

FINANCIAL TOWN MEETING
June 7, 2021

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 the Jamestown residents who passed away since our last Financial Town Meeting.

Town Council members present:

Nancy A. Beye, President
Mary E. Meagher, Vice President
Erik G. Brine
Michael G. White
Randall White

Also in attendance:

John A. Murphy, Town Moderator
Jamie A. Hainsworth, Town Administrator
Christina D. Collins, Finance Director
Lisa W. Bryer, Town Planner
Edward A. Mello, Police Chief
Fred F. Pease, Town Sergeant
James R. Bryer, Fire Chief
Ray DeFalco, Parks and Recreation Director
Betsey Anderson, Senior Services Director
Peter D. Ruggiero, Town Solicitor

School Committee members present:

Keith J. Roberts, Chair
Sally F. Schott, Vice Chair
Andrew C. Allsopp
Kristine A. Lapierre

School Committee member absent:

Agnes C. Filkins

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.

Budget Process, Meeting Procedures and Voting Overview

Town Moderator Murphy thanked Mr. Whitehouse and announced that there were 113 voters present.

Town Council President Nancy A. Beye

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

We meet again tonight in a much better place than we were last year at this time. Last June 22, 2020, we didn't know what we were going to be up against going into the summer season. I believe we carried on in true Jamestown fashion and came together as a community and made the best out of a difficult situation which was Covid-19.

Since our last Financial Town Meeting we have navigated through all the unusual circumstances that the pandemic brought to all communities. Zoom meetings, social distancing, PPE's, outdoor dining, beach issues to name a few. These issues were handled masterfully by our leader, our Town Administrator Jamie Hainsworth. Jamie guided us all and did it with grace and compassion.

Helping Jamie along the way was our Finance Director Tina Collins. Tina has guided us through the budget process since 1999. Thank you, Tina, for all you do. I want to take a minute to thank all of our Town Staff, and Department Heads for helping to make Jamestown the wonderful place that it is.

Through it all we were able to accomplish some lofty goals, we saw the clubhouse at the golf course built, the bike path at the North end opened and was named after our former Town Administrator Bob Sutton, and thanks to the hard work of Chief Mello acting as EMA Director, we were able to provide Covid-19 vaccines to our residents. Pretty amazing considering the circumstances.

This year we reviewed the budget much the same way we did last year and that was virtually. I am happy to say that we had quite a few residents join us but look forward to in person meetings hopefully in the near future.

Last year we "whittled down" the budget in response to Covid -19, the FY2022 budget will look a bit different as a result.

At a special town council meeting held on April 26th the Council unanimously voted to approve the total budget of \$26,628,673.00 of which \$14,887,231.00 is for the School Budget and the balance of \$11,741,442.00 is for the Town Budget.

On behalf of the Town Council, I respectfully request your support for the Fiscal Year 2021-2022 budget as it is presented. Thank you.

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. While this is somewhat reminiscent of last year we have definitely come a long way.

First, let's get into the highlights:

The year started with a very significant accomplishment, our schools opened for the first day of school, and with very few exceptions were able to provide in-person learning to all students 5 days a week for the entire school day. This was not the case in many districts – some were shortened days, every other day, and some were full distance learning until this spring.

The schools continue to go through renovation projects – new windows and entrance at Lawn, new entry way windows at Melrose, new equipment in the kitchen. The projects continue this summer. Mr. Anderson and his team continue to be efficient and effective at keeping our school buildings in great shape.

At the start of our school year only 11% of Jamestown families chose distance learning for their children. By the start of 4th quarter 99% of our students were participating in in-person learning.

The new math curriculum, Ready Mathematics, was implemented in all classrooms from K- 8.

Our Blessings in the Backpack program provided food to over 20 families on weekends, school vacations, and during our distance learning days.

We were able to offer our award winning music program at the Lawn School due to a generous donation from the Newport Festivals Foundation to purchase bell covers for all the wind instruments.

Karyn Kaufman and Erin Preston submitted several students to compete in the 2021 virtual All State Music Festival with other middle schools across the state. Three students participated in the All State Band, one student in All State Mixed Chorus, and two students in All State Treble Chorus. Several students from Mrs. McGuirl's social studies class participated in National History Day; six students were recognized for their talent. One student received First Place Individual Exhibit (a first for Jamestown), one received First Place Paper and Tomaquag Award.

Our students were able to engage in sports in the late winter, and abbreviated seasons were provided for all seasons.

Finally, after having to skip most events for the year we were able to collaborate with state and local organizations to provide a successful and engaging Island Treasures Day for the students.

We are looking forward to the upcoming in-person events and celebrations for our students and families as the year comes to an end.

I want to thank the teachers, administration, students, parents, and community members for all their hard work and support throughout this very unusual year. It was often confusing, frustrating, and stressful – especially for the teachers that were working to keep students engaged in the classroom, and for those that were at home. Everyone had to adapt to new rules, restrictions, and protocols. However, as a community, we pulled together and made it through one of the most challenging times in recent history.

