

February 20, 2021

The special meeting of the Town Council of the Town of Newton was held via Zoom on the above date at 8:30 a.m. Present were Mr. Couce, Mrs. Diglio, Deputy Mayor Schlaffer, Mrs. Teets, Mayor Dickson, and Thomas S. Russo, Jr, Town Manager. Also present were Mrs. Monica Miebach, CFO, Jennifer Dodd, Human Resources Director, and Terri Oswin, Deputy Town Manager/Deputy Municipal Clerk.

Mayor Dickson 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 February 9, 2021."

COMMENTS BY TOWN AUDITOR

Mr. Tom Ferry, Town Auditor, addressed the Council and outlined Newton's financial status.

Mr. Ferry started by acknowledging Tom, Monica, and the rest of the staff for their exceptional work. He usually does Newton's audit first because he generally has very few auditing adjustments/comments. He attributes this to the great CFOs and staff Newton continues to employ.

Mr. Ferry then provided some financial advice and stated the fund balance is **\$2,922,773.01**, an increase of \$89,989.80 over last year. This is a good thing to have this cushion in case we have any emergencies, which we did this year with COVID.

Mr. Ferry went on to say the Tax Collection rate for 2020 was excellent **98.01%**, especially given the fact we are in a pandemic. He explained one tax point equates to \$59,424.95.

Mr. Ferry advised Council the Newton budget and tax levy as proposed represents the municipal taxes on an average assessed home will be **\$12** for which is an increase of **\$1.00 a month**.

Mr. Ferry outlined the financial status of the Newton Water and Sewer budget. He stated the fund balance decreased by **\$196,437.26**. A majority of this decrease is the result of decrease in revenues due to the pandemic. He noted the Town has major Water/Sewer projects coming up and the fund balance will be used for these projects.

Mr. Ferry reviewed the Town's Current Fund net debt. The Town has been paying off its net debt and it is down from the 2014 level. Mr. Ferry noted he is working with financial advisors and indicated the plan is to continue to pay down the debt each year. Mr. Ferry also outlined the net debt and advised the 2020 net debt percentage is 2.12%, a decrease from the prior year.

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There were no questions from the Council, Mr. Russo thanked Mr. Ferry for his time and presentation.

TOWN MANAGER'S REVIEW OF BUDGET SUMMARY

Mr. Russo then began the review of the 2021 budget document noting the appropriations; reserve for uncollected taxes/tax appeals; and health care coverage. He reviewed the revenues in support of the budget.

Mr. Russo asked Mrs. Miebach to explain the CAP Calculation page. Mrs. Miebach explained the Town is allowed up to a 3.5% by ordinance. The budget as presented is a 1% increase. The additional 2.5% serves as a safety net in case of an emergency. If the ordinance is not adopted, and we have an emergency we would have to go before the Local Finance Board which is timely and costly. The top half of the page is what the State allows, the bottom shows the existing numbers where we stand, having an excess of \$585,338.99 which we are allowed in appropriations in calendar year 2021 as long as we pass the ordinance. Mr. Russo added, this is done every year and is basically a number on paper.

Mr. Russo continued to review each page of the budget document and addressed all questions of the Mayor and Town Council.

Mr. Russo noted the fiscal facts: The property tax is divided among the Newton Board of Education, Town of Newton, County of Sussex, County Library, and County Open Space. The chart below illustrates the percentage that each of the jurisdictions received in 2020 from the average taxpayer in the Town.

Newton Board of Education	50.80%	\$2.247
Town of Newton	33.78%	\$1.494
County of Sussex	14.31%	\$.633
County Library	1.04%	\$.046
<u>County Open Space</u>	<u>.07%</u>	<u>\$.003</u>
Total	100.0%	\$4.423 per \$100 of assessed value

Mr. Russo, continued with the Revenue Budget 2021 for various departments within the Town of Newton.

Mr. Couce questioned when a First Aid Squad or Fire Department member earning LOSAP leaves before the end of 5 years and they are not vested, does the Town try to claim the money invested. After a brief discussion, Mr. Russo directed Mrs. Miebach to look into this matter. Deputy Mayor Schlaffer asked legal counsel be

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consulted before any LOSAP accounts are closed.

Mr. Couce also asked if the Town was aware FEMA has adjusted their cost sharing percentage for reimbursement. Mrs. Miebach advised she is aware.

BREAK – 15 minutes.

