

February 10, 2025

The special meeting of the Town Council of the Town of Newton was held on the above date at 5:00 p.m. Present were Mr. Couce, Mrs. Diglio, Mrs. Teets, Mayor Le Frois, Thomas S. Russo, Jr, Town Manager, and Teresa A. Oswin, Municipal Clerk/Deputy Town Manager. Also present were Mr. Thomas Ferry, CFO, Jennifer Dodd, Human Resources Director, Virginia Rafferty, Treasurer, and Kathryn Alcock, Deputy Municipal Clerk. Mr. Dickson arrived at 6:14pm.

Mayor Le Frois made the following declaration that "in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, notice of this special meeting was given to the two newspapers of record and posted on the official bulletin board on January 31, 2025."

Mr. Russo invited Mr. Ferry to speak.

Mr. Ferry started by briefly reviewing the Town's current financial situation. He said Newton has a great professional team that does a great job, and he is happy to be working here. He then reviewed the Current and Water/Sewer Fund Balance pages in the budget. He stated the Town is in good financial shape.

Mr. Russo then started his review of the budget going page by page. On page two (2) he reviewed the appropriations, taking note, the employee costs have a slight decrease from the previous year. On page three (3) he reviewed the status of the current annual reassessment program. On page four (4) he reviewed the Net Valuation Taxable (NVT), which increased by \$67 Million in 2025 to \$1,109,165,654 and the impact of tax appeals. On page five (5) he reviewed the history of tax appeals, the current tax dollars at risk from the 2024 appeals. On page six (6) he reviewed the Town's health care costs and their impact on both the Current and Water/Sewer budgets. On page seven (7) it states the average increase for a residential property based on this budget as presented would be \$3 a month.

Mr. Russo then asked Mr. Ferry to give a review of page eleven (11) on the CAP calculation.

Mr. Ferry explained in 1977 a cap was placed on appropriations, explaining some things are placed "inside the cap" while others such as health care costs/insurance are outside. The Town may by ordinance increase the amount the appropriation increases to 3.5% by ordinance. This does not change the budget as presented, it is more a number on paper. He pointed out at the bottom of page eleven (11) it shows we are almost \$300,000 under what the State allows for us.

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Mr. Russo continued going page by page. Pages twelve (12) and thirteen (13) give an overview of revenue comparisons. He stated State aid is about a point less this year and we are using less fund balance monies. Page fourteen (14) explains how the tax dollars are distributed between Board of Education, County, Library, Open Space, and the Town. Page fifteen (15) gives the history of the fund balance, which has a strong balance.

He then reviewed Revenues on pages sixteen (16) and seventeen (17).

The Mayor noted there is an increase in grant revenue and an expansion of shared services bringing more revenue into the Town.

Mr. Ferry pointed out the State took away their Municipal Relief Aid in the amount of \$106,000. So from the start of the budget process, we were almost a full tax point behind.

Mr. Russo stated you can see a snapshot of the grants on page eighteen (18). The Mayor pointed out our Interlocal Agreements have seen a 198% increase since 2023. Which is significant.

At this time Mr. Russo moved on to the review of the Expenditures, noting on page twenty (20) Redevelopment has been moved from CIF to the operating budget as a Town Manager line item.

Next was a review of pages twenty-two (22) and twenty-three (23) with Mr. Ferry answering the Council's questions.

Pages twenty-four (24) and twenty-eight (28) were reviewed next with minimal questions. One item of note was Affordable Housing Plan line item in the amount of \$25,000, this is something required by the State.

Mr. Russo then jumped to page thirty-seven (37) and reviewed the Reserve for Tax Appeals and Utilities.

Next pages thirty-eight (38) through forty (4) which contains grant, interlocal, and Court expenditures.

Mr. Russo stated page forty-one (41) will be reviewed later, lastly page forty-two (42) was reviewed without comment.

Mr. Russo invited Chief D'Annibale and Lt. Finkle to come forward and directed everyone to page 28.

#### **POLICE DEPARTMENT BUDGET REVIEW**

At this time Chief D'Annibale and Lt. Finkle joined the meeting. Mr. Russo asked

the Chief to give an overview of the Department and the number of officers and employees he supervises.

Mr. Russo started the review of the Police Department budget on page twenty-eight (28).

Lt. D'Annibale answered Mrs. Diglio's questions on overtime.

Next Mr. Russo asked Lt. Finkle to review the Emergency Management budget on Page thirty (30).

Mr. Finkle gave an overview of the two increases. One is the continuation of the Mutual Link Service, and the other is the service agreement of the ICS System.

Also, on page thirty (30) Mr. Russo stated the First Aid Squad asked for an increase, so they increased the aid to the NFAS from \$30,000 to \$35,000.

Next the Chief reviewed page thirty-four (34) explaining the increase in the Animal Control budget is due to the increase in the number of shared services and municipalities we now cover.

The Mayor asked about the Town's ability to accept monetary donations for Animal Control. Chief D'Annibale explained they are in the process of creating a not-for-profit for this purpose. She then asked Lt. Finkle if there were any plans to expand the drone program. Lt. Finkle gave an overview of the improvements planned and the grants they have applied for and received.

Next the Chief stated that the tasers are in and just waiting for training. As for the 9-1-1 upgrades, they are close to completion. They expect it to be done in mid-March.

**Mr. Dickson joined the meeting at 6:14pm.**

The Chief then reviewed his capital requests which include Mobile Data Terminals, License Scanner, replacement of the 2021 Explorer, Automatic License Plate Reader, and updating the radio tower equipment.

A discussion ensued on the need for upgrades to the radio tower equipment. Mayor Dickson stated the upgrades would help all emergency services.

Mayor Le Frois thanked Chief D'Annibale and Lt. Finkle for their time.

