Town of Bridgewater
Town Council Meeting (Joint Meeting of School Committee, Finance Committee and Town Manager)
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, January 20, 2015

CALL TO ORDER:

A quorum being duly present, Town Council President William Wood called the meeting of the Bridgewater Town Council to order at 7:33 pm, on Tuesday, January 20, 2015 at BTV Studios, 80 Spring Street, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

School Committee Chair, Patricia Riley called the meeting of School Committee to order
Finance Committee Chair, Steven Russo called the meeting of the Finance Committee to order.

PRESENT:

Council members present were, Timothy Fitzgibbons, Kevin Perry, Peter Colombotos, Sheila Whitaker, William Wood, Scott Pitta, William Rivers (arriving at 7:46 p.m.), and Sandra Wright (arriving at 7:50 p.m.). Town Manager Michael Dutton and Town Attorney Mark Gildea were also present.

ABSENT:

- Councilor John Norris

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

MOMENT OF SILENCE

A moment of silence was held for all veterans who have passed including:

- Jacob M. Richer
- James F. Comita

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – None

ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE PRESIDENT

- President Wood explained the purpose of the meeting and the format of the evening's meetings.

PROCLAMATIONS - None

CITIZENS OPEN FORUM – No citizens came forward.

Motion: A motion was made by Councilor Fitzgibbons to take agenda item L: Legislation for Action out of order. The motion was seconded by Councilor Whitaker.

Discussion: None

A voice vote was taken and the motion passed 5-1.

LEGISLATION FOR ACTION - ***(taken out of order)***

- Transfer #T-2015-001: CPC Transfer – Recreational Needs Assessment

  Motion: A motion to approve was made by Councilor Fitzgibbons. The motion was seconded by Councilor Whitaker.

  Discussion: Councilor Fitzgibbons noted the measure was approved unanimously by the Finance Committee (5-0) and by the Budget & Finance Committee (2-0). Councilor Pitta expressed concern over the cost of $25,000 and made a motion to amend the amount to $10,000. The motion was not seconded.

  Motion: A motion to amend was made by Councilor Fitzgibbons to strike "and if there are insufficient funds in that account to draw the remaining amount from the Undesignated Reserve Account". The motion was seconded by Councilor Colombotos.

  Discussion: Councilor Fitzgibbons explained this amendment was recommended by the Town Accountant.
  A voice vote was taken and the motion to amend passed 6-0.

  Discussion (cont'd): At Councilor Perry's request, Mr. Dutton explained the $25,000 is the maximum amount allotted to fund the assessment; and to arrive at the maximum they get rough estimates from a number of companies. When they go out to bid, a very precise number comes back and if it's less than the maximum the difference is reverted back to the CPC account. Mr. Dutton also explained this assessment will also play into the Open Space Plan, so it is not money wasted. After stating they all initially had concerns about the cost; hearing the assessment plays into the open space plan, Councilors Colombotos, Whitaker and Wood all expressed support for the measure.

Seeing no further discussion, a roll call vote was taken with results recorded as follows:
Fitzgibbons – YEA; Perry – YEA; Colombotos – YEA; Whitaker – YEA; Wood – YEA; Pitta – NAY; Rivers – NOT PRESENT; Norris – ABSENT; Wright – NOT PRESENT. The motion passed 5-1.

APPOINTMENTS – None

HEARINGS -

- **7:40 p.m.:** Petition #P-2015-002: Request for Propane Storage - Eastern Propane

President Wood opened the hearing at 7:43 p.m.

Mr. Dutton explained the nature of the petition and outlined the need for the process to come before the Council, which is required due to the amount of propane being requested.

**7:46 p.m., Councilor Rivers entered the meeting.*

Tom Cochrane from Eastern Propane came forward and explained the propane is necessary because the gas lines were not laid in time, and this is a temporary solution. Mr. Cochrane explained the request is for 6 takes, 2 are already there and in use.

President Wood invited any questions from the public – none came forward.

President Wood asked if there was anyone speaking in favor – none came forward.

President Wood asked if there was anyone speaking in opposition - none came forward.

President Wood entertained any questions from councilors:

- Councilor Pitta asked when Columbia Gas will have the gas line project finished. The representative responded he has heard they may start as early as next week, but the work could take up to two months.
- Councilor Perry noted the Petition request is 4,000 gallons and they've stated they're seeking 6,000 gallons. The Fire Chief's approval is for 4 tanks. Mr. Dutton responded yes, you'd have to amend it to increase the 4,000 to 6,000.
- Councilor Fitzgibbons asked if this process held up the work. The representative responded it will.
- Councilor Perry asked if there are any safety concerns. The representative responded it's been reviewed with the Fire Chief, there will be Jersey Barriers that will be surrounding the propane tanks and all the lines running from the propane tanks to the heater will be underground. Think we've done as much as we can to mitigate risk.
- Councilor Rivers asked about the plans referenced that are not included in the packet information.

