

**TOWN OF WALPOLE
PUBLIC HEARING ON 2023 ANNUAL BUDGET
FEBRUARY 8, 2023**

Selectboard present: Steven Dalessio (Chair) and Peggy Pschirrer

Staff Present: Mike Rau, Road Agent; Sarah Downing, Manager of Administration
Meghan Hansson, Town Clerk-Tax Collector; Jane Malmberg, Library Director
Richard Kreissle, Finance Manager; Justin Sanctuary, Police Chief

Public Present: Tom Aldrich, Ray Boas, Richard Malmberg, Pauline Barnes and Adrian Basora

CALL TO ORDER: Mr. Dalessio called the Town 2023 Budget Hearing at 5:30 PM. Mr. Dalessio introduced himself and Mrs. Pschirrer.

Mr. Dalessio commented upon the headwinds of high inflation, supply chain problems, and damaged infrastructure that were faced when developing the 2023 town budget. Mr. Dalessio stated to those in attendance that the 2023 budget was \$4,537,202, with an increase of 4.29%. He stated that last year's increase was 5.6%. Mr. Dalessio said that in 2022, a salary survey was conducted. It found that the Town's most employees were compensated at comparable rates to similar jurisdictions. However, due to the survey, compensation for a few department managers would be adjusted given the findings of this survey. Mr. Dalessio informed those in attendance that there has been a 11.7% increase in the cost of medical benefits. He stated to offset this increase, the Town adjusted the medical benefit plan from zero-dollar deductible plan to a \$1,000 per person, \$3,000 per family deductible plan, and increased the employee contribution from 12.5% to 15%.

Selectboard member, Cheryl Mayberry joined the meeting.

Mr. Basora inquired if the budget reflected the Fall Mountain Regional School District. Mr. Dalessio clarified that the budget under discussion was the Town's operating budget, and that the school was not included. Mrs. Pschirrer encouraged the public to attend the scheduled Deliberative Session at Fall Mountain High School on February 9th.

Mr. Dalessio began a review of the warrant articles beginning with Article #5. He commented upon the Selectboard's recommendation of raising and appropriating \$15,000 to the Municipal Building Capital Reserve Fund. Mr. Dalessio then moved on to Article #6, raising and appropriating \$250,000 for the purchase of a 6-wheel truck for the Highway Department. Mr. Aldrich asked, "does a vehicle purchase go out to bid?". Mr. Rau responded that the Town utilizes quotes instead of bids. Mr. Rau stated that the purchase would go through Reed Trucking, a national dealer, which already has the state pricing for the vehicle. Mr. Dalessio stated his confidence that the Town will not overpay for the vehicle. Mr. Dalessio spoke to Article #7, raising and appropriating \$25,000 for the Highway Capital Reserve Fund. He then moved on to Article #8, raising and appropriating \$75,000 to construct storage at the Recycling Center. He spoke about the present issue with the Recycling Center using old tractor trailers for storage, three of which have been deemed unsafe. Mr. Dalessio said that the plan would be one of two things, which are to build a pole barn or replace the current containers with some other form of container. Mr. Basora commented that the capacity for storage is important to the financial viability of the Recycling Center. Mr. Dalessio spoke to Article #9, raising and

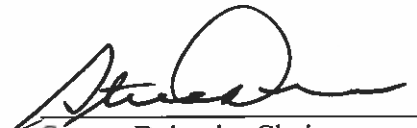
appropriating \$47,000 for a vehicle for the Walpole Police Department. He stated that there is a rotation plan for police vehicles. Chief Sanctuary added that over the years, three hybrid vehicles have been purchased for the Walpole Police Department, and they all have experienced significant electrical issues. Chief Sanctuary commented that the Police department is moving away from hybrids until the electrical issues are addressed by the manufacturer.

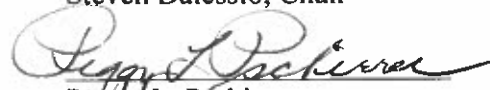
Mr. Aldrich stated there is a pattern of using unassigned funds and commented that last year a lot of warrant articles used unassigned funds. Mr. Aldrich wondered if department managers inflate their budgets to increase the unassigned fund balance. In response, Mr. Dalessio reviewed the budget process. In September, budget documents are prepared with everything level funded except for things that the Town has no control over. He stated that in December, the department managers present their budgets to the Selectboard. Mr. Dalessio added that if a budget line is being drastically underspent or overspent, the Selectboard questions and requests evidence to support the proposed changes. Mr. Dalessio stated that department managers watch their budgets carefully and are responsible for the services that are provided.

Mr. Dalessio then spoke to Article #10, raising and appropriating \$16,500 for equipment in the new police vehicle. He stated that this article will only pass if Article #9 passes. Mr. Aldrich wondered if old equipment could be used in a new vehicle. Chief Sanctuary stated that by the time the vehicles are rotated, the equipment does not fit. Mr. Aldrich stated that the manufacturers do not think of making the equipment adjustable. Chief Sanctuary replied that there is constant change with the equipment. Mr. Aldrich then stated that he hopes the Highway Department's approach to vehicle repair would also apply to the Police Department. Chief Sanctuary stated that the consoles and the cages must fit appropriately, and consideration given for liability and safety when it comes to police vehicle equipment.

Mr. Dalessio spoke to Article #12, raising and appropriating \$115,000 for the reconstruction of Middle Street to include upgrading drainage and roadway improvements to come from unassigned fund balance. Mr. Dalessio invited Mrs. Downing to speak about Articles #13 and #14. Mrs. Downing stated that Article #13 would allow for more a larger pool of people who could apply for elderly tax exemptions and would increase the amount of the exemption at different age levels. She stated that it is hoped that with the change, more residents would apply for the exemption. Mrs. Downing then discussed Article #14; the state legislature passed a bill to allow individuals presently serving in the military to qualify for the Veterans' Tax Credit. However, Walpole has a credit amount that is higher than the minimum. She stated that this article is more for housekeeping, to ensure compliance. Mr. Dalessio closed the public hearing at 5:59 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jordan Cannon, Recording Secretary


Steven Dalessio, Chair


Peggy L. Pschirrer


Cheryl Mayberry