



# Minutes of the City Council Budget Workshop

Saturday, April 3, 2021  
8:30 a.m.

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## **ANNOUNCEMENT BY MAYOR HILLIARD**

As Chair of the Somersworth City Council, I, Dana S. Hilliard, Mayor find that due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with the Governor's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, this public body is authorized to meet electronically.

We are utilizing Zoom for this electronic meeting. All members of the Council have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through this platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously watch by way of our local public access Comcast channel 22 or via live streaming available at our City website Somersworth.com.

## **ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS**

The following Council members were present via Zoom: Councilors Vincent, Austin, Michaud, Witham, Gerding, and Cameron. Councilor Paradis joined the meeting via Zoom at 10:00 a.m.

Councilors Dumont and Pepin were absent.

City Manager Bob Belmore, Deputy City Manager/Finance Director Scott Smith, and City Clerk Jonathan Slaven were in the Council Chambers.

Joining via Zoom were Director of Planning & Community Development Michelle Mears, Fire Chief George Kramlinger, Director of Public Works Michael Bobinsky, Police Chief David Kretschmar, City Engineer Amber Ferland, Chief Wastewater Operator Jamie Wood, Chief Water Operator Greg Kirchofer, Chief Water Distribution Operator Scott McGlynn, and Public Works General Foreman Gerry Vachon.

## **The meeting commenced at 8:32 a.m.**

## **BUDGET WORKSHOP**

- Big Brothers Big Sisters

Councilor Vincent requested a brief overview of the program. Jan Williams briefly described the program as a State program and mentioned they are currently partnered with the Somersworth ACERT (Adverse Childhood Experiences Response Team).

- Community Food Pantry

Councilor Cameron asked how the pandemic has affected the number of families being served. The Community Pantry Director, Pat Vachon, said the year started slow due to the pandemic, but service

picked up with many families coming in from outside service areas. Councilor Witham inquired about already received and potential future federal stimulus funds. The representative replied that a check was received, but had to be split between a few agencies and has not heard any word about future funds.

- Community Action Program

Councilor Austin asked about how the additional \$20k in funding affected their services this year and asked if the City should be expecting another request for next year. The representative from CAP, Betsy Andrews, responded that the funding helped greatly and does not know if another request is in the plan for this year.

- Festival Association

Councilor Witham asked for a brief update on achievements from the past year. The representative, Don Houde, from the Festival Association said they were able to have their penny sale and a frosty drive-up event and hope to have their craft fair at Holy Trinity Church. He said they have struggled since many of their events are also fundraisers.

- Crossroads House

Councilor Witham asked if the warming shelter aided with taking some burden off of their facility. Crossroads House Executive Director Martha Stone replied, yes, the number of total guests has decreased. The other resources were critical in addition to working collaboratively with other facilities.

- Lydia's House of Hope

Councilor Vincent asked if the group is still not paying taxes on their facility. Director Smith stated he would follow up.

- Strafford Nutrition & Meals on Wheels

Councilor Gerding asked for an overview of the program. The Meals on Wheels Executive Director, Jaymie Chagnon, stated they serve approximately 18,000 meals a year to 274 clients, but need more funding if they want to be sustainable for the long haul. The pandemic showed a silver lining that their group provided social interaction to clients; some of whom it was their only interaction with a person each day. Councilor Witham noted their location on Bartlett Avenue and asked if there was any link to the Somersworth Housing Authority. The representative said they used to be connected years ago, but split when they became a 501(c)3. Councilor Vincent asked if they serve all of Strafford County and if they have other funding. The representative stated the County helps contribute to some programs, but they are in need of help with 60+ programs and those not in homes yet.

- General Fund Revenue Estimates (page C-1)

Manager Belmore explained the City was in good shape due to taxes and motor vehicle fees coming in line with estimates, but a big hit was interest in investments. We have used additional funds from the General Fund Unassigned Fund Balance to meet the tax cap, but we should know more once the tax rate is set and we may look to adjust the amount being proposed at that time.