President Wood closed the hearing at 7:54 p.m.

Motion: A motion to approve was made by Councilor Fitzgibbons. The motion was seconded by Councilor Pitta.

Motion: A motion was made by Councilor Fitzgibbons to amend by striking "4,000" and replace with "6,000" and add at end of sentence "contingent upon Fire Chief's approval". The motion was seconded by Councilor Perry.

Discussion: None

A voice vote was taken and the motion passed 8-0.

Seeing no further discussion on the main motion to approve, a voice vote was taken and the main motion to approve passed 8-0.

LICENSE TRANSACTIONS - None

PRESENTATIONS - None

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- Mr. Dutton reported on information about various activities happening around town and highlighted meetings and events. Items of note included: the Academy Building is in the final stages of design planning, and he anticipates going out to bid sometime at the end of January. The Municipal Building Committee and Mr. Dutton agree that the fountain was never supposed to be part of the original Academy Building project; however, they will be

working with Bridgewater Improvement Association to discuss what would be appropriate there. Mr. Dutton plans to re-file a petition to extend the lease for the VFW as mentioned at the last meeting. Mr. Dutton has reposted and renamed the Town Planner position to Community & Economic Development Director and they have had some interest. In the interim, they have hired Greg Guimond back on a contract basis to keep things moving. Mr. Dutton has been having tax incentive meetings with a business looking to move to Bridgewater. The license for Skipps Liquors has been received. Mr. Dutton has written the owners and asked them to be open in the next two weeks. There will be an Informational session on affordable units at Lakeside Apartment project on 2/9 at 6:00 p.m. at the Bridgewater Public Library. Information is also on the website. The application deadline is 3/12/15. Finally, Mr. Dutton provided an update on the Oak Street Bridge.

Council Questions:

- At councilor Whitaker's request, Mr. Dutton elaborated on the meetings regarding Elm Street stating he there are a number of people spearheading efforts on our behalf. A TIP (Tax Incentive Program) will not work in that area for a number of reasons. We were hoping to develop a unique TIP for this community, however that program won't work. The state has provided us with some alternatives that may accomplish much the same thing.
- Councilor Fitzgibbons asked if the Town Manager has talked to West Bridgewater about their part of the bridge. Mr. Dutton responded, not specifically, but West Bridgewater has written us to ask if we would support their long term transportation plans, so he will speak with them.
- Councilor Colombotos asked if a candidate who applies for that newly renamed (former Town Planner) position have the skills necessary to do the job? Mr. Dutton responded we have asked candidates to have planning credentials and experience to do the job, and on paper they would seem qualified.

Joint Meeting:

Mr. Dutton explained the intent of the charter section requiring the joint meeting. Generally the town does continue to improve its financial condition. However there is still a long way to go. We continue to move forward in stability with conservative budgeting. The undesignated fund balances were approaching $3MM at the close of FY14 which is just about 6% of the general fund expenditures. Our target over the next 5 years is to bring that percentage closer to 10%. The 6% puts us just about at the state average. Bond rating agencies assign is based partially on the strength and stability of the undesignated fund balance. Concerns for FY16: sustainable salaries bringing employees to some internal and external equities, improve stabilization balances, continue to fund the sick time buyback fund, OPEB funding – which the town has begun to fund it, but there's still a long way to go, capital planning shows a lot of pent up needs; for example, $13-20MM in roadwork, highway equipment, ambulances and fire equipment. Tax collection has seen some good growth, however we continue to estimate very conservative when we do local receipts. Tax Titles redemptions are up, but need to continue to improve on that effort. Still concerned about 9C cuts, but the new Governor has committed to leaving local aide alone. Pension assessment is another concern. We may see a 1.5/2% increase in health insurance premiums. Regarding the budget process, Mr. Dutton is required to submit a preliminary budget 2/1, and outlined a tentative timeline for the budget season. Finally, Mr. Dutton noted that at the request of the Charter Review Committee he submitted several suggestions for changes to the budget section of the Charter. He noted they may or may not accept his suggestions.