DPW/RECREATION/WATER & SEWER BUDGET REVIEW

Adam Vough, Assistant DPW Director, Ken Jaekel, DPW Director, Sherri Kaylani, Recreation Supervisor, David Simmons, Water Engineer, and Frederick Margron, Sewer Engineer were present to review the DPW, Water & Sewer, and Recreation budgets as well as address the Capital Improvement projects.

Mr. Vough briefly reviewed the Public Works budget. Mr. Couce asked about the line item for 4A Barrett. Mr. Russo explained we have made every attempt to have the current owner rectify the unsafe structure situation to no avail. On the advice of legal counsel we will have to take care of the matter and then place a lien on the property.

Councilwoman Diglio stated she would like money to be included in the budget for summer help for the DPW.

A brief discussion ensued on the Brine and Snow Trust accounts.

Next up for discussion, Sherri Kaylani gave an overview on the pool. This season is expected to run mid-June to Labor Day weekend. It will be approximately 88/9hr days. The staff will be larger than last year's of 25-30; final numbers will depend on the CDC guidelines. The Town has asked our engineers to design and re-engineer the kiddie pool to make it a Splash Pad. We will seek private donations for the construction and installation in 2022.

Mayor Dickson asked about the advertising/promotion line item increase. Mrs. Kaylani explained last year she did the social media posts for the abbreviate season, this year we will use the firm KKPR so we may reach a larger audience to increase revenue from County residents.

Mrs. Kaylani reviewed the remainder of the Recreation budget. Mr. Couce questioned what the Park & Playground overtime line item was used for. Mrs. Dodd, explained it is used to pay Brock Kithcart, licensed pool operator.

At this time, Mr. Vough reviewed the CIF requests. He explained the walkway in front of the Police Department has sunk and needs to be lifted and leveled, at the same time they plan to remove the "garden" area on the municipal side to expand the

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concrete making it a more useable area as well as fix the stairs and wall.

Next up for discussion David Simmons, of Harold E. Pellow & Associates, Inc., the Town Water Engineer gave an overview of the Bridge Q-06 project. The existing 16" Newton Water Transmission main is located on the upstream side of the existing bridge and will be in conflict with the proposed replacement bridge and wingwalls. The County included approximately 150 linear feet of new 16" ductile iron watermain in the bridge project to replace the existing transmission main, and move it further upstream out of the way of the new bridge. The Town of Newton will be supplied with water from Sparta Township through the existing emergency interconnection near the intersection of Routes 517 and 181 during the construction of the new section of water main. The construction of the new section of transmission main is estimated to take approximately three weeks to complete and is currently scheduled for the fall of 2021.

Fred Margron reviewed the Capital sewer projects. TTHM & HAA5 Mitigation \$100,000: Mr. Margron stated, back in late 2017 early 2018, the Town had a number of exceedances in its TTHM and HAA5 levels. A number of interim protocols were developed to mitigate the problem and we've been in compliance since that time; however, the State is looking for a permanent solution. He stated we have requested permission to test a chlorine dioxide system at the WTP. If approved by DEP, he believes this will be the best long term solution for the Town.

PS Improvement Program Study \$30,000: The Town owns, operates and maintains 5 wastewater pump stations as follows: Sussex Street, Merriam Avenue, Woodside Avenue, Memory Park, and Sparta Avenue. The pump station equipment is of varying age and condition. This equipment is inspected and maintained on a routine basis, with repairs performed as-needed, typically when a piece of equipment has failed or has nearly failed. Failure based renewal programs have high risks of extended service disruptions and unexpected and unplanned capital expenditures and higher prices due to the emergency nature of the repairs. Setting up a capital program for renewing the pump station systems gradually over time will allow us to address these as a planned project, minimizing the expense and challenges associated with emergency repairs.

Plant Power Study \$70,000: The WWTP dates back to the early 1950's and much of the electrical system is original or was updated when the plant was upgraded about 30 years ago. The long service in a harsh environment is always a challenge for

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electrical equipment, and there have also been some extensive improvements in technology over the last 30 years. The study will identify the work that has to be done on the plant electrical system to keep the facility running smoothly for the foreseeable future.

Sewer Line Repairs \$285,000: The Town undertook a sewer system inspection program back in 2018. The program identified and prioritized a number of rehabilitation projects that needed to be addressed. This will be the first phase of those sewer repairs with lining, spot repairs and manhole rehab work.

Mr. Jaekel briefly reviewed the Capital requests. He explained the truck replacement is for one of the two utility trucks the crews use. It is twelve years old, its utility body, front end, and door are shot and the engine needs to be pulled and repair. Basically, it has exceeded its useful life.

