

MINUTES OF THE CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING AND BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2017, AT 6:30 P.M. IN ROOM 207-209, TOWN HALL, 84 SOUTH MAIN STREET, CHESHIRE CT 06410

Present

Budget Committee Chairman Timothy Slocum, and Michael Ecke and Sylvia Nichols.
Council Members: Chairman Robert J. Oris, Jr.; Vice Chairman Paul A. Bowman; Jeff Falk, Patti Flynn-Harris, Thomas Ruocco, Peter Talbot.
Staff: Michael A. Milone, Town Manager; James Jaskot, Finance Director; Robert Ceccolini, Director Parks and Recreation Department; Sandy Patella, Deputy Director Parks and Recreation Department; Sheila Adams, Community Pool Coordinator.

1. ROLL CALL

The clerk called the roll and a quorum was determined to be present.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Group Pledged Allegiance to the Flag.

MOTION by Mr. Talbot; seconded by Ms. Nichols.

MOVED that the Town Council enter Executive Session at 6:33 p.m. to include Town Manager Milone and Town Attorney Smith to discuss land acquisition.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

MOTION by Mr. Talbot; seconded by Ms. Nichols.

MOVED that the Town Council exit Executive Session at 6:50 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

MOTION by Ms. Nichols; seconded by Mr. Talbot.

MOVED that the Town Council accept the modification to the agreement on the Chapman Property as prepared by the Town Attorney, and authorize Town Manager Michael A. Milone to sign the agreement on behalf of the Town of Cheshire.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

3. PROPOSED F.Y. 2017-2018 OPERATING BUDGET.

LEISURE: Parks and Recreation Department, Parks and Recreation Commission, Community Pool - Page 74 Summary Book And Page 167 in Detailed Budget Book

Town Manager Milone advised that the Parks and Recreation budget is not reflective of the final outcome for the department budget, due to possible transitioning of Parks Division crew to the Public Works Department. Mr. Milone noted there is a change in the format for presentation of department budgets. The Council is familiar with Town departments; a dialogue will be created; and we are in the position of having to reduce budgets.

There is little change in the Parks and Rec Budget; it is a maintenance budget; there is an increase in the temporary line items due to a minimal wage increase, increased contribution to the Community Pool. In the last few years there was utilization of insurance money and fund balance to cushion the pool operation. This will not be there going forward, and the burden fell on the Parks and Rec Department to increase the subsidy by \$58,000. By next week there will be information on the pool fund balance, and it should be about \$25,000 to \$30,000, reducing the subsidy by about half.

Page 173 - Parks Division. There was retirement of the Parks Foreman, Kevin Simmons, a 38 year employee; this created an opportunity for efficiencies and savings with elimination of the Foreman position. The position salary was \$84,000; it is reduced to \$67,000; and Mr. Milone recommends elimination of the position.

In order to make the Parks Division function, in terms of supervision, Mr. Milone recommends taking the entire division and transferring this division to Public Works Department. The Parks Division would become part of the PW Department; maintain a separate identity; each crew member would continue assignment to their territories in Town to maintain on a regular basis. Mr. Milone commented on the pride of ownership by the Parks crew members, their intimate understanding of the field on which they work, response to emergency or last minute situations. He wants to keep the Parks Division as a separate division of Public Works Department.

The first step is to eliminate the Foreman position. The next step is transferring the Parks Division to Public Works, and hope to achieve some economies.

Mr. Milone supports the request of Mr. Ceccolini to increase the temporary part time account, to have someone available early in the Spring and Fall season, when college kids return to school. This is necessitated by the addition of the Linear Trail, bathrooms etc. to the Parks Department duties.

The transfer of the Parks Division to Public Works will require work on everyone's part; it is in the middle of a busy summer season; and the goal is to have everything run smoothly and efficiently. Collaboration and oversight will be needed in the next few months.

Mr. Ruocco talked about there being "like work" between the two departments with materials, equipment, lawn work at parks and Town Hall. He said Parks crew can also do PW duties.

In response, Mr. Ceccolini said the Parks crew can do PW jobs; their knowledge and work is transferable; Parks crews already do the work at Town Hall; and the crews have many inter-changeable skills.

Mr. Milone said this is the logical progression for what has been going on. For three years the two work forces have been "married" with snow removal efforts, and working the winter blitz.

Ms. Flynn-Harris asked Mr. Ceccolini about the pros and cons of making this move.

According to Mr. Ceccolini, the biggest con is not replacing Foreman Simmons who had 37 years of experience, knowledge, efficiency and a strong skill set. There will be a burden whoever is assigned these duties, and there may be people in Public Works who understand irrigation systems and other Parks functions.