Mr. Russo invited Danielle Finkle and Barbara Hunton, from the Recreation Department to come forward and directed everyone to pages thirty-five (35) and thirty-six (36)

Danielle started by saying they had a great year with lots of events in 2024. Barbara stated the pool tripled the number of swim lesson participants, they are looking

to do more events at the pool this year.

Mr. Russo asked Jenn Dodd, Human Resources Director, to review the staffing plan for the upcoming season. Jenn said even with Barbara and Danielle out last pool season, they had a successful year. We anticipate having the same staff numbers we had last year.

Mrs. Teets said she knows the pool had a successful summer, she heard great things and saw positive social media posts. She is looking forward to this year's season.

Mrs. Oswin wanted to acknowledge that even though both Danielle and Barbara were out for half the year, they did prepare everyone quite well. Their absence was felt, but it wasn't as bad as it could have been, and she appreciated their efforts.

Mayor Le Frois thanked Danielle and Barbara.

At this time, the Mayor announced we would take a break and resume the budget meeting at the conclusion of the regular meeting.

#### **DPW/RECREATION/WATER & SEWER BUDGET REVIEW**

Adam Vough, Assistant DPW Director, and Mr. Van der Groef were present to review the DPW and Water & Sewer budgets, as well as address the Capital Improvement projects.

Mayor Le Frois stated we would not be getting into specifics on the Water/Sewer projects because our new engineers will be attending the March 10<sup>th</sup> meeting to go over said projects.

Mr. Russo directed everyone to page thirty-one (31).

Mr. Vough stated his budget is straight forward, he tried to maintain the same amount as last year.

Mr. Vough answered all the Council's questions regarding staffing and brining.

Next, Mr. Russo moved to pages forty-three (43) through forty-seven, the Water/Sewer budget. Mr. Russo acknowledged Mr. Jaekel was in attendance and sitting in the back, he has given notice of his retirement effective July 1<sup>st</sup>.

A brief discussion took place regarding staffing.

Mayor Le Frois asked about the annual assessment of water/sewer rates. Mr. Russo explained the I-Bank principal forgiveness in the program helps gives us more stability. Mr. Ferry explained we have \$17 million in bonds and notes authorized and not issued. This means it will either be bonded or debt, however most of it is I-Bank related, and their

principal forgiveness.

Next Mr. Vough to review items requested on page fifty-eight (58), the Capital Improvement Fund.

Mr. Vough stated they are requesting two (2) electronic signboard trailers.

Mr. Russo invited Debbie Danielson, Recycling Coordinator to come forward to review requests for improvements to the Recycling Center.

Ms. Danielson reviewed some of the changes planned at the Recycling Center. They are taking delivery of two (2) new cardboard containers requiring the boxes to be crushed. She went onto explain the new traffic pattern planned to improve the flow of traffic through the center. Ms. Danielson explained the center is now under video surveillance, and they have caught people dumping household trash, and thanks to the video the police can notify the offenders. Ms. Danielson then reviewed all the items we now take at our Recycling Center.

Next Mr. Vough outlined what the electrical upgrades to Memory Park entails. Finally, Mr. Vough stated he is also requesting a snow remover for sidewalks in the Capital Budget.

Mr. Russo and Mr. Van der Groef reviewed the Water and Sewer Capital requests.

### **FIRE DEPARTMENT BUDGET REVIEW**

Chief Miller came forward and they started their budget review on page 30.

Mr. Russo stated Mr. Ferry added a Fire Museum Nat'l Reg. Application to the budget. MR. Russo read the following memo from Jessica Caldwell: *"The Town of Newton is seeking to apply to the State and National Registry for historic places to formally list the Newton Fire Museum, located at 150 Spring Street, to secure future grant funding to be used towards rehab and public outreach educational projects. The Newton Fire Museum is located in the Town's local historic district, which is an integral part of the Town's Downtown and Historic District as well as an economic center featuring a combination of uses such as commercial and restaurant establishments, and offices on the upper floors. The main objective to apply to the State and National Register is to take advantage of financial benefits for future rehab grants and as well as open the museum to the public for cultural and heritage tours. Supporting visitors and historic tourism in the Downtown and Historic Districts."* This is what the \$10,000 will be used for.

The Council reviewed page thirty (30) with no questions. Mr. Russo reviewed the

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Capital requests, which are for the exterior renovations for the No. 1 Firehouse.

The Council had a few questions for Chief Miller about upcoming events and membership.

Mrs. Teets thanked the Chief for the Department's support of the Police Department earlier tonight.

Mr. Russo stated he concluded his review.

**OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

Mayor Le Frois opened the meeting to the public.

Neil Flaherty, Sparta Ave, came forth to compliment Tom and his staff for all the hard work that went into preparing this budget. He said he has mentioned he feels the Water/Sewer Capital Improvement Fund should not be a flat fee, it should be based on usage. He currently feels it disproportionately impacts a small portion of the residents. He asked Council to please consider looking into the fee structure and how it is calculated. People should be charged for what they use, and the minimum charge goes against their efforts to conserve water.

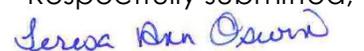
Mayor Le Frois opened the meeting to those on Zoom.

No one else from the public addressed the Council.

Mr. Ferry stated the budget will be introduced at the February 24<sup>th</sup> meeting, advertised on March 6<sup>th</sup> in the NJ Herald, and the public hearing and adoption is scheduled for March 24<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Russo asked for clarity if the budget is okay as it is to introduce. The Council were all in agreement that the budget is good to go for introduction.

There being no further business to be conducted, upon motion of Mrs. Diglio seconded by Mrs. Teets and unanimously carried, the special meeting was adjourned at 9:26pm.

Respectfully submitted,  


Teresa A. Oswin, RMC  
Municipal Clerk