



Minutes of City Council Meeting Monday, April 10, 2023

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m. by Mayor Dana S. Hilliard and, upon roll call, the following Council members were present: Pepin, Vincent, Gibson, Austin, Michaud, Gerding, Cameron and Messier.

Councilor Witham arrived at 6:50 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Hilliard led the Council in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

LAY ON THE TABLE

A. Ordinance 18-23 – Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Budget

Mayor Hilliard explained the process of removing Ordinance 18-23 from the table and asked that the Council consider first reviewing the School Department budget and Community Support items, Somersworth Farm to School and Somersworth Youth Connection, because he will be asking Councilor Austin to step in as Chair pertaining to these sections of the budget. Mayor Hilliard asked that if a Councilor has a request for an amendment to the budget, that they direct the Council to the page number and specific line item for review and discussion. The Councilor will then suggest an amendment to either increase or reduce by a dollar amount.

Councilor Pepin made a motion to remove Ordinance 18-23 from the table. The motion was seconded by Councilor Vincent and passed 8-0 by roll call vote.

Councilor Austin took the place of Chair.

Councilor Gerding directed the Council to page C-8, line-item Somersworth Farm to School and made a motion to increase the Somersworth Farm to School budgeted amount from \$500 to \$3,000 which was their request. Councilor Cameron seconded the motion. Councilor Gerding requested a roll call vote. The vote failed 3-5 by roll call vote. Councilor's Michaud, Gerding and Cameron voted yes.

Councilor Gerding directed the Council to page C-8, line-item Somersworth Farm to School and made a motion to increase the Somersworth Farm to School budgeted amount from \$500 to \$1,500. Councilor Cameron seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Councilor Pepin stated that he is not in favor of any increases to this section of the budget, although they are all good causes, but he has concerns with the School Department's budget as he felt it was a little hard to give them what they were asking for to begin with.

Councilor Vincent agrees with Councilor Pepin adding that he is willing to adjust amounts within Community Support but wants to stay within the page total, and therefore, would request a reduction elsewhere. Councilor Vincent believes that \$500 is an adequate amount.

Councilor Gerding requested a roll call vote.

The motion to increase the Somersworth Farm to School budgeted amount from \$500 to \$1,500 failed 3-5 by roll call vote. Councilor's Michaud, Gerding and Cameron voted yes.

Councilor Messier directed the Council to page C-8, line-item Lydia's House of Hope and motioned to reduce the budgeted \$500 to \$0.00 being that no request had been submitted from their organization. The motion was seconded by Councilor Vincent.

Discussion:

Councilor Vincent stated that Lydia's House of Hope has not been taxed and that is why the City Council, in the past, had opted to not increase the amount provided to their organization. There was some discussion as to whether or not Lydia's House of Hope is a 501C3 and in fact tax exempt but would need to be confirmed with the City's Assessing Department. Councilor Vincent confirmed his reasoning for seconding the motion to reduce the funds to zero is that his understanding of the property being tax exempt.

The motion passed by voice vote.

Councilor Pepin commented on his struggle with approving the overall School Proposed Budget. He acknowledged the hard work that the School Board and Departments put into it, as well as wanting to meet the needs of the City's students. He stated that he will be voting in support of the proposed budget as is for those reasons.

Councilor Vincent questioned that if after they decide to move on from the School section of the budget, are they able to go back with amendments. Councilor Austin confirmed that until the budget receives its final vote and passes, the Council can revisit any part of the budget.

Councilor Gibson made a motion to add \$29,000 to the School Proposed Budget. The motion was seconded by Councilor Vincent for discussion.

Discussion:

Councilor Gibson stated that his reasoning for the requested increase is in regards to the School's reduction in staffing, specifically the Grounds Maintenance Position. He added that with all of the buildings and grounds, the School will at the very least, need to contract out the work.

Councilor Vincent made a motion to suspend Council Rules in order to allow questions to be answered by Superintendent Lori Lane. Councilor Gibson seconded the motion and passed by voice vote.

Councilor Vincent asked, that after hearing of the request for an increase to the School Proposed Budget regarding ground maintenance, if Superintendent Lane would provide clarification on a past conversation that had to do with this topic. Superintendent Lane explained that the decision was to remove the Grounds Maintenance Position, but that \$10,000 was added back into the budget in

order to cover expected contracting costs. Discussion continued regarding the position pertaining to staff, volunteers and contracting to maintain the upkeep of the various School grounds.

