



Minutes of City Council Meeting
Special Budget Meeting
Monday, April 12, 2021

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.

Please note that **all votes** that are taken during this meeting shall be done by **roll call vote**.

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by His Honor, the Mayor, Dana S. Hilliard and, upon roll call, the following Council members were present: Councilors Pepin, Vincent, Dumont, Austin, Michaud, Witham, Gerding, Cameron, and Paradis, who were all by themselves.

Mayor Hilliard announced that City Manager Bob Belmore and City Clerk Jonathan Slaven were in the Council Chambers.

Staff joining via Zoom were Deputy City Manager/Finance Director Scott Smith, Director of Planning & Community Development Michelle Mears, Fire Chief George Kramlinger, Director of Public Works Michael Bobinsky, and Police Chief David Kretschmar.

Members of SAU 56 joining via Zoom were Superintendent Robert Gadowski and Business Administrator Katie Krauss.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Councilor Pepin led the Pledge of Allegiance.

LAY ON THE TABLE

ORDINANCES

A. Ordinance No. 13-21 – FY 2021-2022 Budget

Councilor Witham made a motion to remove Ordinance No. 13-21 from the table. The motion was seconded by Councilor Paradis and passed 9-0 by roll call vote.

Councilor Witham requested an update on the budget as it relates to the tax cap after amendments were made at the last City Council Meeting. Director Smith replied the budget, as amended, is \$52,258 under the tax cap with an estimated tax rate of \$28.72. The current budget Ordinance as amended stands at \$50,372,379.

Councilor Witham made a motion to amend Ordinance No. 13-21 by increasing line item 49807, Sidewalk Improvement Capital Reserve Fund, from \$10,000 to \$30,000. The motion was seconded by Councilor Paradis.

Councilor Vincent encouraged other Councilors to be more involved in the budget process and reminded everyone that we are working with taxpayer dollars. He mentioned the economy is good now, but it could take a dip and we need to plan for that. Vincent also noted past discussions on keeping the tax rate under \$1 and noted we need to be more proactive than trying to keep under that number. In regard to the motion at hand, Vincent agrees that more money is needed for sidewalk repairs, but would rather support an increase of \$10k, rather than \$20k. Vincent asked if we had a sidewalk fund last year and, if so, did we spend it all? Manager Belmore replied the Capital Reserve Fund currently sits at \$53,000 and the proposed budget seeks to increase that number by \$10k. Vincent asked how much was spent last year. Manager Belmore stated nothing was spent from the Capital Reserve Fund. Councilor Witham stated he does not recall any discussions at past meetings in regards to keeping the tax rate under \$1. He said his amendment was an attempt to take a calculated approach to improving the line item in order to improve our sidewalks. Witham said during his communications with residents, he hears a lot of requests to invest in the improvements of our sidewalks and noted a potential program to rate our sidewalks in need of repair similar to what we do with our roads. He said this fund is woefully underfunded and he is taking an incremental approach to raise it to where it needs to be.

Councilor Dumont said he agrees with adding money to the account, but it still isn't enough. He pointed to page C-68 and the \$770k allocated last year for road resurfacing and asked why we couldn't add what wasn't used last year to this current budget amount. He mentioned the proposed evaluation of sidewalks in order to do annual repairs. He asked how much is currently in the transportation fund from motor vehicle registrations. Director Smith said Council appropriated \$900k for FY20-21 road resurfacing and Council approved the transfer of \$130k from that fund for the purchase of a sidewalk tractor. Council also just authorized a contract to S.U.R. Construction to do paving for this spring. Smith also said the money in the municipal and transportation fund is spoken for. \$139k towards the CMAQ project for lighting on High Street and \$190k for repaving this spring. Dumont emphasized the need to get serious about infrastructure.

Councilor Paradis asked if the amendment passes, would it bring the amount for sidewalk repairs in the capital reserve account to \$83k. Mayor Hilliard responded in the affirmative. Paradis also asked for clarification on the amount in account 49102 and when the funds in the Capital Reserve Fund could be used. Manager Belmore mentioned that we only currently have a proposal for a status of the City's sidewalks. Once we have the plan, we can start to develop realistic numbers in regard to the CIP. There are many infrastructure projects going on and account 49102 is for miscellaneous repairs that come up and was reduced due to historic spending to date. Paradis said it may not be enough, but the amendment is a good start.

Councilor Vincent said there is nothing that says we can't use road resurfacing money and fix up sidewalks with it. Manager Belmore agreed that some sidewalk and curbing has been repaired during road resurfacing projects. Vincent noted we are not sure yet what other amendments are going to be brought up tonight. He said he agrees with fixing the sidewalks, but we have other options to fund

their repairs. Vincent said if we didn't use the \$770k allocated for road resurfacing this year, is there a surplus? Director Smith replied the money was appropriated July of 2020 and we have the full year to utilize it. Smith explained our timeline of paving in previous years typically happened in the summers, but the projects would extend into the end of the paving season. We now have deferred paving to the spring. Smith said the projects are all happening in the same fiscal year, just not as early as it typically would.

