

**City of Somersworth, NH**  
**April 6, 2013**  
**8:30 AM**

## **City Council Budget Workshop**

Mayor Spencer opened the Workshop at 8:30 AM. At that time, Councilors Pepin, Hebert, Donohue, Tapscott, Witham and Sprague were present. Councilors Jarvis and Soldati arrived a little later. Councilor McCallion was absent.

### **ELECTED LEADERSHIP**

#### **Community Support:**

- **COAST Bus Service**

Rad Nichols, Executive Director of COAST Bus, said that the service continues to expand. Route 2, which includes Somersworth, has had significant expansion, (approximately 40%.) ADA services are the fastest growing over the last several years, at around 50% + per year, from around \$180,000 to \$875,000 in the last four years. They expect to see that continue. The new self funding route to the Shipyard has been successful.

Mr. Nichols stated that economic impact studies show that for every dollar invested, there is a return to the local economy of about \$6. He hopes to receive full support, saying that locals use (COAST) heavily.

Councilor Witham asked about DOT funding, fare increases and “zone-based fares”.

(Councilor Jarvis arrived at 8:47 am.)

Councilor Sprague asked about the ramifications if COAST does not receive the requested amount. Mr. Nichols responded that they would have to reconsider service levels.

- **Big Brothers Big Sisters**

Jan Williams, the office manager who lives in Somersworth, presented the request for funding from Big Brothers Big Sisters saying that the Executive Director could not be present today. She said that the need is great in Somersworth where they currently have 25 children; 78 children, mostly boys, are on a waiting list.

The cost last year to make a match was approximately \$1,000 per match. The Big Brothers Big Sisters Organization get no state or federal funding, they are funded through business donations, grants, request to towns & cities and fundraising.

Ms. Williams quoted a 14 year old little sister in the program, who, after disappointingly not winning a bedroom makeover contest said “It’s okay. The whole thing brought us even closer together. You saved my life. People don’t give you guys enough credit sitting in that office, making kids happy. If it weren’t for you, I wouldn’t have made it. I didn’t want to give (Kristen) a chance but I did; now she is like a sister to me. She is part of my family.”

- **Community Food Pantry**

Patricia Vachon, Executive Director of the Community Food Pantry said that in 2012 there was a big increase in food expenditures; they are not getting as much food as they used to get.

Councilor Witham pointed out that this service alleviates pressure on the City; City Manager Belmore concurred.

- **Sexual Assault Support Services**

Kathy Beebe Executive Director of SASS, said that they support anyone affected by sexual assault as well as others who are impacted. She said that there were 52 Somersworth residents who were assisted last year.

Ms. Beebe said that kids are at the greatest risk; they go into the schools to try to prevent (assaults.) There is a great need for this and they are asking for level funding.

- **Homeless Center-County**

There was no presentation for the Homeless Center-County.

- **Youth Safe Haven**

Marsha Michaels Miller, President of the Board, said that she views children as teapots where you take off the top and pour in what is needed, teaching them to be independent with academic support and literacy, etc.

Ms. Miller outlined some of the struggles that Youth Safe Haven has gone through recently as a result of the situation at the Somersworth Housing Authority; in December they were told that they didn’t have enough money.

She went on to thank the Mayor for the new commissioners, saying that it is “all about the kids.” There are now 40 children involved, 22 on Bartlett, she said.

(Councilor Soldati arrived at 9:45 am.)

- **Cornerstone VNA**

Julie Reynolds, CEO since January, said that they are celebrating their 100<sup>th</sup> year this year. They have changed their name from Rochester VNA. Their focus is on the home-bound acute care patient; most patients receive 60-90 days of services including hospice and palliative care. They are asking 11 towns and Cities for funding. They are ranked within the top 500 in the country. ...They do not turn anyone away in funded towns, she said.

Councilors Witham and Jarvis both indicated their support of these services.

- **American Red Cross**

There was no presentation by the American Red Cross.

- **Aids Response**

There was no presentation by Aids Response.

- **Community Action Program**

Susan Geier presented for the Community Action Program saying that they leverage the money they get to \$800,000 worth of services to the community. Last year, fuel assistance helped more than 400 households. Electrical assistance served more than 1000 people. Head-start is now in schools. There are summer feeding services that they expect to double this year. They are revitalizing parent education. They did \$15,000 in weatherization.

Councilor Soldati wondered whether “sequestration” will affect their program.