School Committee: Dr. Forbes introduced, Patricia Riley, Chair of the School Committee, and Julie Scolara also of the school committee, Dr. Susan Prewendowski, Michelle Williams and Director of Business Services, Cathleen Maccedo. Mrs. Riley acknowledged we are all at the very beginning of the budget process and Dr. Forbes will be presenting her needs based budget at the School Committee meeting on Wednesday evening. Their public hearing will be held 3/11 and Mrs. Riles invited all to attend. 3/26/15 is the date they will adopt the actual budget. Dr. Forbes explained the preliminary budget, which is needs based and is expenditures only; not a balanced budget, noting they try very hard to come in around a 2.5% assessment to the town. Dr. Forbes explained some of the cost drivers which they do not have control over. They are concerned this year about the possible health insurance premium increase which could be in the double digits and the cost of utilities. Dr. Forbes gave a summary of areas funding has been used for. She outlined the demographics noting a student population of 5,372. Over 3,200 are Bridgewater residents. 582 teachers, administrators, nurses, etc are employed in the school district and they operate 7 schools throughout the district. The

high school graduation rate is 98.8%. Dr. Forbes elaborated on the school district's education programs at the different levels and accreditations. The school district is transition into digital learning by using a variety of web based educational programs which support the curriculum. Dr. Forbes cited some cost savings measures as: in house snow plowing/removal, outsourcing maintenance needs for equipment and purchasing through cooperative groups. Dr. Forbes provided a handout for reference of accomplishments, noting the school district's bond rating has improved to A1. 89% of students go on to 4 and 2 year colleges. She also noted several athletic accomplishments and noted there is a patent pending for a machine to recycle k-cups. The average class size is in the 20's throughout the district. Dr Forbes noted they have one request for a capital item; internal security camera's, which is a security issue.

Finance Committee: Finance Committee Chair, Steven Russo introduced the members as: Rob Mastria, Bob Reese, Ken Barnard and Eric Langone (Vice Chair) and Secretary, Michael Spagone. Mr. Russo noted there are 2 vacancies on the Finance Committee and they are in need of volunteers to fill those openings. At Mr. Russo's request, Dr. Forbes explained the school district will stay with MCAS testing for the 2014/2015 school year because progress is being tracked. However, they are also piloting PARK. Mr. Russo asked if Dr. Forbes saw any other potential budgetary "red flags" aside from the health care and utilities costs previously mentioned. Dr. Forbes responded staffing could be a concern. Mr. Russo spoke briefly about the budget process and spoke favorably on continuing the past practice of holding joint meetings. He also suggested some members of the Finance Committee could function as liaisons with police/fire departments, School Committee, etc. As a body, the Finance Committee has been trying to understand how they can better monitor the town's financial condition. They want to maintain the financial discipline. They have created a model of financial ratios, so they can look at items before the committee to enhance decision making.

Councilor Questions:

- Councilor Rivers asked if Mr. Dutton could give an overview of contracts. Mr. Dutton responded we have just settled 3 contracts and anticipate settling 1 more contract and has one more they are negotiating. They'll be negotiating late February on. There is one contract not up for renegotiation until 2017 (Fire). Dr. Forbes explained they had settled a three year teacher's contract and are currently negotiating paraprofessionals. As a follow up, Mr. Rivers asked if there was a policy for spending in the Excess/Deficiencies. Dr. Forbes stated there is no set policy, but they do work to put money into stabilization and are putting money into OPEB liability. Finally, Mr. Rivers asked what the cost for the cameras would be. Dr. Forbes responded roughly $46,000. Mr. Rivers also noted it would be helpful in the future to have the capital plan for the Council and Finance Committee. Mr. Rivers asked the Town Manager if a compensation/classification survey would be done for public safety. Mr. Dutton responded they will eventually do that.
- Councilor Perry asked Dr. Forbes if they anticipated any funding this year for the full day Kindergarten program. She responded yes, the rough estimate is $1.2MM. It was very expensive to put into place because they had to hire 5 new teachers.
- Councilor Fitzgibbons asked if the $1.2MM was district-wide. Dr. Forbes responded yes it was.
- Councilor Pitta asked if the cameras mentioned would be placed in classrooms or hallways. Dr. Forbes responded they'll be placed according to the Police recommendation.
- Councilor Wood asked Dr. Forbes about books and turning to digital learning and did she see the cost being neutral or a positive? Dr. Forbes responded she is seeing more of the budget going into technology and less into supplies. The savings have come by purchasing classroom sets of materials instead of 1 book/student. President Wood asked if there were efforts we can make to realize some efficiency in group health costs. Dr. Forbes responded they are looking at providers, but some of the expected increase is due to claims.
- At Councilor Wright's request, Dr. Forbes explained the safety presence and training in the schools.
- At Councilor Whitaker's request, Dr. Forbes highlighted several areas where they are initiating cost cutting measures.