Councilor Gerding asked for clarification on account 49102 for sidewalk projects and asked if he was correct that those funds are not coming from the capital reserve fund we are currently amending. Manager Belmore replied in the affirmative.

Councilor Pepin said he was previously on the Public Works and Environment Committee and explained that one of the reasons we would hold off a whole year on bidding contracts is due to the contractors already having their year's contracts lined up by the time we pass our budget. When they bid on our project, they shoot up the price. Our current process allows the City to receive more fair bids. Pepin stated he will support the \$20k increase to the sidewalk improvement capital reserve fund.

Councilor Paradis wanted to reiterate that roads and sidewalks were the number one item that came up in the goal setting session. She said she views improving sidewalks and roads adds to economic development and appeal of our neighborhoods.

Councilor Cameron said she remembers previous discussion on the importance of improving roads and sidewalks. She said this is an area we receive a lot of complaints about. Cameron asked about the number of sidewalks we could improve with the amount in the capital reserve fund. Mayor Hilliard stated we do not have that information as the work would have to be bid and contracted out. He stated there is an extensive list of sidewalks in need of repair which is why we are working on a comprehensive list. Cameron stated she is in support of the increase.

Councilor Michaud said he will support this increase because the sidewalks are in rough shapes. He said he still wants to make sure we are aware of where our budget is in relation to the tax cap.

Councilor Witham asked about the impact on the tax rate for the additional \$20k. Director Smith said it would be an additional two cents and bring it up to \$28.74 from \$28.72. Vincent asked for clarification on the tax rate. Director Smith replied the current estimated tax rate increase would be going from 87 to 89 cents.

Councilor Witham's motion to amend Ordinance No. 13-21 by increasing line item 49807, Sidewalk Improvement Capital Reserve Fund, from \$10,000 to \$30,000 passed 8-1 by roll call vote. Councilor Vincent voted No.

Councilor Pepin made a motion to adopt Ordinance No. 13-21 as amended. The motion was seconded by Councilor Cameron.

Councilor Pepin said the City Manager has presented a good budget and the only increases are on items beyond our control. He said he agrees with keeping the tax rate down.

Councilor Paradis said she would not be voting to pass it right now as she has other things to discuss.

Councilor Dumont said he would support the motion. He mentioned the overtime line item for the Fire Department and noted a large increase. Councilor Witham said the budget increase has to do with

the Council's decision to add a full-time firefighter during the day. Councilor Witham also noted a desire to keep the budget open for further amendments.

Councilor Vincent explained there has been fair time to discuss and amend the Budget Ordinance. Vincent said he recently spent time at the State House and believes there will be a cut of \$100 million for education funding. He noted that this budget before us is the first time since he has been here, we have not had to cut any department.

Councilor Pepin's motion to adopt Ordinance No. 13-21 as amended passed 5-4 by roll call vote. Councilors Austin, Witham, Gerding, and Paradis voted No.

Councilor Paradis asked for a point of order requesting if a motion to reconsider was in order. Mayor Hilliard explained the motion would need to come from a Councilor on the prevailing side.

Councilor Witham made a motion to adjourn the City Council meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Vincent.

Councilor Vincent made a motion to move the question to adjourn forward. The motion was seconded by Councilor Dumont. The motion failed 4-5 by roll call vote. Councilors Pepin, Michaud, Witham, Gerding, and Paradis voted No.

Mayor Hilliard reminded Councilors there has not yet been a motion for reconsideration.

Councilor Gerding clarified his No vote and said he will be voting no on adjournment since he feels there is a better way to pass the budget than a split vote. Councilor Witham also clarified his No vote as wanting to hear more of other Councilor's thoughts.

Council took a brief recess from 7:48 p.m. – 7:54 p.m.

Mayor Hilliard once again recommended that someone on the prevailing side of the vote to adopt Ordinance No. 13-21 needs to make a motion to reconsider as it seems that appears to be the direction Council would like to go.

Councilor Vincent made a motion to reconsider the adoption of Ordinance No. 13-21. The motion was seconded by Councilor Cameron and passed 9-0 by roll call vote.

Councilor Pepin noted he was not trying to shut anyone out nor stifle their comments. Councilor Cameron stated she thought the budget was put together very well which is why she seconded the motion to adopt. She further explained she is open to hearing what the other Councilors have to say. Councilor Michaud stated he is going to vote in favor of reconsideration so everyone can be heard.

Council took a brief recess from 7:59 p.m. – 8:03 p.m.

Mayor Hilliard reminded everyone that the budget is one of the most difficult things we do. He said there will be times we disagree with each other, but at the end of the day we are a team and let us please respect each other as such.