Manager Belmore called attention to the health insurance lines and said what is being budgeted is the guaranteed maximum increase; and the actual premium rates were reduced. He said Council could look into reducing individual lines for health insurance, but he recommends level funding this year to next year and reduce the health lines which would provide an additional \$37k under the tax cap. Councilor Witham asked if we lowered health insurance line items, would it create a gap in next year's budget. Manager Belmore replied it would be likely. Councilor Gerding asked when proposed amendments should be mentioned. Mayor Hilliard replied the idea of today's meeting is to have Councilors create a list of items to be brought up after the Public Hearing for possible amendments to the Budget Ordinance.

- Human Services (page C-21)

Manager Belmore pointed out the proposed line item increase in homeless shelter support. Councilor Gerding inquired about the increase in the rent relief item. Manager Belmore said we have been able to utilize support agencies in regard to this line and have been reluctant to reduce this item over the past decade. Director Smith said we have spent approximately \$30k of this item year to date and what we have seen during the pandemic has been counterintuitive to what one may expect. We have seen a reduction in requests, most likely due to unemployment insurance and rules prohibiting evictions during the pandemic. The concern now is that, after the pandemic, we will see a rise in the requests.

- Library (page C-23)

Councilor Gerding inquired about the monthly book replacement rate. Director Smith replied that it is an average number of the actual books being replaced every month. This is done to show the math as to how we arrive at the total proposed line item for books. Manager Belmore also mentioned an RFP is out for ADA accessibility at the Library so that we could consider potential improvements. We will be interviewing five architectural firms within a week or two and be coming back to Council in regards to questions of funding and moving forward with more improvements to the library.

- Recreation (page C-37)

Councilor Witham asked if there is somewhere in the budget that shows the offset of costs for the kid's camp in regards to the revenue they generate. Manager Belmore replied yes, and the programs are generally self-supporting. Councilor Witham asked if future budgets could include a note in the expenditure line to indicate anticipated revenue from the item. Director Smith replied in the affirmative. As a point of reference Smith stated we budget \$85k in terms of Recreation revenue when programs are in full swing. Manager Belmore also noted that any funding not spent goes back into the general fund unexpended fund balance. Councilor Gerding asked if this summer has reduced services and if the numbers budgeted account for that. Manager Belmore replied this year's budget for Recreation accounts for modified programing and that we hope to get back to full summer camps by summer of 2022.

- Public Safety (page C-53)

Councilor Witham stated he received a correspondence from a constituent who indicated the desire to be more aggressive with building maintenance for the Police Station. He asked Chief about the condition of the building. Chief Kretschmar said the roof is fine, minor painting is needed, we sealed and relined the parking lot and changed out carpets in the training room last year. This year his goals for facility maintenance are to replace carpets throughout the building and reseal the booking room

floor. If no major breakdowns, the \$14k budgeted is in line with necessary maintenance. Manager Belmore added that he regularly visits City's facilities and recently asked Chief Kretschmar to develop a maintenance program. Belmore stated he asks this of all department heads to ensure we are properly serving the Community and can be proud of the buildings we work in. Councilor Austin stated his experience with the school's facilities has shown him the importance of regular and preventative maintenance.

- Fire (page C-58)

Councilor Witham inquired if the budget for Fire has been level funded in terms of facility and utilities due to the process of building the new station. Manager Belmore replied we have level funded this since it is a moving target. He also noted there is a bond to be utilized for any additional expense as we begin construction of the new facility.

- Public Works (page C-68)

Councilor Witham asked if the reduction in funds for Hot Top/Patch is from using less of the product due to the City's road resurfacing efforts. He also asked if this line item included the repairs for sidewalks. Manager Belmore replied that as he understands, this line item is only for road repairs, not sidewalks. Belmore also stated it is a good supposition that the decrease in need for Hot Top/Patch is due to resurfacing efforts. Councilor Vincent said there was a big discussion last year on bumping the Hot Top/Patch line item up to \$30k. Manager Belmore replied he tries to provide realistic numbers in the budget based on what we actually spend. Belmore also stated the City has gone back to Beta, the company who did the City's resurfacing rating program, to get a quote for a sidewalk repair plan. Councilor Vincent stated he is very happy with the way the Public Works Department is being run and that things requested to the City Manager to complete are getting done.

