

At a Special meeting of the Town Council holden in and for the Town of Gloucester on April 18, 2023

I. Call to Order

The meeting was Called to Order at 7:00 P.M. by Councilor W. Worthy, Town Council President.

II. Roll Call

Members present: Cheryl A. Greathouse; Walter M. O. Steere, III; Stephen W. Arnold, Vice President; William A. Worthy, Jr., President

Member absent: Jonathan E. Burlingame

Also Present: Jean M. Fecteau, Town Clerk; Christine Mathieu, Deputy Town Clerk; Adam Muccino, Finance Director ; Chief Delprete, Gloucester Police; Gary Treml, Director Public Works; and Robert Shields, Recreation Director

III. Pledge of Allegiance

All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance

IV. Public Hearing

A. Proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2023/2024- Discussion and/or Action
Councilor W. Worthy stated that this Public Hearing was advertised in the Valley Breeze Observer on 3/30 and 4/13/23.

Councilor W. Worthy **DECLARED** the Public Hearing **OPEN**.

Councilor W. Worthy stated that this hearing is to review and discuss the proposed budget. Councilor W. Worthy stated that first we will have a review of the budget under item #1, questions can be asked under item #2, and Council can discuss the budget or proposed changes under item #3.

1. Review of proposed budget (as needed)

Councilor W. Worthy stated the Finance Director will present the highlights of the budget for the town and the local schools.

A. Muccino, Finance Director, gave a summary of the budget with explanations as to

the expenses by department, debt service, education and capital. (PowerPoint presentation)

Highlights discussed via PowerPoint:

Personnel/Salary/Benefits:

Proposed budget lists 4% salary increases for Administrative/Exempt employees earning under \$90k and 3% for those employees earning over \$90k. The Director stated there is a separate increase included for the Chief of Police as well as Health & Dental increases at 1.1% and 6.9% , respectively, which are actual rates from the RI Interlocal Trust, not estimates.

Municipal Government Expenses:

Reflects an increase in Revaluation Reserve as \$35k was removed in FY23, however, the Town needs to get back on schedule, setting aside at least this amount to prepare for the next statistical revaluation in 2026.

Savings in Tax Collectors Office: Fewer collections due to Motor Vehicle Phase out

Department of Public Works:

Increase in Purchased Services - Tree Maintenance
Cost of calling in a vendor for assistance has increase, not the frequency
Increase in Salt / Sand for 2023
2022-23 winter season, salt and sand were funded by American Rescue Plan
Increase in required soil testing & license renewal for transfer station
Increase in fuel & consumables
Increased Tipping Fees

Public Safety:

Police Department

Increase in Salary for Police Chief
Increase in Education / Training
Training requirements per accreditation and State law
Increase in Special Patrol
Increase in Service Contracts
Taser Program

EMA

Increase for CPR and HAZ-MAT training for EMA CERT Team

Animal Control

Increase in Other Purchased Services
Veterinary expense
Cost per visit has increased, not the frequency of visits

Recreation:

Increase in P/T Wages for Swim, Tennis, Arts & Crafts programming

IT Office:

Increase in hosted server expense, Microsoft 365 Applications, Cybersecurity audit and Compliance

Senior Center:

Increase for Heating Oil & Propane
Increase in Purchased Services
Pest control, waste disposal, cleaning

Other Operational Expenses:

Increase in Property Liability Insurance
Increase in telephone/fax
Increase in postage

Aid Requests:

Increases to Gloucester Manton Library (Harmony Library level funded)
Increase to Gloucester Light Infantry
Increase to Gloucester Little League
Increase to Gloucester Historic Cemeteries

Debt Service:

Debt Service Non-School
 Principal and Interest for Senior Center Financing
 4 years remaining
Debt Service Gloucester Schools
 Principal & Interest for Fogarty Roof Financing
 4 years remaining

Education:

