

Budget Committee
September 29, 2020
Meeting Minutes

Present:

Chair Charles Therriault, Vice Chair Joe Caristi, Walter Waring, Janet Cavanagh, Sue Sodano, and Select Board Representative Les Dion.

Others Present:

Nik Coates, Town Administrator; Don Milbrand, Select Board Vice Chair; Anita Avery, Select Board member; Jim McIntire, Bristol Police Chief; Raymah Simpson, Tax Collector/Town Clerk; Ben LaRoche, Bristol Fire Chief; Christina Goodwin, Assessing and Land Use Manger; Brittany Overton, Library Director.

Call to Order:

Mr. Therriault called the meeting to order at 6:05pm.

2020-21 Budget Presentation:

Mr. Coates made a presentation on the 2020-2021 budgets to the Budget Committee. The purpose was to prove a baseline of data and information on the budget such as what has been done for 2020 and 2021 data points to think about for future budget planning. Mr. Coates discussed the challenges that Bristol faces in revenues; areas such as job opportunities being tied into the service industry, varied housing within the town such as seasonal and long-term residents, and in the current wake of COVID-19 pandemic. Investing in economic growth within the town and community is always the goal for Town government, but the Town also needs to stay disciplined in spending, especially during these uncertain times. The two types of revenues are sustainable--which include local and state--and situational. which is made up of grants, capital reserve funds, and the unreserved fund balance. The unreserved fund balance is an amount that is accessible for emergencies. Ms. Simpson stated that that local tax collection is around 96% of payments due. Mr. Coates then discussed the pandemic and its effects on the town. The immediate concern was with stabilizing revenue and how prolonged revenue loss could impact community services. Mr. Coates stated that keeping Town employees employed was a priority and that no one was furloughed or laid off which was part of a 3-phase plan. Phase 1 consisted of getting department heads together to identify immediate needs and come up with a plan to meet those needs. Departments took on role extensions such as food and meal delivery within the community and connecting with state resources. Phase 2 consisted of providing staff in all departments to still meet the needs of residents and businesses. Staggered shifts still provided appropriate coverage while limiting the number of staff in personal contact per State guidelines. Non-emergency staff or those on staggered shifts worked remotely to stay safe to still meet the needs of the community. The Fire and Police Departments created shift adjustments to meet all needs. Phase 3 included 2020 budget management to ensure no unnecessary spending occurred until there was more information on the pandemic and its potential long- and short-term impact. Mr. Coates said the unemployment numbers in the town went up during the pandemic and have slowly declined over time as people are going back to work or finding other employment. Mr. Coates advised the Budget Committee to keep in mind coming into the 2021

Budget year that there is no telling of how the revenues will look. With the pandemic still ongoing, and if it continues to do so, then the community could face some hardships, but he hopes for the best and to be prepared for even the worst-case scenario. The community has always found a way to come together and help each other out and Mr. Coates has no doubt that the town will continue to do so.

Discussion: Department Heads and Select Board:

Mr. Therriault asked the Department Heads how their budgets changed during the pandemic and how that would reflect next year's budget. Chief McIntire stated that the currently low budget figures are misleading. There were no training sessions, officers did not take to vacations or time off, and OT was cut to decrease risk of exposure. Many officers have families with no childcare available to them during the pandemic so modified schedules were created. Regarding the Police Cruiser purchase that was approved, Ford shut down its plant so there has been a delay on delivery. Ms. Simpson stated that the front lobby was still very busy with taking appointments, collecting from the drop box, and mail ins. Ms. Goodwin discussed how the Land Use and Assessing Office was still busy. The Health Department donated supplies to help the community and were not able to save much in the budget as many resources were depleted and many were hard to restock during the pandemic. Mrs. Godwin's future concern is for the costs of supplies and demand. Ms. Overton stated that the Library staff transitioned well during the pandemic and they still saw patrons interested in using study spaces or items. The library received a \$10,000 grant which helped to save from the operating budget. Chief LaRoche stated that overtime has managed using per diem staff. Many repairs needed were done in house. Calls declined at the beginning of the pandemic but have returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Mr. Caristi stated some people from the service industry made more on unemployment than actually working. The unemployment rate is now decreasing, and the community hopefully will see a slow progression.

Review and Approval of Minutes:

Motion to approve amended minutes from September 14, 2020 by Mr. Waring, seconded by Ms. Cavanagh. Motion passed by roll call vote 6-0-0.

Old Business:

Mr. Therriault and Mr. Cote asked the committee if they had any questions regarding the bylaws. Motion to approve the bylaws as written by Ms. Dion, seconded by Ms. Cavanagh. Motion approved by roll call vote 6-0-0.

Correspondence:

None

Member Comments:

Mr. Waring discussed an article written by Mr. John Sellers on the sewer extension project that had discrepancies regarding details and project costs and he firmly believed that the Town needed to address the correct details as many community members were confused by the article. Ms. Dion stated

there has been previously presentations and another one in October that will discuss the precise details and attending the presentation would be beneficial to town residents and the members of the committee. Ms. Dion says the presentation breaks down the phases of the project and will clarify any misunderstandings of the project along with costs.

Mr. Waring also discussed how many town residents were concerned with financials during COVID and how they were going to pay some of their bills including taxes. The stimulus checks of \$1,200 helped people pay their tax bills during the pandemic along with other bills.

Mr. Coates also gave a welcome to the new Welfare Director, Ingrid Heidenreich.

Select Board Comments:

None

Staff Comments:

None.

Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn meeting at 7:35pm made by Mrs. Cavanagh, seconded by Mrs. Sodano. Motion passed 5-0-0.

Next Meeting:

Tuesday, October 20, at 6pm at Town Office Meeting Room A

Respectfully Submitted,

Shannon Wharton