

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
February 24, 2022 – 4:30 p.m.

Committee Members present: Councilor David A. Witham, Chair
Councilor Don Austin, Vice-Chair
Councilor Martin P. Dumont, Sr.

Committee Members excused: Councilor Matt Gerding

Administration/Staff present: City Manager Bob Belmore
Finance Director Scott Smith
Director of Public Works Michael Bobinsky
Chief of Police David Kretschmar
City Clerk Jonathan Slaven

Chairman Witham called the meeting to order at 4:35 p.m.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Councilor Dumont made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 1, 2022 meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Austin and passed 3-0.

WASTE MANAGEMENT MSW/SLUDGE CONTRACTS

City Manager Belmore introduced Peter Lachapelle, a Waste Management (WMI) representative, who met with him, Directors Smith and Bobinsky recently to inform the City of increasing costs for collecting and disposing of municipal solid waste (MSW), recycling, and sludge waste. Mr. Lachapelle reviewed a packet of information detailing the WMI's reasons in requesting an increase in the present contracts with the City.

Mr. Lachapelle stated he is currently going to all of his municipal customers to ask for an increase in collection fees to offset the spike in costs. He added that a larger spike in costs will most likely be coming in the future when the City renegotiates at the end of the contract term or when the City goes out to bid again, and paying more now should help alleviate a potential large spike in increased costs.

Councilor Witham asked when the current contract runs though. Director Smith stated it expires June 30, 2025. Councilor Witham stated the reason for the long-term contract is its stability and it is a big question what prices will look like at the end of this contract. Mr. Lachapelle stated that facilities are having a huge issue with many at or near capacity and he foresees the rates rising significantly.

Councilor Dumont stated the ask is worth strong consideration. Mr. Lachapelle stated WMI is seeking a 7% increase for this year, on top of the current 3% escalation increase built into the contract each year. Councilor Austin stated he is typically not in favor of changing a contract once it is set, but he would rather pay now rather than needing to absorb a larger increase later. Councilor Witham asked about the possibility of WMI adjusting fees for soil that has been stockpiled from the Fire Station

construction site should it not be able to be placed back onto the site as finish grading occurs. Manager Belmore stated he has already discussed the eventual need to dispose of this so-called “dirty dirt”, and was informed that type of disposal has a different rate. Mr. Lachapelle stated it is special waste that WMI will consider and may be used as landfill cover if it is acceptable. Councilor Witham stated he is in favor of accepting a potential increase to avoid the spike in out years, noting also the lack of other providers for waste hauling service. Mr. Lachapelle mentioned that his request is for April 1st, but another option is to wait until July 1st to fall in line with the fiscal year. Manager Belmore recommended to not consider an increase as of April 1 rather the Council might consider an increase July 1, and Councilor Witham agreed.

Councilor Witham stated the Committee reached a consensus to direct staff to examine the request and bring a proposal back to Committee for consideration.

NH DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE POLICE GRANT

Manager Belmore briefly explained the scope of services the \$75k grant is limited to. Chief Kretschmar stated the grant funds can be used retroactively to July, 2021 as it relates to overtime costs related to Covid. He added that last year, five of his officers contracted Covid and many others were required to quarantine due to exposure. Chief Kretschmar stated the funds are open to use for these issues until July of 2023. Councilor Witham asked where the funds would go. Director Smith stated they would go to the general fund.

Councilor Austin made a motion to support a Resolution accepting the grant from the Department of Justice for Overtime Reimbursement. The motion was seconded by Councilor Dumont and passed 3-0.

CEMETERY ORDINANCE – LOT FEES

Manager Belmore detailed a memorandum from Maggie Roberge, Cemetery Trustees Chair, who is recommending an amendment to the Cemetery Ordinance to increase cemetery lot fees based on nearby cemetery lot fees the Trustees recently reviewed. Belmore stated he suggested to her that he recommended the Trustees agree on new language, as follows, in lieu of setting a fee that might need to be changed again in a year or two: “to authorize the City Manager to set lot fees based on the recommendation of the Cemetery Trustees”. Trustee Roberge agreed with the concept. Councilor Witham stated he had no objection to the request.

Councilor Austin made a motion to support a change to the Ordinance to reflect this language request. The motion was seconded by Councilor Dumont and passed 3-0.

REPORTING

Director Smith stated the City budget’s expenditures YTD is generally in good shape with a few caveats. He stated the City has a few retirement payouts to be aware of and noted an increase in the amount of salt and sand used for snow/ice. Smith also stated that a Transfer Ordinance may be required for the Fire Department due to staffing issues causing an increase in overtime, but noted this could change as more firefighters come back to work.

Councilor Witham asked about the possibility of leftover funds again this year from the School Department. Director Smith stated he spoke with the SAU56 Business Administrator, Katie Krauss,

who informed him they might be making a similar request that could help soften the estimated \$.89 increase to the tax rate. He added that it is anticipated the request would be less than the \$419k requested last year.

Councilor Dumont commented on the high overtime numbers for the Fire Department and said it seems to happen every year. Director Smith stated there have been changes from Council requiring 4 full-time firefighters on each shift which has been contributing to the amount of overtime.

MISCELLANEOUS

Manager Belmore spoke regarding phase-2 of the upgrades to the Somersworth Public Library, that is being considered based on a proposal received by Placework. Belmore stated the Committee had approved sponsoring a Resolution and Supplemental Appropriation to move sooner on it, however Belmore decided to plug it into the budget as we have time to discuss during budget deliberations. Director Smith added that the recommendation is to use a transfer from the Cable Fund to cover the cost and therefore it does not have a direct impact on the tax rate.

Councilor Dumont mentioned that CAP is working to offset the cost of free rides given by COAST bus to their guests at the Willand warming center. He stated they have given approximately 760 free rides a month just to the warming center.

ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Austin made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilor Dumont and passed 3-0. The meeting adjourned at 5:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Slaven, City Clerk