Councilor Sprague wondered about means testing and whether landlords needed to wait a certain amount of time to sell properties if they received weatherization services.

- **Festival Association**

Phil Munck spoke on behalf of the fundraising and community events of the Festival Association and reminded people that the Spring Craft Fair and Farmer’s Market is next weekend.

Councilor Witham mentioned in-kind services (such as street-sweeping and moving staging that the association receives from the City.)

Councilor Soldati commended the association saying that the Sustainability Committee is pleased with the Farmer’s Market.

- **Homemakers**

Linda Howard said that she has been involved with the Homemakers for over 35 years, explaining that the agency started with 10 staff members and is now at 115. The Homemakers work to keep people in their homes. There are 91 Somersworth residents involved. The Homemakers mission is to keep older/disabled patients in their homes. They offer the most cost effective services and their help is essential.

- **Somersworth Youth Connection**

There was no presentation by the Somersworth Youth Connection.

- **CASA**

There was no presentation by CASA.

- **A Safe Place**

Lisa LeBlank, Executive Director of A Safe Place, asked Somersworth for funding for the first time saying that Somersworth is the community to which they provide the fourth highest level of services. They are now asking other communities to provide funding, as well.

Ms. LeBlank likened the service to the under-ground railroad, saying that they do not turn people away.

Councilor Sprague asked the ramifications (of not receiving help from communities.) Ms. LeBlank answered that they hope to keep services in place, but they may need to decrease services, etc. When asked why they chose the funding request to be \$8, 000, she answered that she would have get answers from their Finance department.

Councilor Witham asked if they work with local law enforcement and she answered in the affirmative.

Councilor Tapscott wondered how much Rochester and Dover contribute. (Rochester contributes office space in the Community building in lieu of funding.)

Councilor Sodati would like the breakdown of contributions.

Note: City Manager Belmore said that the proposed budget reflects level funding from the prior year leaving it up to Council (to add funds).

**Mayor-Council:**

No discussion.

**Civic Promotion:**

Councilor Soldati asked if there is a problem with the holiday decorations on poles. Councilor Witham said that they can address that as the downtown revitalization is done. Councilor Hebert asked about parade funding.

## **CITY MANAGEMENT**

### **City Manager:**

There is an increase in hours and benefits in the proposed budget for the City Manager's Executive Assistant as well as a new position being created: Human Resources Coordinator. Councilor Witham remarked that he supports both increases.

Councilor Tapscott questioned "travel & training."

Councilor Sprague said that he supports the HR Coordinator position. He said that he thinks \$25,000 of the CM salary is reimbursed by Water and Sewer funds and \$10,000 is reimbursed to the Finance Director.

Councilor Soldati questioned the Designation "Coordinator" as opposed to "Director." She wondered who the Coordinator would report to.

CM Belmore answered that he didn't see the need to create a new department head.

Councilor Soldati wondered if this proposed salary was the going rate and whether this would lower our liability insurance. She also remarked on health insurance.

Councilor Jarvis supports these changes but asked, with respect to a level budget, if we are adding these costs, would we be shifting the money from somewhere else?

CM Belmore said that we are at bare bones and cannot eliminate any positions. They would like to add an IT person and a City Attorney.

Councilor Witham sees the HR position as a "foot in the door." He supports and believes it is achievable.

### **Administration:**

Councilor Tapscott asked about property liability insurance. He was told that it covers City Hall and the staff.

The City Manager is asking for an increase in legal and litigation, which Councilor Sprague endorses.

## **FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION**

**Finance Department:**

CM Belmore went to a proactive consultant for IT.

Finance Director Smith outlined how IT helps.

CM Belmore said that they are looking for a social network intern.

**City Clerk:**

Councilor Jarvis asked what percentage of health insurance staff members pay. Non union employees currently pay 12% and the City pays 88%. There are some differences between the five city unions.

**Elections:**

CM Belmore said that the proposed amount goes up and down depending on the number of elections.

CM Belmore said that there may be an issue with how we pay the election workers. Finance Director Smith said they will be bringing forth a resolution because, although they had thought that election workers were exempt from withholding FICA and Medicare; there is a resolution from 1993 which they were not aware of that exempts only \$50 of their pay. You can exempt up to \$1500, (and they will need to make an adjustment.)

Councilor Pepin asked about the election booths which were cut out of last years budget. Finance Director Smith said that they ...did not bring them forward (in this budget,)

Councilor Sprague asked if we need all these polling stations.