In his proposal, Mr. Milone said one of the four grounds keepers becomes a "Crew Leader" for the Parks Division to maintain continuity of the group, and capture their institutional knowledge. One advantage of this is the Parks Department having more bodies when needed...before the summer...and people with the skills to follow directions and guidance. The Parks Department does not have this now...there are four crew members, and that is it.

Mr. Ceccolini stated that if the Parks Division crew goes to Public Works, many things happen which are not cut and dry...i.e. the Strawberry Festival needing a state on the Town Green, Fall Festival, Parade, Walkathon, Road Races and other Town events. Parks and Rec gets the call and takes care of things that are needed to be done. This will all have to be figured out...the contact, who coordinates...Parks crews or Public Works crews.

Mr. Ceccolini informed the Council he will be retiring at the end of May 2017 which will effect the transition and work to be done.

In theory, Mr. Oris is not against this transition of staff, and is pleased the Parks Division will be kept together. He has worked with the Parks and Rec staff for many years in many capacities. The Parks crew does a lot, more than people know or understand, and are on call all the time. CHS Athletic Director calls Parks and Rec to get help with fields etc. Mr. Oris asked for assurance that the Parks Division crew will stay independent as a core group. He questioned whether Public Works will move the crew to other PW jobs, and Parks duties are not done. With understanding of the efficiencies which he supports, Mr. Oris still has worries about this aspect and practicality of how it will all work out...and wants to get it right.

Stating he does not disagree with Mr. Oris...Mr. Milone has talked to PW Director Noewatne about keeping the Parks crew in tact. They are a unit that reports to Public Works, but their duties cannot be compromised, and parks are first and foremost for Spring, Summer and Fall seasons. It is the Town Manager's job to insure this happens.

It is also the Council's job to reinforce and restate this when Public Works presents its budget. The first responsibility of the crew is to the Town parks and their maintenance. Mr. Milone cannot afford to have something go wrong as fields are public facilities. He hopes to have the manpower and resources to put more people at the parks to assist the Parks Division crew. Mr. Milone has met with the Parks Division crew members; they voiced some of these concerns to him; and he wanted to allay their fears that they would be forgotten and just melded into Public Works.

The Council was told by Mr. Milone that other communities (Southington) have done this and it has not worked well. Communication will be most important along with regular contact with the crew, who must be on the fields, in the parks, as if they were still associated with the Parks and Rec Department.

Mr. Oris noted the Parks crews have good morale and work well together, and does not want this upset.

Both Parks and PW crews work well together in the winter, driving trucks, plowing snow, and they know and respect each other. Mr. Milone said this is a good first step.

For the Parks and Rec Department staff, Mr. Oris does not want them to think of this as a move to devalue their commitment to the community. He understands and knows the department's important value to the community...and while supporting some consolidation, he does not want the thinking that Parks and Rec is less important than Public Works. From his perspective he does not believe that, and said Parks and Rec Department and staff is very valuable to the community. He does not want dilution of the Parks and Rec organization; it is very important; and he has worked directly with the department that does very good work.

Mr. Talbot has concerns and is not comfortable about the change. He understands the budget situation, and Council taking a hard and fast look at things. With the dominos that are falling on this, Mr. Talbot thinks we are setting it up for a real issue down the road. In losing Mr. Simmons as a Foreman, there is the loss of work of at least two people, and the position is eliminated. The five guys are down to at least four, and more because of the workload. Add to this the shifting of the Parks Division into another department, even with a crew leader...there is still going into another department. A few months after this transition there is loss of the Parks Department Director, and this effectively takes away their identity by title. Mr. Talbot stated his further concern on the departure of the Town Manager, leaving a department under Public Works that nobody realizes anymore that they were a department on their own. He does not see how we will be able to maintain the level of fields and quality and other things at the parks, after building up great reputation. Mr. Talbot sees this declining. He also said in a few months the CHS A.D. cannot call Parks for help...he will have to call Public Works for assistance.

Town Manager Milone said he worries about these issues as well. Whether the change is recommended or not, we are losing Mr. Simmons and Mr. Ceccolini. The choice is

filling these positions right away, but still having problems for people with a steep learning curve, and there is no assurance things will be seamless. As a result of these retirements there will be a change, without the same service with two new people filling the jobs without additional support. Mr. Milone this is the right time to do the transition because there will be some volatility. By having the PW hierarchy it can address things by virtue of having manpower to redirect...but no matter, there will be a learning curve and adjustment to changes, whether the transition is done or not.

Mr. Talbot stated he would prefer the Foreman position being frozen rather than eliminated. The Town must get through the summer without a Foreman and Director in place. He asked about plans in place for the summer concerts and other events.