Councilor Gerding made a motion to amend Ordinance No. 13-21 by increasing account 45491, Lydia's House of Hope, from \$500 to \$2500. The motion was seconded by Councilor Paradis.

Councilor Vincent said Lydia's House of Hope is a great thing to support, but mentioned the tax exemptions and other benefits they received from the City. Councilor Dumont echoed Vincent's comments and added that their taxes are around \$10k and they are exempt from paying them. Dumont said they do great work, but have other resources to tap into for funding. Councilor Gerding stated he understands the benefits Lydia's House receives, but noted they are the organization that receives the least based on the request. Manager Belmore stated Lydia's House of Hope did not attend the workshop they were invited to and mentioned that the request is just a carryover from last year. Councilor Paradis stated she is in support of the \$2k addition since it isn't a large amount for us. Manager Belmore asked Director Smith if he was correct that we received requests from everyone on the Community Support list except Lydia's House of Hope. Director Smith replied he was correct. Councilor Vincent asked if they did not request anything, why are we giving them anything? Councilor Cameron stated she knows the woman who runs Lydia's House and she would be very grateful for the support. Cameron stated she is in support of the increase. Councilor Dumont emphasized the benefits and tax breaks they receive from the City. Councilor Vincent requested clarification on the request process from the community support organizations. Manager Belmore stated they are invited to request funds and attend a workshop to explain their reasoning. If they do not request, the amount allocated in the previous year's budget is carried over. That is, unless Council wishes to amend the budget to increase or decrease the amount or remove it altogether. Councilor Pepin stated he recalls that when an organization has not requested funds or been absent from the budget workshops, those funds were not given to them in the past.

Councilor Gerding's motion to amend Ordinance No. 13-21 by increasing account 45491, Lydia's House of Hope, from \$500 to \$2500 failed 3-6 by roll call vote. Councilors Pepin, Vincent, Dumont, Austin, Michaud, and Witham voted No.

Councilor Austin made a motion to amend Ordinance No. 13-21 by increasing account 45479, Somersworth Youth Connection, from \$5,000 to \$25,000. The motion was seconded by Councilor Paradis. Councilor Gerding recused himself.

Councilor Austin explained an adopted Resolution that was passed in full support of the City Council and the Somersworth School Board as a way to make the program a more integral part of the Community. He said we have been talking about funding for the SYC at the Community level for years. He explained that most of their funding comes from a Federal grant and part of what helps them receive this grant is showing a high level of Community support. Austin said his request of \$25k is not nearly enough, but it is a start. Councilor Paradis said she supports SYC and asked how the increase could impact them. Councilor Dumont said he would be remiss if he didn't advise that the joint Committee has passed the funding issue to the City Manager and School Staff to work out the specifics since the grant is scheduled to run out next year. Dumont stated he feels it is too soon to be jumping at this issue with a dollar amount. He said he is not against giving them money, but they are currently not in a position where they are looking for money today.

Mayor Hilliard explained that a meeting is taking place tomorrow between the City Manager, Director of SYC, Finance Director Smith and some School personnel to examine the use of Federal grant dollars to sustain the program in the long term.

Councilor Witham asked about where the current allocation actually goes. Director Smith replied it is a transfer to the School Department. Councilor Witham asked how the funding is budgeted by the school. Dr. Gadomski stated the funds come in as grant funding. School Department Business Administrator Katie Krauss confirmed this adding that whatever isn't funded through the Federal grant is done so by funds from the City and parents of kids in the program. Councilor Witham asked if the proposed \$25k was not utilized, does it carry over year to year or does it go back to the general fund? Ms. Krauss stated it is a revolving fund that rolls over year to year.

Councilor Vincent asked if anyone has an idea of how much it costs to run SYC each year. Ms. Krauss explained the scheduled Federal grant come in around \$167k which pays for the Director and a couple of staff members. She stated she doesn't have an exact figure, but can get that.

Councilor Austin emphasized the need for community support in assisting them getting the Federal grant. He stated the total cost of running the program is around \$490k a year for around 400 children. He said they have been successful in getting the grant thus far, but it is not guaranteed. Councilor Dumont also emphasized the need for community support for the program to receive their grant. He said grants are not continual financial support. Dumont also noted that they can only carry over 10% of any surplus funds not utilized.

Councilor Austin's motion to amend Ordinance No. 13-21 by increasing account 45479, Somersworth Youth Connection, from \$5,000 to \$25,000 failed 7-1 by roll call vote. Councilors Pepin, Vincent, Dumont, Michaud, Witham, Cameron, and Paradis voted No. Councilor Gerding recused himself.

Councilor Pepin made a motion to adopt Ordinance No. 13-21 as amended. The motion was seconded by Councilor Cameron and passed 9-0 by roll call vote.

ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Witham made a motion to adjourn the City Council meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Cameron and passed 9-0 by roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jonathan Slaven, City Clerk