Councilor Witham said that came up during the Charter Commission. They had a legal opinion and because they are a City, they are required to have separate wards.

**Tax Collector:**

CM Belmore noted that all four clerks (in the City Clerk/Tax office) are cross-trained.

**Human Services:**

CM Belmore said that our one full-time welfare officer is doing a good job for us. They are level funding Human Services.

Councilor Sprague asked why there was a spike in direct relief.

Finance Director Smith said that \$115,000 is the request; the budget has been flat for years and that \$87,000 was the actual amount (expended. It usually ranges from \$87,000 to \$100,000, he said, depending on demand. So they have level funded that again.

Councilor Tapscott noted that percentage-wise, state retirement has gone up higher than the increase in our health insurance.

CM Belmore pointed out that as far as the Welfare budget is concerned, five or six years ago when he took over overseeing this, the budget was double or triple the current amount; they are being much more efficient as far as their partnerships and screening and adhering to the City's Welfare guidelines.

### **Library:**

CM Belmore proposed some funding for part-time help.

Finance Director Smith said that the library needs that assistance, they are down to two full-time staff and it puts a lot of pressure on the Library Director. They have done an excellent job with the cutbacks, and it is important to maintain the services and support it at the level that they have requested. The Finance Committee recently released some funding toward the automation project which is in early stages.

Councilor Witham thinks that (this budget) is as lean as it can be and continue to have a functional library and he would not support touching this whatsoever and he applauds the effort to automate.

Councilor Pepin agrees. If anything, they ought to look to replace some of what has been taken away.

Councilor Sprague echoes that.

Councilor Jarvis agrees, saying that this is bottom line. Kudos to those at the Library because she has noticed increased foot traffic ...and that is great to see.

Councilor Soldati echoed all these sentiments. She asked about the lower janitorial costs.

Finance Director Smith answered that that is a result of losing a previous contracted service and using the janitorial help from the City Hall and the schools.

CM Belmore said that they will be planting outside the Library and putting chairs out.

## **DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

### **Planning:**

No discussion.

**Economic Development:**

CM Belmore said that they have increased this supply, (etc) part of the budget somewhat since they now have hired the Economic Development Manager.

**Code Enforcement:**

Councilor Witham asked where legal fees issues associated with property maintenance were listed.

That is in the City Management part of the budget.

Councilor Pepin wondered about transportation for Christine Davis, the new Economic Development Manager. Answer: She is using a hand-me-down police cruiser.

Councilor Witham asked about pro-rated benefits for the part time Code Enforcement position.

**Assessing:**

CM Belmore said it would be nice to bring back the (full-time hours) for the Assessing Clerk.

Councilor Sprague mentioned the looming tax cap saying that this would be the year to (do increases) to create the benchmark for the tax cap.

CM Belmore said that "Revaluation" is under Capital Outlay.

Dave Sharples, the Director of Planning and Community Development, said that they are trying to improve service at the desk.

**Recreation:**

Councilor Witham would like to increase the amount allocated for park maintenance.

Councilor Soldati thinks that the Recreation services are great. She is appalled at the level of Nick Champion, the Recreation Supervisor's salary, given what he does. She wants to see an actual Parks and Recreation Department which is not (managed) under Economic Development.

Councilor Jarvis agrees and believes it could become self-sustaining.

There was some discussion about metering the new water feature.

**City Hall:**

No discussion.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

### **Police Administration:**

Councilor Witham asked why there was an increase in vehicle maintenance.

Police Chief Crombie answered that it is mostly because of tires. He said that they do anything they can themselves.

### **Patrol:**

Councilor Jarvis asked about the total number of staff.

Chief Crombie said they had had a pedigreed department until about eight months ago when they lost four people to the State Police, one to Liquor and one to another department. They will have seven people with less than one year (experience.)

### **Investigations:**

Councilor Witham said that this is a very busy agency and he is not inclined to cut it at all.

Chief Crombie said that they have had one guy on the streets now for nine months to cover.

Councilor Witham looked at the increase to retirement, he said it is approximately \$165,000 on the City side and even more on the school side.

### **Police Support:**

Councilor Sprague asked, "What is Police Support."

Answer: Dispatching.

Councilor Sprague believes that we need more parking enforcement.

CM Belmore mentioned more police presence downtown.

Councilor Soldati asked about the "Building Cleaning Service." That is for mats that we rent.

### **Traffic:**

No discussion.