Mr. Russo asked Mr. Vough to explain some of the Capital request items. Tow-Behind Screener for sweepings: Mr. Vough stated they are looking to get a new screener to attach to one of their trucks so they can screen what they sweep up. SCMUA has been more stringent in what they accept as sweepings. Even though it is swept from the road we have to screen out the garbage leaves etc. before taking it to SCMUA which is a lot more expensive in the long run. Plus, it can be used to screen topsoil, so it would have a dual purpose.

Refurbishing of 2004 Elgin Pelican Sweeper: Mr. Vough explained we have two sweepers. The 2004 Elgin is still a good sweeper but the sweeping mechanisms in the hopper are all pretty much shot at this time. It is a lot cheaper to refurbish this machine than to purchase a new one.

Brine System Upgrade: Mr. Vough stated with the system we have the parts and computer system are obsolete. Currently the tank is outside and there are issues with it freezing, he would like to upgrade and move the tank into one of the bays to avoid this issue. He is waiting to hear from Andover Township on cost sharing for this project.

2007 Chevy 4500: Mr. Vough stated this is one of the medium duty, mason dumps, and is quite old, it's gone through a few rears and breaks down frequently. It really needs to be replaced.

At this time, the Mayor asked if any of the Council had questions on the DPW, Water Sewer, or Recreation Budgets.

Mr. Couce inquired about a possible shared service with Andover who is looking

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to purchase a sweeper. Mr. Russo directed Mr. Vough and Mr. Jaekel to reach out to their counterparts in Andover on this matter.

Mrs. Diglio asked why there wasn't anything in the budget on the "Obie" the 1949 snow blower. Mr. Vough explained it was not in this year's budget because at the time of the budget prep it was operational. He went on to say, yes the machine did break down, but they were able once again to get it running. It will have to be replaced or refurbished and they will research costs for next year's budget.

Mayor Dickson thanked Mr. Vough, Mr. Jaekel, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Margron, and Mrs. Kaylani for coming in and presenting their budget.

With no other questions, Mr. Russo requested Mayor Dickson to take a short break.

BREAK – 15 minutes.

POLICE DEPARTMENT BUDGET REVIEW

At this time, Mrs. Teets muted herself as she has a conflict. Mr. Couce would abstain from any discussions involving Special Officers, as he has a conflict.

Chief Osborn and Lt. Van Nieuwland came forward to review and outline the police budget.

Chief Osborn explained Chief Richards and Lt. Zappa both retired this year and he has one officer out, leaving the squads short. Currently there are 2 officers eligible for retirement, 2 eligible in 2022, and 3 in 2023. Two officers were hired; they both already completed the police academy because they came from other agencies and are now working for the Town of Newton. This resulted in a cost savings for the Town. This year we are looking to hire a new officer; the potential candidates will have to attend the academy. Two dispatchers left and they are looking to replace them. The Chief's administrative assistant was given an increase and given added duties assisting OEM.

In the CIF he is requesting \$30,000 to replace various equipment, which includes 5 computers and monitors.

Mr. Russo asked Chief Osborn to give an overview of the two Lieutenants duties. Chief Osborn stated some of their duties overlap. They are both responsible for OPRA requests and 2 patrol squads. Lt. Monaco oversees traffic, internal affairs, background checks, and training. Lt. Van Nieuwland oversees the Detective Bureau, vehicle maintenance, the crossing guards, and dispatch. Lt. Van Nieuwland also stated there

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are many vendors they both deal with for IT services, software, and body worn cameras.

Mr. Russo stated he appreciates the relationship with the community the police department has. He asked Chief Osborn to speak to the efforts his department has made building the relationship. Chief Osborn stated they try to be responsive to any complaints whether they are via email, phone, or social media. His officers are very community oriented - giving talks at the local schools, attending events such as Newton Day and Coffee with a Cop. The department is very active on social media and he tries to keep the public informed with news alerts. Det. Post is in the schools doing the L.E.A.D program and Lt. Van Nieuwland recently did a child safety seat demonstration for Birth Haven.

Lt. VanNieuwland added we also participate in C.L.E.A.R. program which our former Chief helped to start. We also have the Medicine Drop Program. Chief Osborn went on to say they try to partner with other agencies whenever possible. His department has strong ties to the community.

Mr. Couce questioned the increase in the vehicle maintenance line item. Chief Osborn stated we have an aging fleet and more repairs are warranted. Lt. Van Nieuwland added there are 3 cars that are near or just over the 100,000 mile mark. The cars never really have any downtime, they are running almost 24/7.

