



INFORMAL MEETING OF JUNE 21, 2016

Informal Meeting of the City Council was held in the City Council Chamber, Room 219, City Hall, on Tuesday evening, June 21, 2016.

CALL TO ORDER

Council President James Walsh called the informal meeting to order at 6:00 o'clock p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Eleven (11) Councillors were present, including President James Walsh and Councillors James Boone, Nathan Boudreau, Craig Cormier, Ronald Cormier, Scott Graves, Karen Hardern, James Johnson, Marc Morgan, Paul Tassone, and Matthew Vance. Mayor Mark Hawke and City Auditor John Richard were also present.

FY2017 BUDGET REVIEW**Mayor's Budget**

Administrative Assistant Salary & Wages (51011) – The Mayor's recommendation is to increase the hours of the AA to full-time, from 19 hours currently to 37 hours beginning July 1, 2016. President Walsh stated that the Mayor will submit a progress/achievement report to the Finance Committee in January, 2017 for its evaluation.

Councillor Karen Hardern suggested that the AA's hours should be maintained at the current level, in order to give the incumbent more time to show the Council her value, adding that she's unsure about the increase at this time.

President Walsh asked Councillor Hardern if she recommends an amount to be cut from the Mayor's proposed budget request.

Councillor Hardern responded that she'd like to maintain the 19 hours/week schedule.

Mayor Hawke cited difficulty in maintaining the 19 hours/week position, since the position is "project-based." He said that the AA currently works 4 days per week/5 hours per day, with Fridays out of the office. He said that since the AA is available only during the mornings, he is unable to have the AA handle certain projects such as contract negotiations and attending meetings in Boston or elsewhere. He cited a number of projects that need to be addressed; however, due to the demands on his schedule, he is unable to address them.

City Auditor's Budget

Professional Services (52190) – Increase is due to the hiring of a new outside auditing firm that provides more comprehensive services, as well as for training for the new Auditor.

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Assessors Budget

Temporary Project Salary & Wages (51023) – For part-time employees performing residential listings.

Human Resources Budget

Professional Services (52190) – Budget higher in prior FY due to additional training (MUNIS) for the former Auditor.

Medical Exams (52192) – For medical and psychological exams for 7 new firefighters, plus medical exams other new municipal and school employees.

Information Technology Budget

Information Technology (52040) – Budget increase for tablets or iPads for Councillors.

Conservation Commission Budget

Conservation Agent Salary & Wages (51011) – Increase in Conservation Agent's hours from 32 to 37 per week.

Community Development Budget

Economic Development Coordinator (51015) – Increase to cover shortfall due to loss of \$10,000 in EPA grant funding for position, plus a 2% COLA.

Cable Commission Budget

Cable Commission Budget fully-funded through Comcast Cable Contract Agreement.

Mayor's Unclassified Budget

Salary & Wages – Reserve (51010) – \$5,000 contingency for unanticipated salary or wage adjustments.

Capital Improvement Plan (58000) – Increase in budget to achieve eventual goal of funding capital improvements through the operating budget, as opposed to drawing from Free Cash, as recommended in the DOR Local Services Financial Management Review.

Police Department Budget

Overtime (51030) – \$300,000 proposed for FY2017; \$282,000 expended YTD (through second week of June).

New Police Vehicles (55090) – \$78,000 expended in FY2016 with \$108,000 recommended for FY2017 to purchase three new vehicles in FY2017 (2 and 3 vehicle purchase cycle).

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Fire Department Budget

Overtime (51030) – \$240,000 recommended by the Mayor, \$319,000 expended YTD as of June 8, per Mayor.

Councillor Boone questioned whether overtime is projected to decrease with the addition of 7 new Firefighter/EMT's (Ambulance).

The Mayor anticipates that OT should decrease in FY2017.

Councillor Tassone anticipates that (Ambulance) revenues should cover additional OT.

Mayor Hawke stated that the ambulance purchased from the Town of Westminster should arrive in Gardner in July. One-half of new Firefighter/EMT recruits have begun the Fire Academy.