Gloucester Schools
 3% increase for Certified teachers & 3.5% increase for Non-Certified Staff per agreements
 Health Insurance @ 4.6% increase and Dental @ 2.2% decrease
 Local Appropriation (amount funded by Gloucester taxpayers) 2.5% over FY22
Foster – Gloucester Regional
 3.01% increase in General Ops
 2.02% increase in capital
 3.21% decrease in Debt Service
2.5% increase in Local Appropriation (amount funded by Gloucester taxpayers) given the pro-
ration calculation

Capital:

New Couches / or recovering and Storage shed for Senior Center

1 front line police vehicle

Automatic Standby Generator, (3) trucks and paving for Department of Public Works

The Finance Director listed the following for Council Considerations:

Remove the 570k proposed use of fund balance for operations FY24

Municipal Expense Subtotals / Adjustments:

Public Safety – \$3,298,607

Reduction of new recruit / lateral transfer to 7 months in FY24

DPW - \$2,402,715

\$20k for Loader Tires, ARP funded

Municipal Revenue Subtotals / Adjustments:

Increase Non business license & Fees revenue to \$580k

Increase Department receipts slightly to \$255k

Increase Transfer from GSD Future Operations to \$520k, add \$220k as special appropriation from unrestricted fund balance to refund this account

Increase Transfer from Proration for Foster-Glocester Region to \$200k, add \$200k as a special appropriation from unrestricted fund balance to refund this account

(End of presentation by Finance Director)

Discussion: None

No action taken

2. Public Discussion

Councilor W. Worthy asked if anyone wished to speak or ask questions, then to please state your name for the record when called to the podium

Discussion:

1. Walter Steere, resident, asked if the special appropriations would be sent to the voters and if the special appropriations would effect the tax rate. J. Fecteau , Town Clerk, stated that three of the questions, so far, are moving funds from the unrestricted account so they would go before the voters and the other question is moving funds from the assigned account which Council may do without voter approval. A. Muccino also stated that funds can be moved from the assigned accounts without voter approval.

W. Steere asked if there were separate accounts for loss in state aid and future operations. A. Muccino stated that there is now one account which includes both items. W. Steere offered a

suggestion as to how money could be put aside for loss of state aid automatically each year.

J. Fecteau stated that she was a bit confused as the budget has loss in state aid and future operations combined. J. Fecteau stated that about two years ago they were separate questions for the voters as they were separate accounts. W. Steere questioned those accounts being combined.

W. Steere asked the balance in the surplus fund. A. Muccino stated it is at 19%. W. Steere stated that it is a lot of money especially as 12% is required by law. W. Steere also suggested looking at the audit for extra revenue. W. Steere stated that this is the second year that taxpayers have to make up the approximately \$700,000 yearly shortfall from the ending of the FM Global PILOT program.

2. K. O'Donnell, resident, stated that she finds the budget to be lean compared to other cities and towns. K. O'Donnell states she is happy to live here as she feels safe ; the education is good; and, the money is well spent.

3. D. Steere, resident, offered detailed questions and suggestions regarding the proposed budget items:

- a. Questioned why all of the amount offered by the Governor for Gloucester School state aid was not being used (\$2.7 in our budget but the Governor's budget is \$2,746,000). D. Steere stated this will effect the bottom line.
- b. Stated that the prior Finance Director combined the loss of state aid and future operations into one account and it has been used for future operations since.
- c. Stated the school budget is being balanced using surplus and money from the assigned future operations account which will create a problem in the future. Mr. Steere discussed the MOE and the effect on the budget.
- d. Suggested a more fair way, in his opinion, as to wage increases for non union employees. W. Steere stated percentages was the most unfair way to give increases.
- e. Questioned why there was an adjusted FY 23 column and not an adopted FY 23 column that mirrored what was approved by the voters. A. Muccino stated the column was adjusted for items like increases in revenues and on going negotiations. A. Muccino stated it is a function of Excel. W. Steere stated a budget was passed by voters, was a higher number, and those columns do not reflect that budget.
- f. Questioned whether it was correct to show the increased revenue of almost one million dollars as in the adjusted budget when the budget adopted by voters had an amount of \$ 567,000 in revenue.
W. Steere stated that by increasing these amounts the result was a reduction in the amount to be raised by taxes which means the levy is wrong or in fact the levy approved by voters.
- g. Questioned the increase in municipal expenses by 9% as too much but stated that a lot of those increases were actually a reinstatement of items that had been taken out of the budget last year.
- h. Questioned that the total expenses is off by \$100,000 because it was netted

out in error and that it should appear as an adjustment on page 4.