**Prosecution:**

Chief Crombie does not know of a city that does not have a prosecutor.

**Fire Administration:**

No discussion.

**Fire Fighting:**

CM Belmore has level funded the overtime line. He said that Fire Chief Hoyle would like to increase that line, by perhaps another \$20,000.

Fire Chief Hoyle explained the history of how they do the staffing, saying that now, if they have a vacancy during the day, they do not fill that vacancy. There were 164 daytime vacancies last year. His proposal is to increase the budget by \$19,000 to cover weekend days only; an additional 48 shifts. It would be about \$60,000 to try to do all of them.

He said that the standard is four fighters on before starting rescue operations. Studies show that a four person engine company is 35% more efficient than a three. It is difficult to get people back on recalls, especially on summer afternoons.

Chief Hoyle did a comparison of other NH communities that are the same size as Somersworth. These included Berlin, Claremont, Durham, Hampton and Lebanon; they all have at least four firefighters on duty. Durham and Claremont have five, Lebanon has six, Hampton, because of there location, has nine. Somersworth, daytime, has three. The proposal is to try to at least get them to four on weekends.

CM Belmore said the round figure; with roll up costs for retirement, is \$20,000.

Councilor Soldati asked about the bottom line department budgets for each community.

CM Belmore said it depends where (benefits) are plugged in.

Chief Hoyle said that our budget is the lowest.

Councilor Soldati asked why health and dental went down. It is because Chief Hoyle receives it through retirement in Massachusetts.

Councilor Pepin will support this increase, saying that there is a big difference working a fire with four people instead of three.

Chief Hoyle reminds people that one of the Council goals is to increase call firefighters and they have doubled that this fiscal year from three to six. They will continue to add several.

Councilor Witham generally support this.

CM Belmore reminded everyone that they also get good support from mutual aid, as well as provide good support. They are not short staffing or placing the community at risk.

Chief Hoyle agreed, saying that in the last ten months that he has been here, he thinks he has gone on more mutual aid calls than he had in ten years of his previous job in Massachusetts.

Councilor Sprague asked about the current number of engines.

There are two front line engines and a ladder and the “three engine” is in reserve.

Councilor Sprague asked if we need that much apparatus.

Chief Hoyle wants to retain it for the call force. Typically they would try to have two pumpers and a ladder on scene, leaving a pumper back at the station that they could hopefully staff. The problem is when they get maintenance; they drop back to two pumps, or if there is a breakdown...

Councilor Pepin said they have situations where all of there apparatus is out on calls. It is important to have decent equipment.

Chief Hoyle said a pumper should typically last twenty years.

The City’s ISO rating improved from “5” to “4”, primarily because their pumping capacity went up.

He said that currently, the 1995 pumper is more reliable than the 2002, which was an experimental model.

## **PUBLIC WORKS AND UTILITIES**

### **PW Administration:**

CM Belmore said that this budget provides the same level of service (as previously provided.) Increases are retirement related, etc.

### **Street Maintenance:**

Councilor Sprague wants to consider increasing line item #9104: Road resurfacing quite a bit. One of Council's goals is to get the City on 3-5-7 year programs with some of their roads. That number is going to have to at least double, he said.

Mayor Spencer mentioned \$375,000 in the CIP.

Councilor Sprague said again that this is the year to set the benchmark for the budget, bear that in mind.

Mayor Spencer mentioned the indirect consequence of not funding this adequately of having property values decrease.

CM Belmore reiterated that you can never have enough money in that line. As bonding instruments retire, they can address major road work. He mentioned various other issues, saying we have a contract engineer and quite a few projects to start. He said four Councilors plan to attend the Monday downtown improvement meeting, which is good so that they do not have a quorum.

On Thursday they will walk High St. for the de-lamination project to make sure that the contractors are very aware of where they want to start and stop.

**Snow Removal:**

Snow removal is level funded.

**Street Lighting:**

No discussion.

**Equipment Maintenance:**

No discussion.

**City Engineer:**

The Engineer position is level funded. Councilor Sprague asked how much has been saved on the contracted engineer budget. Finance Director Smith answered about \$70,000 for each of the last two or three years.

**Building and Grounds:**

No discussion.

**Cemetery:**

There was some discussion about the grub control issue for the cemeteries. They are working on how to handle that.

**Solid Waste Collection:**

No discussion.