Councilor Gerding commented that if the increase was approved, the School Board would not be obligated to add this increased amount to the specific line-item that was referenced pertaining to the Grounds Maintenance Position. He did state that he would support the increase as he favors funding to education but he wanted to caution the Council on the specific request's purpose. Councilor Gerding asked for clarification on the School Board process should the Council agree to amend the bottom line of the budget by any amount.

Superintendent Lane explained that the budget would go back to the School Board for final review, decision and approval of where to reduce or increase within specific line-items.

There was additional discussion regarding the Grounds Maintenance Position pertaining to overtime expenses and if the same person would be hired to fill the position should the School receive and spend the money within this position. There was agreement that this amount of funding would not be enough to hire and maintain a full-time position with an additional \$29,000.

Councilor Messier commented that he is comfortable approving the current Proposed School Budget and is confident in the Board doing their due diligence and coming up with the budget figures for each line-item that is best for the Community and the School system.

Councilor Gibson commented that he understands not being able to dictate to the School Board, where money is applied within their budget. He added his hope is that within a cooperative environment, if funding was increased with a suggestion, he would expect that it be followed through in a favorable fashion. He worries of the lack of maintaining the School's grounds and that is why he recommended an increase.

Councilor Michaud questioned what the tax impact would be with an increase of \$29,000 to the School Budget. Director Smith confirmed an increase of \$0.025.

Councilor Vincent requested a roll call vote on the motion made to add \$29,000 to the School Proposed Budget. The motion failed 2-6 by roll call vote. Councilors Gibson and Gerding voted yes.

Councilor Pepin commented that the only reason the proposed School Budget tax impact is high is due to the State reducing education funds to the City and feels they need to take responsibility. Comments and discussions continued briefly about the States budget's funding and the affects felt by the City of Somersworth.

Councilor Gibson made a motion to adopt the School Budget as proposed by the School Board. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gerding and passed 8-0 by roll call vote.

Mayor Hilliard returned to the Chair seat.

Councilor Vincent offered an amendment to the Use of Fund Balance on page C-2; he requested an increase of \$200,000 which would bring the line-item from \$1,300,000 to \$1,500,000. Director Smith clarified that the tax impact currently is estimated at \$1.47 based on revised property assessment

values for the City and with the proposed increase to the Use of Fund Balance, the tax impact would decrease by \$0.175 for a new total tax impact of \$1.29.

Mayor Hilliard asked, if there is no objection from the Council, that City Manager Belmore explain the two amendments that he is recommending be added to the budget to ensure that any amendment going forward are within the scope of what the Council wants. There was no objection.

Manager Belmore provided a handout to the Council pertaining to the two recommended amendments to the Proposed General Fund FY 2024 Budget both occurring after the FY 2024 budget was proposed. He explained the first amendment for consideration pertains to the Supplemental Site Investigation (SSI) of the PFAS issue at the Fire Station Site affecting page C-84 and it would be a new line-item. NH DES sent a letter to the City mandating that we develop a Scope of Services plan which needs to be sent to NH DES by June 1st and approved prior to executing. Manager Belmore is working with two companies on costs to then complete an SSI which one estimate was around \$40,000.

Manager Belmore explained the second amended up for consideration, Other Expenses to page C-90, line-item Superfund Monitoring Line. The monitoring line has been ongoing, and t per a recent conference call with US EPA, NH DES and Geosyntec, the City was able to narrow in on new testing requirements and their associated costs. The total cost is expected to increase by approximately \$30,000 with the new line total requested being \$172,073. He reminded the Council that the cost is shared with GE and therefore, why he is only requesting an increase of \$15,000 which is the City's shared cost responsibility.

Mayor Hilliard asked Director Smith to confirm the tax impact if the two amendments presented by Manager Belmore were approved totaling an increase in the General Fund by \$55,000 and the suggested amendment by Councilor Vincent to increase the Use of Fund Balance by \$200,000. Director Smith confirmed the new estimated tax impact would be \$1.34 as opposed to \$1.29.

Councilor Witham arrived at the meeting.

Councilor Vincent made a motion to amend the Use of Fund Balance by increasing it by \$200,000 for a total of \$1,500,000. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gerding.

Discussion:

Councilor Gerding appreciates the amendment being brought forward and is in full support of it. He did some number crunching because he was concerned how pulling money from the General Fund Balance would impact the percentage that is recommended to be within to maintain a healthy Fund balance. Currently the General Fund sits around 11% which is within the recommended 5-17%, by shifting the \$200,000 as recommended, it would only impact the percentage by less than a half of a percent. Councilor Gerding feels that the impact to the General Fund Balance is minimal and is a reasonable way to decrease the estimated tax rate increase for residents.