- i. Questioned why the total revenue for the Gloucester school department on the town budget is different from that in the school budget
 - j. Suggested that the interest from delinquent taxes was too high and should be decreased as he had received information from the Tax Collector showing a decreasing trend with only \$35,000 being collected in the 3 quarters so far of this year
 - k. Questioned the two different numbers for fund balance found in the audit in two different places- stated it was off by \$78,000 which he is of the opinion can be found in the Gloucester School budget
 - l. Stated his opinion that the Council should be careful using fund balance because if this budget is approved as is, it would result in the fund balance being only 15 %.
 - m. Stated his opinion not to use the proposed almost 1 million from surplus for this budget which includes \$570,000 from surplus to balance the budget
 - n. Stated that the \$400,000 shown as coming from surplus should actually be from the assigned account
4. R. Shields, stated as the Recreation Director , he had some additional requests and/ or changes which were as follows:
- a. Suggested increasing the pay for lifeguards to be commensurate with other nearby communities to \$18 per hour for an addition to the budget of \$3500 as an essential item.
 - b. Suggested adding 2 employees as a litter crew, which the Council asked for, to work with the current parks and grounds crew at \$13 per hour for 6 hours per week for 6 weeks for a total of \$936.
 - c. Suggested adding 2 employees to work at Gloucester Memorial Park in the snack shed at \$13 per hour for 10 hours per week for a total of \$1560.
 - d. Questioned why the budget board reduced the recreation budget in the following categories:
 - 1. \$5000 recreation materials and equipment
 - 2. \$3000 ski trip
 - 3. \$1500 paddle boards

R. Shields stated that K. Bonoyer, Budget Board Chair, did provide some reasons for the some of the reductions, but not all. R. Shields would like to see the ski trip added back into the budget as it is the responsibility of the Recreation Commission and it gives our youth a chance to ski when they may not have that opportunity.

R. Shields stated that he budgets for arts and crafts supplies on a two year rotation from this category and by reducing the budget by \$5000 it would be difficult to provide the materials needed.

R. Shields stated that K. Bonoyer told him the paddle boards were cut because of the unknown future of Spring Grove that was discussed with the Gloucester Land Trust who informed them of the high fecal count at Spring Grove. R. Shields questioned why Land Trust was involved and stated that during his time there has not been an issue with high fecal count at Spring Grove. R. Shields stated that there has been a problem with high fecal count at Marion Irons beach. R. Shields stated

that the Department of Health tests the water every two weeks.

R. Shields stated that no other budget was cut by 30% like the Recreation budget. R. Shields stated he would like the capital requests for the snack shed and bike trail . R. Shields was informed they were cut due to the conversation between the Budget Board and the DPW Director.

R. Shields also was still receiving messages from the Ponaganset Basketball Association requesting funds to help them when he had relayed information to them and the Budget Board .R. Shields stated that the lines of communication could be improved in this budget process. Councilor S. Arnold asked what PBA was looking for. R. Shields stated \$2000 per league. Councilor W. Worthy stated that Council was very generous last year when the PBA needed money and that PBA needs to be able to run their own organization. R. Shields stated that his goal is protecting the town and that the lines of communication could be better.

Councilor W. Steere asked what the Recreation Director was currently paying the lifeguards. R. Shields stated \$15 per hour.

5. J. Fecteau, Town Clerk, stated she has spent a lot of time reading the town audit and asked about the many restricted accounts and if there was some type of report that explained how these accounts could be used. J. Fecteau stated that the Parade Committee received funds from the ARPA program this year, there is a restricted fund for the parade, and there is a line item in the proposed budget. J. Fecteau, Town Clerk, stated that the audit contained many restricted funds that might apply to items in the budget if there was a report that explained how each restricted account could be used. J. Fecteau gave the examples of the Parade restricted account and the Leja field account that might be used to offset the requests by the Parade committee and the Little League.