Upon returning from the holiday break we commenced our budget planning process. It's worth noting that we use a practice called 'Zero Based Budgeting'. It is 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, or with a standard increase. 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 \$14,887,231. That is an increase of \$335,9958 over last year, which represents an increase of 2.3%. The town appropriation is \$12,637,108. That is an increase in \$152,600 over last year, which represents an increase of 1.22%. 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. 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.

At the conclusion of the budget process the Strategic Planning process was kicked-off after having to cancel the process that started just prior to the Governor's Executive Order in March of 2020. This year's process is about to conclude, and I'm excited to see what Dr. Duva recommends for our strategic priorities for the next 5 years. While participating in the process this year it's been interesting to listen to the thoughts and ideas from the group that was assembled. The members of the group includes teachers, administration, parents, students, and a variety of community members. While Jamestown has always performed well in the state-wide standardized testing I hope we make meaningful changes to how we help our students succeed and thrive in high school and beyond. During one of the strategic planning sessions one of the participants brought up the needs of the 21st century student. They are as follows: Critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, flexibility, leadership, initiative, productivity, and social skills. As we think about our student's success in high school and beyond we need to be developing those skills along with ensuring every student is successful with math and reading. I would not be surprised to learn that in order for us to continue to develop and evolve the curriculum, programs, and overall student experience that we will need to provide additional financial support to achieve these strategic goals. After all, how many of us have been able to make strategic investments through re-allocation of baseline expenses, without negatively impacting the areas that lost funding? As I've mentioned, our annual budget is based exclusively on the upcoming year's needs and meeting RIDE's requirements – nothing extra. However, the general sense I get from the vast majority of Jamestowners' that I've spoken with is that they want to see the student experience grow and evolve beyond the minimums that are required by RIDE. A common theme I hear is that things are great, but if you believe in continuous improvement then we shouldn't be satisfied with our status quo. In my experience, growth and change is not cost neutral, or a prioritization exercise. I look forward to working with the administration, my fellow committee members, and Jamestown-at-large to figure out how to fund the strategic priorities so that we don't end up in a situation where we are robbing Peter to pay Paul.

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 excellent schools that are 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.

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 using your flags to cast your vote.

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

A motion was made by Vice President Meagher with second by a voter in attendance to approve the entire Town Budget for \$11,741,442.00

Valerie Southern of 43 Clinton Avenue inquired what the tax increase would be. Vice President Meagher stated it would be an increase \$0.21 per \$1,000.

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 their flag.

Motion passes by a majority vote in the affirmative.

A motion was made by School Committee Member Roberts with second by Councilor Brine to approve the school budget in the amount of \$14,887,231.00

Moderator Murphy asked if there is any discussion. (No discussion)

Moderator Murphy called 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 their flag.

Motion passes by a majority vote in the affirmative.

Voting on the Resolutions

Moderator Murphy stated there are three housekeeping Resolutions:

A motion was made by Councilor M. White to waive the reading of Resolutions 1, 2, and 3 with a second by Vice President Meagher.

- **Resolution Number 1 – Sewer Linde 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.

A motion was made by Councilor R. White with second by Vice President Meagher to approve Resolutions 1, 2, and 3.

Moderator Murphy asked if there is any discussion. (No discussion)

Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor of the motion to signify by please waiving their flag.

Motion passes by a majority vote in the affirmative.

Resolution Number 4 – Setting the Tax Rate

Moderator Murphy announced we will now set the tax rate.

A motion was made by Vice President Meagher with second by Councilor M. 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 \$8.28 nor more than \$8.33 per \$1,000.00 of assessed valuation.

Moderator Murphy asked if there is any discussion. (No discussion)

Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor please signify by waving your flag.

Motion passes by a majority vote in the affirmative.

Resolution Number 5 – Borrowing for Water Tank Purposes

A motion was made by Councilor Brine with second by Vice President Meagher to approve Resolution Number 5 – Borrowing for Water Tank Purposes.

Moderator Murphy asked if there is any discussion. (No discussion)

Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor please signify by waiving your flag.

Motion passes by a majority vote in the affirmative.

Resolution Number 6 – Use of Proceeds of Borrowing for Fire Department Purposes

A motion was made by Vice President Meagher with second by Councilor M. White to approve Resolution Number 6 – Use of Proceeds of Borrowing for Fire Department Purposes.

Moderator Murphy asked if there is any discussion. (No discussion)

Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor please signify by waiving your flag.

Motion passes by a majority vote in the affirmative.

Resolution Number 7 – Use of Federal Grants in Lieu of Borrowing for Projects Otherwise Authorized and any Other Capital Projects in the Town Capital Improvement Program and/or the School Capital Improvement Program

A motion was made by Councilor M. White with second by Councilor Brine to approve Resolution Number 7 – Use of Federal Grants in Lieu of Borrowing for Projects Otherwise

Authorized and any Other Capital Projects in the Town Capital Improvement Program and/or the School Capital Improvement Program

Moderator Murphy asked if there is any discussion. (No discussion)

Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor please signify by waiving your flag.

Motion passes by a majority vote in the affirmative.

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

A motion was made Vice President Meagher and seconded by Councilor Brine to adjourn.

Motion passes unanimously.

The Financial Town Meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Attest:

Denise Gamon, Town Clerk's Assistant