The motion passed 7-2 by voice vote. Councilors Witham and Austin voted no.

Councilor Messier made a motion to create account number 48109 Supplemental Site Investigation and appropriate \$40,000 to said line-item. Councilor Gibson seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Councilor Gibson thought that it was required procedure by NH DES to test contaminated soil at the new Fire Station building site. City Manager Belmore stated that they did not know the extent of it and had a consulting firm conduct core test samples from the site, he added that that PFAS contaminates is new and isn't yet qualified as hazardous material nor have parameters been set by EPA or DES. The City was committed to build on the site and thought that removing and disposing of the contaminated soil would not be such an issue as it has very recently evolved into.

Councilor Gerding asked where the appropriation of \$40,000 originated from. City Manager Belmore confirmed that the amount is based off of estimates from two engineering firms. Councilor Gerding questioned if it would be beneficial for the City to wait until an actual figure was determined and then request a supplemental appropriation at that time. Manager Belmore stated that he would not recommend waiting and suggests adding it to the budget. He added that if costs were to increase, at that time, he would then request a supplemental appropriation to cover the expenses if need be.

Councilor Messier stated that having past experience with the NH DES and EPA, he feels that the costs are only going to continue to increase. He supports the amendment and feels it is best to get ahead of the issue and expects that more fill will be moved from the Fire Station site if the State approves it.

Councilor Witham apologized for being late to the meeting. He stated that he agrees with Councilor Messier's comments of the contaminate issues continuing to evolve. He continued to comment on the Blackwater Road monitoring and responsibilities shared by the City and GE, and the current contaminated soils identified at the Fire Station. Councilor Witham stated that testing requirements also continues to be a moving target that changes frequently as more is learned about the contaminants at the State level. He favors moving forward with creating the new line item and appropriating \$40,000 in the current budget.

The motion passed by voice vote.

Councilor Messier made a motion to increase account number 49812 Superfund Monitoring Line by \$15,000. The motion was seconded by Councilor Witham and passed by voice vote.

Councilor Gerding directed the Council to page C-58, regarding the Deputy Fire Chief position which is scattered throughout multiple sections such as salary and benefits. For ease of the amendment he is proposing, he stated that he would like to remove the Deputy Fire Chief position as a whole. City Manager Belmore confirmed that it would be a reduction in the budget of \$67,400 which covers salaries and benefits for half of a fiscal year.

Councilor Gerding made a motion to reduce the Public Safety Fire Administration budget by \$67,400 and to remove the Deputy Fire Chief position. The motion was seconded by Councilor Messier.

Discussion:

Councilor Pepin shared his past experience of working with the Fire Department and explained how the shifts work with staffing and issues that came about without having a second in command who is familiar and prepared to take over when the Fire Chief at the time needed to be out on an unexpected medical leave. He continued to comment on issues with training and turnover adding that the Public Safety Committee vetted the addition of this position and it became a top priority for them. Councilor Pepin stated that with a larger and new Fire Station, the City needs a Chief to assist with the management, training, shifts, upkeep and more.

Councilor Vincent commented that after the budget workshop meeting Saturday, he was not in favor of the onboarding of a Deputy Fire Chief. He stated that he took more time to justify his reasoning and began reviewing the budget booklet, specifically comparing the Police Department with the Fire Department which are both similarly crucial departments within the City. He commented that he has less hesitation when approving expenses for the Police Department and admittedly feels that he can short the Fire Department at times. Councilor Vincent stated that having a Deputy Chief would assist with necessary tasks that can be interrupted by an emergency call or if the current Chief was not available for a multitude of reasons. He commented that he is aware that the current proposal only pays for a Deputy over a 6-month period and that there will be an additional cost in the next fiscal year's budget. He added that the Council could go back to the Use of Fund Balance and request an additional \$100,000 to lessen the tax impact if there was concern of the current \$1.35 increase.

Councilor Gerding shared his reasoning pertaining to his recommendation of removing the Deputy Fire Chief position. He stated that when he initially reviewed the budget, he was looking for ways to either increase the City's revenue or reduce expenses as he felt the tax rate estimation was high. Councilor Gerding explained that he also looked at the Deputy Chief position being cut because the School Board had to make the decision to cut 11 staffing positions within their budget. He felt concerned after witnessing those cuts at the School level and having the ability to justify adding a new, expensive position to the City's budget. Councilor Gerding noted that 18 staff are currently within the Fire Department which is a higher total number of staff than some of the other communities of similar size. Councilor Gerding further explained he would like to propose removing the position for the half year and take it into consideration for the next fiscal year's budget. He feels that rather than adding the new position, that the Fire Department takes the time to look at restructuring, as well as ways to utilize the current staff they have and possibly promote from within while maintaining the same number of staff.