**OTHER EXPENSES**

**Transfer to Debt Service:**

Councilor Sprague asked about line item # 9727-“Plaza principal” for the façade and the parking lot. Finance Director Smith thinks that is from the early 2000’s. Mr. Smith thinks “New City Hall 2”- line item # 9729, would have been from between 1998 and 2002. CM Belmore thinks that would have been in the late 1990’s, because it was done before he began. Councilor Tapscott thinks it was for the acquisition of the building.

**Capital Leases:**

No discussion.

**Transfer to Other Capital Funds:**

CM Belmore is the lead person on the Superfund Landfill Monitor. They will be doing more work with regards to bringing in fill. They are excited about looking at solar energy down there. They will embark on a feasibility study on that.

**Contingency:**

CM Belmore said they have a contingency fund of \$80,000 which is not a very big contingency, so he recommends we keep it there or increase it. He explained, after being questioned by Councilor Sprague, that it is money to be used when they have an issue such as a boiler breaking down or to be able to not show their hand during collective bargaining agreements. If it is unexpended, it rolls back into the general fund.

Councilor Sprague suggested that it could be used as a mark to set future budgets.

**Capital Outlay:**

Councilor Soldati asked, if the community gardens needed fencing, where that would that money come from.

CM Belmore suggested that she might need it this spring and perhaps it could come from “contingency,.” He said he or the Finance Committee could approve it or it might need to go to the full Council.

Councilor Sprague asked what the City does with old plow blades. They will go to auction.

Councilor Witham thinks that everything on this Capital Outlay list is pretty easy to justify. They have applied for State grants for generators. He thinks the Fire-SBCA Replacement is very important and they need to get going on that so it doesn't hit all at once. As to Councilor Sprague's point that we are entering into a time that we are going to be faced with a tax cap and it may be hard to get started on these important projects, so despite the costs he thinks he is in favor of leaving all of them in (this budget.)

**Intergovernmental Assessments:**

No discussion.

**SCHOOL DEPARTMENT**

**School Expenses:**

Councilor Sprague commented that he doesn't see capital improvements here; they bonded last year but that is not the mechanism for all of the improvements. He does not want to replace a school because we didn't maintain it.

**School Debt Service:**

Mr. Sprague asked why there was an increase in interest on a decrease in principal for the School Debt Service.

Finance Director Smith answered that they had captured the majority of the building aid up front in the Capital Appreciation Bond.

Councilor Witham watched all of the School Board meetings and thinks they ...were extremely judicious in what they were requesting. The School Budget as presented is fine with him unless someone has more to say. He said that Councilor Sprague has a good point that there is not much there from a Capital Improvements perspective. He thinks it has been extremely valuable for the Council and School Board to get together periodically and thinks they ought to do that. He encourages scheduling a joint meeting.

**ENTERPRISE FUNDS**

**Waste Water:**

CM Belmore said that they need to replace an emergency generator and do roof repairs. They also want to put a flow meter at the pump station, etc.

### **Water Department:**

Councilor Witham said these are very large funds and are ultra-critical for our community and...now operate in the black. They have reached some level of stability, there is a lot of good news, he said, concerning the water and waste-water sides of the house. They do just run pretty well.

Councilor Sprague asked the percentage increase in the budget over last year.

Finance Director Smith said the General Fund is up about 4.5%, not including the School or the County.

Councilor Sprague said that if the tax cap were in place for this budget, what would that number have been?

Finance Director Smith said that if the tax cap were in place, we would have to reduce approximately \$623,000 from this budget.

CM Belmore said that the estimates were \$328,300 from the City side and \$295,000 from the School side.

Councilor Sprague asked why they separate (these amounts). He thought it was a budget as a whole.

Mr. Smith said that it can be approached that way. The technical answer is \$623,000. Most of the communities that have addressed their tax caps have done (so using) this formula ...but it is up to this Council and would be a matter of staying within that tax cap.

The CPI was 2.1%.

### **Solid Waste Disposal:**

No discussion.

CM Belmore will get a copy of analysis of the budget, if the tax cap were in place, to the Council.

Councilor Witham thanked staff.

Councilor Soldati asked if they could do this workshop on an off-Council night, over a couple of weeks.

Councilor Witham said he believes he drove it to a Saturday morning because it had been broken up over a number of nights which he found to be cumbersome.

CM Belmore said that they used to do three or four workshops in evenings.

Councilor Soldati said that for people working full time, their weekends are precious.

After a little more discussion the meeting was adjourned at 1:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

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Elise B. Brellis, Deputy City Clerk