8.07 nor more than \$8.12 per \$1,000.00 of assessed valuation.

(No discussion)

Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor please signify by waiving your flag. **The motion passes unanimously.** (Applause)

Resolution Number 5 - Borrowing for Improvement, Construction, and Repair of Roadways in Jamestown through Issuance of Bonds

A motion was made by Town Council Vice President Mary Meagher with second by Council President White to approve Resolution Number 5 - Borrowing for Improvement, Construction, and Repair of Roadways in Jamestown through Issuance of Bonds and to waive the Reading. (No discussion)

Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor please signify by waiving your flag. **The motion passes unanimously.** (Applause)

Resolution Number 6 - Borrowing for Fire Department through Issuance of Bond

A motion was made by Councilor Nancy Beye with second by a Voter in attendance. White to approve Resolution Number 6 - Borrowing for Fire Department through Issuance of Bond and to waive the Reading. (No discussion)

Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor please signify by waiving your flag. **The motion passes unanimously.** (Applause)

Moderator Murphy stated this concludes are business and called for a motion to adjourn.

Emily Falces stated she did not vote for Town budget and stated to deny the police cruiser as they are not essential service during this time. She commented on homeless and risk of Covid. She further commented on the need to give homes to the homeless and disappointed in all that voted in favor of the town budget as she felt there was better use for the money than a police cruiser.

Moderator Murphy advised she was past the five minutes.

Falces shouted black lives matter, defund the police, and then yielded her time.

Moderator Murphy advised that statement needed to be made at a budget meeting and advised on the change needed to be submitted more than two weeks ago

Moderator Murphy calls for a motion to adjourn.

A motion was made and seconded by voters in attendance to adjourn. (No discussion)

Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor please signify by waiving your flag. **The motion passes unanimously.** (Applause)

The Financial Town Meeting was adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

Attest:

Erin F. Liese, CMC, Town Clerk

Copies to: Town Council
 Town Administrator
 Finance Director
 Town Solicitors
 Town Moderator