President Wood thanked all parties for their presence and participation this evening.

Motion: A motion to adjourn the School Committee meeting at 9:34 p.m. was made by Mrs. Scolpara. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Williams. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

Motion: A motion was made by Eric Langone to adjourn the Bridgewater Finance Committee meeting at 9:34 p.m. The motion was seconded by Bob Reese. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

**9:34 p.m., President Wood called a 10 minute recess.*

**9:46p.m., President Wood called the meeting back to order.*

**Councilor Perry did not return to the meeting.*

DISCUSSIONS

- Administrative Code
  President Wood referenced a handout produced by the Town Manager noting this was the framework of the Town Code. Mr. Wood walked through various sections of the code and explained where information will fit in. Mr. Dutton followed up stating this is a rough outline. The Administrative Code is what we've really been talking about. Our current bylaws will need some revisions to be updated to reflect the new government. This gives you an idea of an overall Town Code.

  Councilor Fitzgibbons stated this is a great start and he appreciates having the overall bones of the structure. Councilor Whitaker asked if there is there a sense of a timeline. President Wood responded the timeline is we march forward and work on it each meeting until we have something we can vote on.

- Town Manager Performance Update
  Councilor Whitaker updated the group stating the Town Manager has provided a narrative and self assessment. Councilor Whitaker is looking for councilor feedback by this Friday. All that will be compiled and given to the Strategic Planning Committee and we will complete an assessment. Please also identify what you see as priorities for goals.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS - None

OLD BUSINESS - None

NEW BUSINESS

- Transfer #T-2015-002: Transfer to Fund Planning Consultant Contract
  Mr. Dutton briefly explained the transfer.
  Motion: A motion was made by Councilor Rivers to refer the matter to the Budget & Finance Committee and Finance Committee. The motion was seconded by Councilor Fitzgibbons.
  Discussion: None
  A voice vote was taken and the motion passed 6-0.
- Transfer #T-2015-003: HDC Budget Transfer
  Mr. Dutton briefly explained the nature of the transfer order.
  Motion: A motion was made by Councilor Rivers to refer the matter to the Budget & Finance Committee and Finance Committee. The motion was seconded by Councilor Fitzgibbons.
  Discussion: None
  A voice vote was taken and the motion passed 6-0.

CITIZEN COMMENTS - None

COUNCIL COMMENTS

- Councilor Wright: Thanked the committees for attending this evening and though there are a lot of challenges ahead of us she looks forward to a good budget season.
- Councilor Norris: Absent
- Councilor Rivers: Thanked the committees for coming out this evening. He expects to follow through and meet jointly with the Finance Committee as they did last year. If councilors have concerns/suggestions Mr. Rivers encourages all to bring them forward so he can bring them to the committees.

- Councilor Pitta: Thanked all who came out this evening and encouraged citizens to volunteer. Mr. Pitta noted he would not be seeking reelection, so his seat would be available and he's happy to speak with any citizen interested.
- Councilor Whitaker: Stated she thinks this meeting was a great kickoff to the budget season. We received great updates.
- Councilor Colombotos: Echoed previous councilor comments.
- Councilor Perry: Not present
- Councilor Fitzgibbons: Thanked School Committee and Finance Committee for coming out this evening. Emphasized the need to fill the Finance Committee vacancies. Mr. Fitzgibbons also reminded everyone that the presentation Dr. Forbes gives tomorrow evening is not the final budget.
- Councilor Wood: Thanked all for organizing this meeting. Regarding volunteers, Mr. Wood stated it would be great if we could get more people into volunteer positions.

EXECUTIVE SESSION –

Motion: A motion was made by Councilor Fitzgibbons to move into Executive Session under: MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21(a) (3): To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares; and to adjourn from Executive Session. The motion was seconded by Councilor Wright.

A roll call vote was taken with results recorded as follows:

Wright – YEA; Norris – ABSENT; Rivers - YEA; Pitta – YEA; Wood – YEA; Whitaker – YEA; Colombotos – YEA; Perry – YEA; Fitzgibbons - YEA. The motion passed 8-0.

ADJOURNMENT

Open session adjourned at 9:55 p.m.

Minutes submitted by: Ann Holmberg

In accordance with the applicable provisions of the Town of Bridgewater Home Rule Charter and Town Council Rules and Procedures, the Town Council assembled voted, at their meeting on Tuesday, February 24, 2015, to approve the aforementioned minutes, as submitted by a voice vote (8-0) (Councilor Perry not present).

A TRUE COPY ATTEST:

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Ann M. Holmberg
Town Council Clerk