

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

May 27, 2021 @ 4:30 p.m.

Committee Members present: Councilor David A. Witham, Chairman
Councilor Donald Austin, Vice-Chairman
Councilor Martin Dumont
Councilor Martin Gerding (Mayoral Appointment)

Administration/Staff present: City Manager Bob Belmore
Finance Director Scott Smith
City Clerk Jonathan Slaven

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Witham at 4:30 p.m.

APPROVE PAST MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 19, 2021

Councilor Austin made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 19, 2021 meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Dumont and passed 3-0. Councilor Gerding abstained.

CONSULTANT CONTRACT FOR LIBRARY ACCESS FEASIBILITY STUDY – RES. NO. 16-21

Manager Belmore explained that the City received five proposals for upgrades to accessibility and improvements to the usable space at the Somersworth Library in order to better serve patrons. He said we wanted to take a holistic approach to the project and after the five firms were interviewed, 3 received a second interview done so by himself, City Engineer Amber Ferland, Director Smith, and Library Director Rebecca Whitley. The team unanimously agreed that the firm, Placework, was the best fit for the project. He explained that funding for the project would come from late fees held in escrow for the library.

Councilor Dumont made a motion to support the scope of work provided by Placework for improvements to the Somersworth Library. The motion was seconded by Councilor Austin and passed 4-0.

BRETON'S CLEANERS – CITY CONSULTANT CONTRACT

Manager Belmore explained that a Groundwater Management Permit was the necessary next step to prepare the property for reuse. Credere Associates, who have worked with the City throughout the process of cleaning up the Breton's Cleaners site, has provided a proposal to apply for the permit. He explained that after the permit is granted, groundwater quality monitoring is needed and the City needed to take care of this first step. If someone purchases the property, further testing will be required and the City would likely transfer this responsibility to the new owners. Councilor Austin inquired if the proposed price of \$3,500 was consistent with the typical price for such a proposal. Manager Belmore replied that the typical price for this proposal is around \$5k or so.

Councilor Austin made a motion to approve the proposal by Credere Associates for a Groundwater Management Permit Application. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gerding and passed 4-0.

CITY ORDINANCE, CH. 4, NON-UNION WAGES – COLA TO INCLUDE WATER/WASTEWATER UNION

Manager Belmore stated the Government Operations Committee unanimously approved sponsoring an Ordinance to increase non-union employee wages by 2.5%. He informed the Committee that this would also flow through to the Water/Wastewater Union as they have a “me-too” clause whereby changes to wages involving COLA adjustments within the personnel plan also go to them.

Director Smith informed the Committee the estimated cost for non-union wages with roll-ups is \$54,271 and for the Water/Wastewater Union with roll-ups is \$21,415.

Councilor Austin made a motion to support Ordinance 17-21. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gerding and passed 4-0.

PROPERTY TAX – ELDERLY EXEMPTION PROPOSAL

Director Smith explained the current elderly exemptions and detailed increasing the amount of each level of exemption by \$15,000 being proposed by City Assessor Marybeth Walker. There were a couple cases after the Citywide revaluation where a property value increased and exceeded the exemption amount and created a property tax for someone that previously was fully exempt. Manager Belmore added that the Government Operations Committee has already unanimously supported accepting the Assessor’s recommendation. Councilor Witham asked what the implication of raising the elderly exemption was. Director Smith said it would increase the tax rate by \$.02.

Councilor Gerding made a motion to support the Assessor’s recommendation for the increase in the elderly tax exemption. The motion was seconded by Councilor Dumont and passed 4-0.

VETERANS PROPERTY TAX CREDITS

Manager Belmore informed the Committee this item was requested to be on the agenda by Councilor Dumont. Director Smith referred to a memo prepared by City Assessor Walker comparing the current level of Veteran’s credits to other Cities and Towns in the County.

Councilor Dumont stated he is a proponent of raising all veterans tax credits to the maximum amount. He explained that there are not a lot of people in that category and would like to raise the credit from \$500 to \$750. Councilor Dumont said he would like to support veterans anyway we can and believes disabled veterans have a greater need for support.

Councilor Dumont made a motion to increase the regular veterans tax credit to \$750 per year. The motion was seconded by Councilor Austin and passed 4-0.

The Committee also discussed the service-connected total disability credit. Currently it is \$2,000 but can go to a maximum of \$4,000. Councilor Witham stated he felt we should increase it but wasn’t

inclined to increase it to the maximum. Councilor Dumont agreed and said he felt we should increase it to \$2,500.

Councilor Dumont made a motion to increase the service-connected total disability credit to \$2500 per year. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gerding and passed 4-0.

REPORTING/TRANSFER ORDINANCE

Director Smith explained that the focus of the Transfer Ordinance is to account for an overage in the Police Department and will most likely be in the amount of \$60,000. Smith noted there was a surplus on the general budget of approximately \$300,000. Councilor Dumont asked if the overage was with a full slate of payroll. Smith replied that some of the reasons for the overage were based on the contract and the overtime pay from absences due to Covid. Councilor Witham mentioned he has spoken with many police chiefs in the area who have experienced similar overtime issues. Councilor Gerding asked if the federal relief funds for Covid would be able to cover the cost. Smith replied no, and explained that those funds can only be used for costs incurred from March 3, 2021 through present.

Councilor Austin made a motion to support the Transfer Ordinance. The motion was seconded by Councilor Dumont and passed 4-0.

MISCELLANEOUS

Manager Belmore explained that he and Director Smith have been attending many conference calls regarding permitted uses for federal ARPA funds. He and Smith believe the best use of funds would be to push up the Constitutional Way project and utilize federal funding for the water, sewer and drainage improvements for the project. Director Smith added that we should be receiving \$600k soon and \$600k the same time next year.

ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Dumont made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilor Austin and passed 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 5:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Slaven, City Clerk