J. Fecteau questioned the proposed aid to Gloucester Little League which has increased by \$5000 and in particular how it would be used. J. Fecteau stated the Little League also received ARPA funds..

J. Fecteau questioned how the \$9000 increase for the Gloucester historical cemeteries would be used. J. Fecteau commended the work of the committee and would the increases have to continue each year.

J. Fecteau asked if there was a report that would show how the “aid request” groups use the money given to them.

J. Fecteau asked how the 8 % increase for non union police officers originated, if they were approved by the Budget Board or if the amount was added by the Finance Director. A. Muccino stated that the Budget Board discussed the increase for the chief was heard multiple times. A. Muccino stated that the increase for the non union employees, except the Captain, included salary and holiday pay. A. Muccino stated the request was approved by the Budget Board as to the chief and the Captain; but that the others mirror the collective bargaining agreement. J. Fecteau stated our police employees do outstanding work and questioned where the increase came from because typically department heads do not go to the budget board with higher salary increases but that they

bring those requests to Council.

6. A. Muccino apologized for the FY 23 error. A. Muccino offered the following considerations for the Council as to reductions in the budget:

- a. include 7 months for a new police officer instead of one year
- b. increase the amount of state aid for the Gloucester School Dept.
- c. the budget still includes \$20,000 in DPW for tires which the Council allocated ARPA money already at the last Council meeting

7. Councilor S. Arnold suggested the following changes in the budget:

- a. reduce parade request by \$10,000 for a new requested amount of \$20,000 as they have \$31,000 currently and they received \$10,000 per year for the next three years from ARPA funds
- b. reduce the amount to Gloucester Little League to \$3500 as they received ARPA funds as well as private donations
- c. reduce the request from Ponaganset Basketball Association to \$2000 as they have received ARPA funds as well as funds from the Town
- d. reduce the request from Gloucester Light Infantry to 1/3 of the \$3000 request as they are no longer sponsoring the Memorial Day parade
- e. increase the pay to \$18 for lifeguards as they are critical for the summer program
- f. would be open to supporting the two individuals for the litter crew at a cost of \$936
- g. not necessarily a priority to do the snack shed employees

8. Councilor W. Steere stated the volunteers who take care of the cemeteries do a fantastic job but would like to know how the proposed request of \$15,000 is to be spent. Councilor W. Steere would be open to a request of about \$9,000 to \$10,000 if he knows how it will be spent.

Councilor S. Arnold thanked B. Brown and the volunteers for their work. A. Muccino stated that the \$12,000 allocated for the Gloucester Cemeteries has not been used yet in response to Councilor S. Arnold's question. Councilor S. Arnold suggested reducing the proposed budget request to \$6000 due to the available ARPA funds.

9. Councilor W. Steere stated his opinion that it is not a good idea to use fund balance for operations and feels there is a way to not do so. A. Muccino suggested using more set aside money as well as the items he mentioned which were the 7 months police hire, increase to state aid for Gloucester schools and the \$20,000 for tires from ARPA funds. Councilor W. Steere asked the level of the fund balance if the amount proposed to be used for operations was not used. A. Muccino stated the surplus fund balance would be about 18%. Councilor W. Steere stated his opinion that 18% surplus is a bit high and recommended 15% as a reasonable amount. Councilor W. Steere stated his opinion that perhaps some of the surplus could be used for capital projects.

Councilor W. Steere agreed with Councilor S. Arnold as to the lifeguard pay, the litter crew, but not as to the snack shed crew. Councilor W. Steere stated his opinion that the Council needs to be responsible and thanked the Budget Board.

10. Councilor S. Arnold stated he would consider reinstating the \$5000 for materials and equipment back to the Recreation Department that had been cut by the Budget Board. Councilor

S. Arnold stated he was in support of the ski trip . Councilor W. Steere asked if the money was for transportation. R. Shields stated that the money was for two buses and that the goal is to keep the expense down for the kids .