In that regard, Mr. Ceccolini said everything is being set up and planned for the summer events and programs.

Mr. Bowman understands the reasons for the proposal from the Town Manager, and hopes for a smooth transition. He questioned the difference in culture between the two departments.

There has been a cultural difference, and Mr. Milone hopes it has been bridged by the involvement of the two groups together in the last few years. The culture has melded much better in the last few years because of the turnover. Three of the four Grounds Keepers are relatively new, and Mr. Milone thinks whatever differences that existed have diminished or are eliminated. This is something he and Mr. Noewatne can deal with...but it is not what it would have been with a transition back a few years ago with different people.

Mr. Bowman said the people and other management not in tune with this program could be butting heads, with the plan made or broken by them. He hopes they realize that will not sit well with this Council and the Council serving after November. It was noted by Mr. Bowman that whatever happens with Parks and Rec is visible to the people in the community. What happens is crucial; the department programs are crucial; and it is hoped the PW management clearly understands that if this does not work, it will have to be fixed on some way. Along the way, things may have to change, as this is more an experiment, and there are challenges. Mr. Bowman said we must go into this with eyes wide open; management must be in tune to make it work; and everyone must have an open mind. Parks and Rec does an incredible job for the Town; the department is very fluid and adapts to any needs of the Town; it is a flexible department that completes the tasks in various disciplines throughout the Town.

Mr. Milone said Public Works also shows this, and will continue to show it.

Ms. Flynn-Harris is less concerned about Grounds Keepers being pulled for other than Parks work. She is more concerned about the part-time workers, about 12 in Parks and Rec, versus 4 or 5 in Public Works. This could be an issue of...we need you over here...and it is a management issue.

In that regard, Mr. Oris said Public Works must understand the importance and role of the Parks and Rec crew members, and this message must be put across.

Ms. Nichols concurs with all that is being stated. She commented on Mr. Milone saying this experiment has been done in other towns, and it has not worked. Ms. Nichols asked why it has not worked; can we learn a lesson from that; is it management or control of the process; a cultural difference between two departments causing a problem; or is it borrowing staff at inappropriate times. What were the reasons for not working other towns...and Cheshire should be aware of the potential issues. The concept is good, but she has some concerns. Ms. Nichols asked if we can learn from the experience of other towns and not our own.

In response, Mr. Milone said the first hand experience is with Southington...it has not gone well. They had two different bargaining units, and immediately had grievances and major problems over people's roles and responsibilities and duties. In Cheshire, the crew members are in the same union; they have worked together in the last few years doing common jobs; and it has brought them together, creating more of a sense of one organization. In Southington, management did not go about this with the sensitivity of the people involved and problems were encountered. Mr. Milone said there has to be recognition of informal relationships, not just the formal hierarchy of reporting. These relationships made Mr. Ceccolini successful and effective. There are many things not on paper that must be addressed when a problem arises, with people ready and willing to do this. Town management will work hard to make the transition happen, but Mr. Milone cannot promise there will be no glitches in the process.

There was a discussion about the Board of Education (BOE), and Mr. Milone said he will make it clear to Supt. Solan that the Town crews will help...but they are not the BOE supplemental work force. The BOE is opening a concession stand at the CHS fields. On numerous occasions, Mr. Ceccolini reported that Park crew members must go over and clean the facilities. Unless there is an understanding and formal relationship established as to when Parks crews do this, the BOE cannot rely on Town staff. In an emergency, Town crews will respond. BOE must realize they have to staff the stand, have the resources, and not expect Town staff to be their fall back and safety net.

Mr. Bowman pointed out the extreme difference in culture with the BOE. For the CHS Athletic Director to have Mr. Ceccolini on speed dial to respond to crisis management issues, is not right. It can be done with BOE charged a high fee for this service.

The Parks and Rec Department uses BOE fields, and Mr. Milone said the Town crews take care of the BOE fields.

Mr. Ceccolini stated that many towns visiting Cheshire think Bartlem Park is part of the high school because they use the Town fields. It is an interchange with use of the fields.

If the plan does not work out, Mr. Bowman said the alternative is for Public Works to start subbing jobs out...it may be more cost effective and more accountable.

Mr. Slocum said there will be administrative advantages already deployed in one department to be utilized in the other department for more efficiency at a lower cost. It will come down to how people in Public Works manage the Parks Division crew members. He said a Parks Foreman may be more valuable.