Councillor Morgan questioned the continued dispatching of large Fire fighting vehicles along with the Ambulance on certain types of emergency calls.

The Mayor said that that practice would change a little; however, the nature of certain emergency calls requires that larger department vehicles be dispatched.

Dispatchers Budget

The Mayor stated that the Gardner-Athol Regional Dispatch Center, provided for under a grant from the Commonwealth's E911 Office, is approximately one year from full implementation. The FY2018 Budget will provide for the new regional operation and that revenue from the Town of Athol will offset a portion of operational expenses.

Part-time Dispatchers Salaries (51022) – Councillor Boone questioned the proposed increase to part-time salaries.

Mayor Hawke stated that there is a significant turnover in part-time Dispatcher staffing, so the Department is seeking to increase its pool of part-timers.

Building Inspector Budget

Assistant Building Inspector Salaries & Wages (51011) – Increase represents an additional Local Inspector to address the backlog of 110/R2 safety inspections. The Mayor noted that fees generated from the inspections should cover the cost of the additional inspector.

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Clerk/Asst. Salary & Wages (51012) – Figure of “\$111,470” under “FY2017 Department Request” is a scrivener’s error.

Plumbing & Gas Inspector Wages (51018) – Increase represents wages for additional hours required for additional inspections associated with significant building renovations at OEV, with plumbing and gas fees expected to offset the additional labor costs.

Weights & Measures Department Budget

Mayor advised \$4,000 fees generated annually.

Animal Control Officer Budget

Councillor Paul Tassone noted that the Safety Committee anticipated that savings would result due to the regionalization of animal control services with the Towns of Ashburnham, Hubbardston and Westminster.

Mayor Hawke stated that “the savings is on the revenue side and not the expense side.” He said that the budget is based on the original projected costs, plus 2½% increase every fiscal year from each town. He added that the \$115,000 budget includes \$40,000 in revenues from the three towns and that the salary budget includes three full-time positions.

Civil Defense Budget

Councillor Morgan questioned whether the Department is mandatory.

Mayor Hawke stated that the Director annually submits grant applications that generates between \$10,000 and \$25,000 for public safety-related needs.

Councillor James Johnson noted that the Director provides CERT Training annually.

Minor Equipment (52050) – Noting that no funds were spent in this account in FY2016, the Council recommended reducing the line item from \$2,000 to \$500.

Animal Shelter Budget

Overtime (51030) – Noting that minimal overtime was spent in FY2015 and in FY2016, the Council recommended reducing the line item from \$2,000 to \$500.

Civil Enforcement Budget

Professional Services (52190) – Line item provides for ticket/citation processing through Kelley and Ryan, Associates. The Mayor added the account is revenue neutral, as the City retrieves in collections what it expends for professional collections services.

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Regional School Assessments

Monty Tech Assessment (56500) – Councillor James Boone, a Gardner Representative to the Monty Tech School Committee, stated that the Committee recognized that it needed to keep its budget limited, so its budget increased approximately ½% over FY2016. He said that Gardner has 153 students attending Monty Tech, which are four fewer students than in the prior year.

Survey/Engineering Department Budget

Information Technology (52040) – Supports ESRI License (ArcGIS).

Public Works Budget

Vehicle Fuel (52243) – \$125,000 spent YTD, per Mayor. Most expended during winter months. All municipal vehicles obtain fuel from the DPW (Fire, Police, City Hall, etc.)

Airport Budget

Mayor Hawke stated that annual revenues are slightly less than the operating budget; however, it is anticipated that revenues will increase in FY2017.

Repairs & Maintenance (52020) – Councillor Marc Morgan noted that the Mayor's recommended cut of \$7,500 affects the Airport Commission's ability to hire a private contractor to paint the main hangar; however, it could be handled in-house.

Health Department Budget

Department Head Salary & Wages (51010) – Mayor Hawke explained that a series of salary steps have been implemented for the new Director whereby salary adjustments would become effective upon State certification as a Registered Sanitarian and then as a Certified Health Officer.

Council on Aging Budget

Building Repairs (57800) – Mayor Hawke explained that Building Repairs was combined with Repairs & Maintenance (52030).