Councilor Gibson stated he appreciates Councilor Gerding's explanation. He stated that each organization needs to maintain a certain structure and having a second in command is necessary and something that the City does not have. He spoke to appropriate staffing needs adding that the City has several upcoming commercial and residential developments that will require more inspections and needs for fire safety efforts. Councilor Gibson stated that he is not in favor of the amendment.

Councilor Witham stated that the Fire Chief is the only one that provides continuity between the lieutenants meaning that if the Chief is not available due to vacations, training or illness, that continuity is interrupted. Councilor Witham commented on the need for consistency and command structure within the Fire Department; both are at risk of being compromised if the Chief is not available and can cause unnecessary safety concerns. He also appreciated Councilor Gerding's review

of the budget and reminded all that the Council was the one that voted on the requirement of four firefighters on duty at all times totaling 16 staff not including the Chief and administrative assistant. Councilor Witham commented on the Council's desire to create the Deputy Chief position for many years and stated that he appreciates the City Manager's approach with introducing the position with an impact to the budget for 6 months to the first fiscal year and then adding the rest the following year. In closing, Councilor Witham noted that each of the other City Departments have the command structures to continue with day-to-day operations, while the Fire Department does not and should have had it decades ago. Councilor Witham stated that he does not support the amendment.

Councilor Austin commented that after hearing from the Fire Chief and his explanation of wanting a Deputy Fire Chief, what struck him was that he can never have a day off and when he does, the need is always there for him to maintain communication in order for the Fire Department to maintain its function and it shouldn't be that way. Councilor Austin spoke to Councilor Gerding's comparison of School positions versus City positions, Councilor Austin stated that the staffing reductions made by the School Board were a result of declining student enrollments and not that they could not afford them and felt the two should not be compared. He echoed Councilor Gibson's comments pertaining to the economic growth the City has upcoming which will require the City to be prepared to increase services if needed, he added that restructuring the Department is not the answer. Councilor Austin stated that he does not support the amendment.

There were further comments regarding the reduction in School positions and the effect of enrollment numbers over the years.

Councilor Michaud stated that he will not be in support of the amendment and the Deputy Chief is something that has been needed for many years within the City.

Councilor Messier made a motion to move the question and limit the debate. The motion was seconded by Councilor Vincent and passed by voice vote.

Councilor Witham requested a roll call vote.

The motion to remove the Deputy Chief position and \$67,400 from the Fire Department budget failed 2-7 by roll call vote. Councilors Gerding and Messier voted yes.

Councilor Witham made a motion to adopt Ordinance 18-23 as amended. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gibson.

Councilor Vincent questioned what the current estimated tax rate impact is with the current amendments. Director Smith confirmed that the estimated tax rate increase is \$1.34 and further confirmed that the Ordinance is currently set at \$56,582,776 which is almost \$1,500,000 under the tax cap.

The motion passed 9-0 by roll call vote.

Mayor Hilliard commended the Council for all their work on the City's budget adding that he feels they exemplify what Local Government should be all about by debating respectfully and weighing

out the needs of the Community, by investing into the City's needs all while taking into deep consideration the concern of the taxpayers.

Closing Comments:

Councilor Pepin thanked all of the Councilors for the Deputy Fire Chief position and included thanks to the City Manager for putting it into the budget.

Councilor Vincent stated that this budget was tough for him being that it is a lot of money, he added that he understands what it is to put money into the Community to better it. He is hopeful that the State will come through in a favorable way on their budget.

Councilor Gibson thanked all that contributed to the budget and felt that the needs of the City were balanced well with the needs of the School. He also hopes that the State will come through favorably, adding that one of the unfortunate things about the State of New Hampshire, is that property taxes pay the bills.

Councilor Austin thanked all that were involved in the budget process, he added that although it is not his favorite part of serving the City, it is a necessary and an important thing that they do every year. He believes that everyone takes their role in the budget seriously which is evident in the way that they debated during the meeting. He acknowledged that the State could change the City's tax rate come the fall and cautioned the Council on focusing on the estimated tax rate and encouraged that the focus be on the services provided by the City.

Councilor Michaud thanked the City Manager, Finance Director, Department Heads, City Staff and School Board and Departments. He commented that the budget is lean and that the Council does their best to keep the City moving forward.