Mr. Couce questioned the formula for replacing cars: 0-2-1 over a three-year period, he thinks maybe a 1-1-1 would be better. He also inquired about an event he enjoyed when he was younger "National Night-Out" and would there be any interest in hosting this again. Chief Osborn explained increasing costs and waning interest is the reason this event is no longer held.

Lastly, Mr. Couce asked if the Chief was aware of the Firehouse Sub Grant which is done quarterly in the amount of \$15k-\$30k which he feels is underutilized in the County. Hamburg was recently successful in receiving monies from this grant. Mr. Couce also inquired if the Town ever looked into hiring a grant writer. Mr. Russo responded it was on his goals list, he has looked into it, but doesn't feel the cost was warranted at this time. He feels we do okay without it at this time. Mr. Russo stated they will look into the Firehouse Sub Grant.

After a lengthy discussion, Mayor Dickson thanked Chief Osborn and Lt. Van Nieuwland for coming in and reviewing his budget.

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FIRE DEPARTMENT BUDGET REVIEW

Deputy Chief Miller, came forward and outlined the Fire Department budget and explained the capital improvement items requested. The \$30,000 is for gear washers and an air system. Mayor Dickson asked about grants for the gear washers. Deputy Chief explained they were not able to apply by the deadline, but they are actively researching other grant opportunities.

Mr. Couce once again mentioned the Firehouse Sub Grant is available to Fire Departments also. Sparta and Allamuchy recently were successful in acquiring monies through this grant. Mr. Couce also stated he believes Andover Fire was in the process of acquiring an air system. This might be an opportunity to look for a shared service for cost sharing. Deputy Chief explained, after some consideration, it was more cost effective to have our own.

A brief discussion took place on the hose testing and replacement. Deputy Chief stated the hoses are tested every year and replaced as needed.

Mr. Couce mentioned E-Dispatch and if the department had any interest to use this. Deputy Chief Miller explained they recently switched their reporting software and we should see a decrease in costs this year.

Mr. Russo, stated this concludes the review of the budget. He will add \$6,000 in each of the Current and Water/Sewer budgets for 2 part-time helpers in the DPW for the summer. This will not affect the overall budget totals.

Mayor Dickson thanked the firemen for coming in and presenting their budget. He also thanked all the staff for their hard work in putting together this budget, reducing debt, keeping operating costs down, and increasing shared services.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Mayor Dickson opened the meeting to the public.

Neil Flaherty, 154 Sparta Avenue, stated every year the budget process improves. This is the 2nd year in a row, his questions were answered before he had a chance to ask them. He went on to thank Mr. Russo and his staff for putting the budget together. It's a tight budget and he appreciates it.

Peg Baldini, 10 Barry Lane, questioned what the Town's responsibility is if the Bridge Q-06 project takes longer than anticipated and goes over budget. Also, she questioned the Splash Pad at the kiddie pool. She didn't think there was much support for this. Is it necessary?

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Mr. Russo responded the Town's responsibility with Bridge Q-06 project is capped, if it goes over it will be the County's responsibility. As for the kiddie pool, the Town has capped its responsibility at \$30k for engineering and design costs. Private donations will be solicited for the construction.

No one else from the public addressed the Council.

COUNCIL & MANAGER COMMENTS

Mrs. Miebach advised the hose testing was charged to the Cascade line item 1070213 in 2018. Mr. Couce stated he believed testing was to be done annually. Mr. Russo instructed Mrs. Dodd to follow-up with Deputy Chief Miller to ensure we are in compliance.

Mrs. Diglio thanked Mr. Russo and his staff for their work on the budget and keeping the increase to \$12 for the average assessed home.

Mrs. Teets stated she wanted to echo Mr. Flaherty's comments, she knows the work that goes into preparing a budget. She appreciates and respects the work done. She went on to say it is very helpful to have the staff and professionals in attendance to explain certain line items.

Mr. Couce fully agrees with Mrs. Teets. He went on to say it is nice to know we are keeping with a minimal increase and he hopes the County and BOE try to keep their increases low. Our staff did a very good job.

Deputy Mayor Schlaffer, stated in response to Ms. Baldini's inquiry on the Splash Pad, it is cheaper to install, maintain, and insure the Splash Pad compared to a kiddie pool. The Town will be relying on private donations, and he thinks this is our best option.

There being no further business to be conducted, upon motion of Mrs. Diglio, seconded by Deputy Mayor Schlaffer and unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned at 11:41am.

Respectfully submitted,



Teresa A. Oswin, RMC
Deputy Municipal Clerk