Professional Development & Travel (52170) – Mayor Hawke explained that the increase is due to training and certification requirements for the new Director.

Veterans Department Budget

Veterans Benefits (57100) – Councillor Marc Morgan explained that the City has appropriated additional funds in the current fiscal year for Chapter 115 Benefits and noted that the Veterans Office currently serves 76 veterans that reside in the City of Gardner. Of these, 40 hail from the immediate area, while the others hail from outside the immediate area and out-of-state. He added that the State provides reimbursement to the City at the

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rate of 75% of benefits paid and that reimbursement payments are made within 12 months and on a quarterly basis.

Mayor Hawke said that in FY2006, the City expended only \$206,000 in benefits.

Library Budget

Mayor Hawke stated that in order for the Library to qualify to receive State Library Aid, the City must provide a certain level of funding.

Salaries & Wages, generally – Councillor Morgan noted that with the current staffing plan, the Library Director is able to address management and administrative matters, while staff focuses on the patrons.

Overtime (51030) – Additional overtime expenses are provided for through State Aid or the Library Trust.

Recreation Budget

Professional Services (52190) – \$12,500 committed for the Summer UP Program.

Playground Improvements (58150) – The Mayor stated that approximately \$10,000 is planned for Ovila Case Playground to replace the ballfield netting.

Councillor Scott Graves stated that DPW Director Dane Arnold has been considering constructing a small playground area at the Greenwood Memorial Pool.

Greenwood Memorial Pool Budget

P/T Lifeguards Salary & Wages (51013) – The Certified Pool Operator position is paid from this account.

Employee Benefits Budget

Worker's Compensation (57010) – Premiums are experience-rated and based on the number of employees.

Health/Dental Insurance (57060) – Municipal/School Budgets are consolidated and then apportioned by the Auditor at the end of the FY. School costs are reimbursed indirectly.

Insurances Budget

Property & General Liability Insurance (57501) – The Mayor stated that the addition of the ambulance to the Fire Department would not increase the City's premium.

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Motor Vehicle Floater (57504) – Mayor stated that the budget projection was provided by the City’s insurance carrier and that the addition of one ambulance might add another \$1,000 to the premium.

Sewer Budget

Cold Storage Building (55123) – Councillor Scott Graves stated that the cost of the Cold Storage Building is apportioned in both the Sewer Department and Water Department budgets.

Office Supplies (52230) – Councillor Vance questioned the increase in FY2017 for office supplies. Councillor Craig Cormier explained that the increase for office supplies/furniture is due to the relocation of a number of employees from the current DPW Office Building into the new Administration facility in FY2017.

Golf Course Budget

Mayor stated that Golf Course revenues are greater than what it expended in order to build reserves. City Auditor John Richard added that the Golf Course currently has \$85,000 in the Reserve account.

Repairs & Maintenance (52030) – Councillor Vance questioned FY2016 YTD expenses. The Mayor noted that \$19,000 has been expended YTD and that \$1,200 has been encumbered.

Councillor Boone stated that he had heard that fees were raised and that the Golf Course has been losing members.

The Mayor responded, saying that if revenues decline, then the budget follows suit.

Indirect Costs Reimbursement (52380) – Councillor Morgan stated that the Golf Course pays for its employees benefits through the indirect costs reimbursement.

Solid Waste Budget

Trash Bags (52232) – Councillors questioned the \$15,000 request for trash bags. The Mayor noted that \$2,335 was expended in FY2014 and added that any unexpended account balances revert to surplus at the close of the fiscal year.

School Department Expenses

President Walsh advised that the City Council can only reduce the bottom line of the School Budget.



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Councillor James Boone expressed disappointment that the School Committee granted salary increases to staff and administrators while laying-off employees.

Councillor Paul Tassone expressed thanks that the City is able to add \$354,645 toward Net School Spending.

Councillor Marc Morgan remarked that the Public Welfare Committee sought answers to a number of questions; however, responses had yet to be received.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:36 p.m.

Accepted by the City Council: *July 5, 2016*