Councilor Witham commented that the Council continues to move the needle a little at a time and provided an example of the gradual growth of the road reconstruction budget making it more tolerable. He expressed thanks to the City Manager, Finance Director, City and School Staff, and the School Board for creating the budget each year and delivering by the deadline. Councilor Witham added thanks to his colleagues on the Council for having the appropriate level of debate and thoughtfulness given to amendments.

Councilor Gerding gave thanks to all that were involved in the budget process, including his fellow Council members. He acknowledged the process not being easy for all involved and commends all for making it seem easy. Councilor Gerding took a moment to recognize highlights of the many good things going on throughout the City such as the Deputy Fire Chief position, although he didn't vote in favor of the position, he explained that he was never not in favor of the position but he did feel that there was another way to get what was needed and wanted to do so. He continued with the highlights recognizing the funding for community support programs, City-wide events and park improvements.

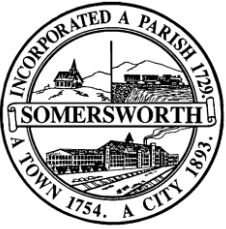
Councilor Cameron thanked all that put their hard work into the budget and stated she is very happy with the Deputy Fire Chief position and is excited to see that come to fruition after being wanted by the City and Council for many years as well as the addition of the new Fire Station.

Councilor Messier thanked everyone for their work on the budget including the Council, City administration, School administration and School Board.

Councilor Messier made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gibson and passed 9-0 by voice vote. The meeting adjourned at 7:46 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristen LaPanne, City Clerk

	City of Somersworth – Ordinance
	Ordinance No: 18-23 FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024 BUDGET

March 20, 2023

THE CITY OF SOMERSWORTH ORDAINS THAT BUDGETS FOR THE CITY OF SOMERSWORTH FOR THE 2023-2024 FISCAL YEAR SHALL BE:

DEPARTMENT

GENERAL FUND

BUDGET

Elected Leadership	\$230,720
City Management	569,803
Finance and Administration	1,817,558
Development Services	1,037,072
Police	4,829,459
Fire	2,563,621
Public Works	3,580,198
Other Expenses	1,460,616
Capital Outlay	192,750
Intergovt Assessments - County	3,049,883
School Department	29,109,022

TOTAL GENERAL FUND

48,440,702

ENTERPRISE FUNDS

Wastewater Department	4,183,996
Water Department	3,236,505
Solid Waste	647,260

TOTAL ENTERPRISE FUNDS

8,067,761

SPECIAL REVENUE FUND

Cable Fund

74,313**TOTAL FY 2023-2024 APPROPRIATION**\$56,582,776**AS ADOPTED APRIL 10, 2023**

This Ordinance shall take effect upon its passage.

Authorization	
<i>Sponsor by Request:</i> Mayor Dana S. Hilliard	<i>Approved:</i> City Attorney

City of Somersworth – Ordinance 18-23

History			
First Read Date:	3/20/2023	Tabled:	4/3/2023
Public Hearing:	4/3/2023	Removed From Table:	4/10/2023
Second Read:	4/3/2023		

Discussion

3/20/2023

*Clerk LaPanne performed a first reading of Ordinance 18-23.**Ordinance 18-23 will remain in first reading until the call of the Chair.**A Public Hearing is scheduled for the next regular scheduled City Council meeting.*

4/3/2023

*Clerk LaPanne performed a second reading of Ordinance 18-23.**Councilor Witham made a motion to table Ordinance 18-23. The motion was seconded by Councilor Vincent and passed 9-0 by roll call vote.*

4/10/2023

*Councilor Pepin made a motion to remove Ordinance 18-23 from the table. The motion was seconded by Councilor Vincent.**Councilor Witham made a motion to adopt Ordinance 18-23 as amended. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gibson. The motion passed 9-0 by roll call vote.**Minutes of the April 10, 2023 City Council Special Budget Meeting are available to review detailed discussion of the FY 2023-2024 Proposed Budget.*

Voting Record	YES	NO
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Ward 1 Councilor	Pepin	X	
Ward 2 Councilor	Vincent	X	
Ward 3 Councilor	Gibson	X	
Ward 4 Councilor	Austin	X	
Ward 5 Councilor	Michaud	X	
At Large Councilor	Witham	X	
At Large Councilor	Gerding	X	
At Large Councilor	Cameron	X	
At Large Councilor	Messier	X	
TOTAL VOTES:		9	
On 4/10/2023	Ordinance 18-23	PASSED	FAILED