- City Engineer (page C-76)

Councilor Witham asked if there was a plan for a new vehicle designated solely for the City Engineer. Manager Belmore explained it is an outlier for 2026. He also pointed out that the City Engineer's salary is divided by drawing revenue from the utilities; water, waste water, and general fund.

- Buildings and Grounds (page C-79)

Councilor Gerding asked if the City could use woodchips from Malley Farm and other locations for the woodchips for Millennium Park. Director Bobinsky stated the composting material taken from Malley Farm is generally used for gardening and the public and is not rated for use at playgrounds. Councilor Witham suggested a language change from woodchips to "engineered wood fiber".

- Solid Waste Collection (page C-82)

Councilor Austin asked if the City was still running a deficit on this item. Director Smith said the issue comes from recycling. We are going to be close, though most likely over, but are going to be much closer than in previous years.

- Capital Leases (page C-86)

Manager Belmore stated this budget proposes adding two additional Police SUVs and one unmarked detective unit. We typically do one per year, but have upgraded this year to two.

- Capital Outlay (page C-92)

Councilor Witham noted that line item 49117 reads “tennis court rehab”, but said there is no tennis courts there. Manager Belmore indicated it was in error and should read “basketball court”.

- County Assessment (page C-94)

Councilor Vincent stated these taxes are based on how much development is going on in your town or city. Councilor Witham asked if this is in line with the tax cap number. Manager Belmore replied in the affirmative and added the estimate is \$17k under the tax cap.

- Enterprise Funds – Waste Water (page C-97 & C-100-104)

Councilor Witham asked if the question of looking at the price of curbside pickup bags was going to be on a Public Works and Environment Committee or Finance Committee agenda. Manager Belmore replied it will be on a future Finance Committee meeting agenda to discuss the increase in the price of bags. Witham noted part of the bag fees supports a solid waste capital reserve fee and asked what the number of funds in that account is currently. Manager Belmore clarified it is not technically a capital reserve fund, but there is approximately \$30k in it. Councilor Vincent asked what the increase in price per bag will be. Manager Belmore explained we do not have that information at this time.

Councilor Witham asked if the utility costs during construction to the Waste Water Treatment Plant are expected to remain steady once construction is complete. Manager Belmore explained it is a look and see approach as we bring new processes in line and noted there is a fair amount of operating capital to utilize. Councilor Gerding asked if the reimbursements could be explained. Manager Belmore explained that the water and wastewater funds are separate enterprises and not supported by taxation. The utilities are essentially reimbursing the general fund so general tax payers are not fully supporting the salaries associated with the utilities. Gerding followed up asking if it is just salaries that are being reimbursed. Manager Belmore replied in the affirmative, it is just a portion the salaries for the City Engineer, Water Clerk and other key staff noted. Councilor Vincent asked about the increase for repairs and maintenance. Director Bobinsky explained it is for anticipated and unanticipated repairs to the existing treatment plant infrastructure. Manager Belmore explained that page C-103 spells out the reasoning for the math.

Councilor Vincent also inquired about the jump in the line item for solid waste disposal. Director Bobinsky explained the cost for the City for sludge removal has gone up. Councilor Vincent asked for an explanation on the line items for Cemetery Road improvements. Manager Belmore said the Cemetery Road Bond that Council has approved incorporates water and waste water improvements. It is a bond obligation which is split between water, waste water, and general fund so if we do utility improvements, they are charged to the enterprise fund being utilized. Director Smith added that this item is the water department portion of the first-year payment (principle and interest).

Councilor Gerding asked if the request to extend sewer service line on Cemetery Road would be done so utilizing the waste water fund if the City chooses to do so. Manager Belmore stated the request would cause an increase to the wastewater fund. He further explained we would have to find

additional funding or increase the bond. The increase would be approximately \$100K plus potentially up to \$50k more if issues of ledge are found.

- Enterprise Funds – Water (page C-106)

Councilor Vincent commented on the increase in the price of dental. Director Smith indicated that the majority of the cost he is looking at is for health insurance.

**The meeting adjourned at 10:22 a.m.**

Respectfully Submitted,

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Jonathan Slaven, City Clerk