Councilor S. Arnold asked about the practice where R. Shields buys supplies for two years at a time. R. Shields stated that there is a savings if he buys two years at a time as he can buy items in bulk and that some money is used for other town events. Councilor C. Greathouse stated she would support reinstating the \$5000 to the Recreation budget as it offers fantastic programs.

11. Councilor S. Arnold recommends using set aside money to reduce the amount proposed from surplus for operations.

12. Councilor W. Steere stated that the voters have not added money for proration account and now Gloucester is in need of it. Councilor W. Steere stated that the Council needs to communicate to residents so that they know what they are voting on. Councilor W. Steere stated there are little places where the budget may be reduced but his biggest concern is to not use surplus for operations.

13. D. Steere, resident, suggested the following items for council to maybe consider as a way to reduce the budget:

- a. p10- reduce EDC budget as they have not used the entire \$5000 in the past several years
- b. p23 The proposed storm account request is for \$100,000 which may be reduce by \$50,000 if the restricted account in the audit is used for the rest
- c. p 29 the \$10,000 budgeted for the Senior Center has not been used in accord with the audit so eliminate
- d. there is a \$2000 account for the Sr. Ctr which can be used- it was originally for a new stove
- e. p31 other operational expenses- there is a budgeted amount of \$5000 for the transfer to healthcare reserve which could come from that account in the audit as it has \$ 392,000 in the account and it has not been used
- f. the audit has a perpetual care account containing \$10,000for cemeteries that may be used for the budget request by the Historical cemeteries.

14. J. Dipietro, resident, stated that this account is for specific cemeteries by their specific family members .

15. W. Steere , resident, recommends using all the amount for proration.

16. J. Dipietro explained that restricted funds are usually grants or state money that is put in an account to be used for a specific purpose. J. Dipietro stated that she is unsure why the restricted Senior Center account is labeled donations and that account should be looked into and perhaps used.

17. Councilor S. Arnold questioned the 8 % increase for the Chief of Police and Captain and asked the Finance Director for clarification. A. Muccino explained that the Chief asked the Budget Board for the increase . A. Muccino stated that the Budget Board approved an amount that was half of what was requested. A. Muccino stated that the increase was for cost of living,

longevity and holiday pay.

A. Muccino stated that the same was for the Captain.

Chief Delprete stated that the Captain's increase mirrors the collective bargaining unit contract of which he is not part. Chief Delprete stated that he is not part of the union and that there are officers that make more money than he does. Chief Delprete stated he is the most underpaid chief in northern RI. Chief Delprete stated that he respects the Budget Board analysis and decision and that he is happy as a department head and grateful for the town.

Councilor W. Worthy asked if the captain, lieutenant and Sargent were comparable with other communities. Chief Delprete stated the Lieutenant and Sargent are part of the union but that the captain he feels is still underpaid.

18. Councilor W. Steere stated he felt the public hearing should remain open. J. Fecteau stated that the agenda for the Council meeting on Thursday does include the continuation of this public hearing. A. Muccino stated he needed to make the changes suggested tonight in a revised budget.

19. J. Dipietro asked how the FY 23 levy and tax rate would be fixed if they were not correct. Councilor W. Worthy asked A. Muccino to send a message to the Town Solicitor.

J. Fecteau asked if fund balance could be used to correct the error. D. Steere stated that the tax rate was too low so not enough taxes have been collected. J. Dipietro stated that the Council may do what it wants with the unrestricted fund.

MOTION was made by Councilor W. Steere to TABLE the PUBLIC HEARING TO April 20, 2023; seconded by Councilor C. Greathouse

Discussion: None

VOTE: AYES- J. Burlingame, C. Greathouse , W. Steere, S. Arnold , W. Worthy
NAYS-0

MOTION PASSED

3. Council Discussion and/or Action

- a. Amendments, Additions, Changes to proposed budget - Discussion and/or Action

No Action Taken

V. Adjourn

MOTION was made by Councilor S. Arnold to ADJOURN AT 9:10 PM; Seconded by Councilor W. Steere

Discussion: None

VOTE: AYES- J. Burlingame, C. Greathouse , W. Steere, S. Arnold , W. Worthy
NAYS-0

MOTION PASSED