The point made by Mr. Talbot about freezing the Foreman position rather than eliminating it is a good idea, and Mr. Milone said it should be considered. At this time, the Council is only hearing half of the transfer. To close the loop there will be discussion with Public Works management, Mr. Noewatne and Mr. Gancarz, on what they intend to do...with Mr. Ceccolini present. Public Works management is sensitive to the fact that the Foreman is key...a utility person, who on a moment's notice is called to any number of places to address a problem. This is what makes it work. Mr. Milone said that PW Director Noewatne must come up with a process on how things are done with the Parks Division.

If the answer is "yes" to this plan, Ms. Flynn-Harris asked if Mr. Noewatne would be looking at manpower, supplies, equipment, and all other areas of maintenance for economies of scale.

Mr. Milone said this would be discussed in executive session with the Council, Mr. Ceccolini and Mr. Noewatne.

Mr. Oris commented on the Parks and Rec Department being a flexible organization, and he has concerns that the Public Works Department is not as visible and open to people who call them. He is worried that Public Works is good at what they do; it has a different culture; and it will be important for Mr. Milone and Mr. Noewatne to understand this difference. Mr. Oris said the management overseeing the Parks crew must understand that role; it may be different than what Public Works is accustomed to; and they must be flexible to allow the Parks crew to do things as they have been done and what the public expects to be done on a moment's notice. He said there will be a big culture issue, with Public Works knowing the expectation of this group of people now working under them.

According to Mr. Talbot, identity is important for the Parks Division crew...to think of themselves as "Parks". There will be three guys who will be Parks Division, and the crew leader reports to someone at Public Works.

Mr. Slocum said there is a flow chart of what has to be done, with the management part being the most complicated. He thinks the transition is doable. Certain things happen annually in the Parks and Rec organization, and some tasks are repetitive.

There are things that follow a set order, and Mr. Ceccolini noted the Parks Department puts out lots of fires throughout the year from calls to the office. People in Town have

come to expect this, and it is what makes Cheshire a good town...people come to play on good fields and Parks and Rec makes things happen.

Mr. Oris stated the BOE must be more responsible for issues and problems at the high school, rather than calling Parks and Rec Department to solve a problem.

It was noted by Ms. Flynn-Harris that with the change, BOE will be calling Public Works for help. She and Mr. Talbot have discussed these issues, and at sometime, the parks being taken care of by BOE maintenance, or there being an overlap.

Mr. Slocum talked about events, i.e. needing a stage set up, and calling Parks and Rec to organize this work. He asked who people would call for this assistance and creation of a work order.

The Council was informed by Mr. Milone that Parks and Rec will be in charge of "recreation", but there is the overlap of needing people to set up a facility for a recreational activity. A schedule will be planned with dates, events, and responsible people. If something is not on this schedule, i.e. a field is needed, it must be figured out how to address the issue quickly. It is getting information to the person, getting the person on the site...and it must be worked out internally. There must be someone at both departments to respond to calls. The field and permit come through Parks and Rec, so the natural thing is to call the Parks Department.

Mr. Milone stated that these are issues to be discussed with PW Director Noewatne. He said customer service cannot be diminished in any way.

Parks and Recreation Department Budget - Mr. Ceccolini reviewed the Core Services and Goals and Accomplishments over the last six years, and read them into the record of the meeting.

Linear Trail Snow Plowing - this is the most inefficient job done in the department by the crews, and only one section is plowed by Parks and Rec; Public Works plows most of the trail.

Increase in Revenue - the program rates were raised last year for the park pavilions and Youth Center rentals; there was no drop-off in rentals; prices are moderate.

Full-day Kindergarten has affected some of the Park and Rec programs for younger children. BOE pre-school program will also affect these programs. The Cheshire Library also has free programs vs. the Parks programs with a fee.

Sports Camps - the usual revenue is \$310,000 to \$320,000 annually; there are more opportunities and options for out-of-town sports camps which have negatively impacted department camps.

The department budget is a maintenance budget; there are no larger requests; there is addition of some part-time maintenance people for Spring and Fall season work.

The concerts at Bartlem Park have been successful; there are four concerts each summer; cost is about \$30,000 to \$40,000. Sponsorships for the concerts are available. Council discussed possibly charging for attending these concerts, or passing a bucket for donations, but since this is a "free" concert, it is unlikely there will be charges or donation requests. Mr. Ceccolini explained that the sound system is very expensive, and may be scaled back. There are forms on-line for sponsorships, and completed forms must be reviewed by the Town Attorney. For marketing of sponsorships, Ms. Patella said the Chamber of Commerce business list will be used, and letters and information sent.

COMMUNITY POOL - Page 126. Mr. Milone reported the pool budget increased less than 1/2 a percent; total increase is \$4,200 in the salary account and medical benefits account; a new employee is now covered by medical benefits; and the pool operates on a 12 month basis.

Natural Gas Account - is reduced by \$32,000 this year; in 2007 the gas billing was \$272,493; in FY 2018 it is estimated at \$78,000.

Ms. Adams reported that more revenue is expected in the next fiscal year. To host larger swim meets there is a need for bleacher seating, and this will be a capital budget request that will pay for itself over a short period of time.

Fees - last year fees were slightly increased. Ms. Adams proposed increasing the "Family" rates by \$20 for town and out of town residents, and \$1.00 for day passes.

Page 185 Miscellaneous Expenses - the increase of \$25,000 is due to salary and medical and life insurance benefits to a full time employee.

Ms. Adams commented on there being nothing negative about the Community Pool and everyone loves it. At a swim meet on March 17th there were 1,200 people present throughout the day. Swim organizations want to bring more swim trials and meets to the facility...CIAC, SEC, and others, but this cannot be done without bleacher seating and upgrading the blocks for championship meets. Ms. Adams advised that a \$60,000 sponsorship would cover the costs of the bleachers and blocks. The score board is at the pool; there is no sponsorship associated with the score board; and some people have expressed interest in a sponsorship; but, it is a large donation.

The goal was to get the pool open and operating and the first year has been phenomenal. Ms. Adams reported a big increase in the swim lessons which are now being given 12 months of the year. Swim teams are also at the pool 12 months of the year without rental of outside facilities; lap swimming is ongoing for 12 months as well; and more adult memberships are being taken out. Ms. Adams hopes for more summer memberships this year.

Birthday Parties - now that the pool is open all year there is a big increase in parties. The past weekend there were nine (9) birthday parties, with revenue of about \$200 per party.

Revenue - more revenue can be raised with bleachers for swim meets, and a concession stand. Ms. Adams said the pool could generate 40% of the revenue from a privately operated concession stand.

Ms. Flynn-Harris talked about marketing the pool to increase family memberships rather than increasing the family rate.

According to Ms. Adams there has been an increase in traffic at the pool, and the increase in the number of families is incredible. She suggested the pool have a "slide" or inflatable items for kids to climb and slide. The cost would be about \$15,000 to \$20,000 for this type of apparatus. For the capital budget there will be recommendations for pool improvements, including seating capacity.

The Community Pool remains in the Parks and Rec Department, and the department crew members assist with maintenance and repairs at the facility.

Mr. Bowman commented on the CHS Girls Swim Team revenue at \$18,000 and Boys Team revenue being a little more. He said the BOE should be paying fair market value for team use of the pool.

Ms. Adams reported there was an increase in the high school team rates in 2010. To bring in more revenue the Town could start up its own swim team, but Ms. Adams said this would interfere with the existing teams.

The Town subsidizes many things for the BOE, and Mr. Milone noted they are not reflected in the BOE budget.

There was a brief discussion on public use of the pool bathrooms. Ms. Adams and Mr. Ceccolini both stated these bathrooms are not for use by people using the park, except in an emergency situation. A big reason for non-public use is due to people swimming in the pool, and having personal possessions in the locker rooms.

Regarding summer revenue in 2016, Mr. Slocum said he anticipates this revenue increasing in 2017.

Mr. Oris talked about more revenue items, and seeing things as an investment and way to generate revenue, and making the pool more profitable.

With more swim meets, Ms. Adams said the pool would be closed to the public. This is a balancing act to meet public use of the facility. The goal is to make the pool fiscally self sufficient.

Summer camps through the Parks and Rec Department use the pool each day.

When the pool first opened, Mr. Ceccolini noted that some things were not taken into account...workers compensation, social security, etc. and the pool rates were lower at that time.

Pool Subsidy - Mr. Milone reported that in 2012 the subsidy was \$459,000.

The BOE budget is talking about cutting some sports programs, and Mr. Slocum said the high school and YMCA team fees have not been increased.

As a courtesy, Mr. Ceccolini said the schools and the Y receive a one-year notice of pool rate increases.

On behalf of the Council and the Cheshire Community, Mr. Oris thanked Director Ceccolini for all he has done over his years of service.

MOTION by Mr. Talbot; seconded by Mr. Ecke.

MOVED that the Town Council enter Executive Session to include Town Manager Milone and Finance Director Jaskot to discuss personnel issues.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

MOTION by Mr. Bowman; seconded by Mr. Oris.

MOVED to exit Executive Session at 8:50 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

**SOCIAL SERVICES: Human Services Department, Youth Services
Committee, Human Services Committee**

Postponed to the week of March 27, 2017.

4. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Mr. Bowman; seconded by Mr. Oris.

MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk