

At a Special meeting of the Town Council holden in and for the Town of Gloucester on April 22, 2024

I. Call to Order

The meeting was Called to Order at 6:00 P.M. by Councilor W. Worthy, Town Council President.

II. Roll Call

Members present: Cheryl A. Greathouse; Jonathan E. Burlingame; Walter M. O. Steere, III; Stephen W. Arnold, Vice President (arrived at 6:05 P.M.) ; William A. Worthy , Jr. President

Also Present: Jean Fecteau, Town Clerk; Christine Mathieu, Deputy Town Clerk

Arrived for 7:00 P.M. Public Hearing: Jane Steere, Tax Collector and Interim Finance Director; Elizabeth Beltram, Financial Analyst and Asst. Interim Finance Director; Gary Treml, Director Public Works; Chief Delprete; Karen Scott, Town Planner (arrived at 7:10 P.M.); Robert Shields, Recreation Director (arrived at 7:30 P.M.)

III. Pledge of Allegiance

Councilor W. Worthy asked everyone to please stand and join in the Pledge of Allegiance.

IV. Seek to Convene to Closed Executive Session (Closed Session) Pursuant to:

- A. R.I.G.L. 42-46-5(a)(1) Sessions pertaining to discussions of the job performance, character, or physical or mental health of a person or persons – Discussion, considerations, vote or other actions by Town Council

MOTION was made by Councilor W. Steere to Seek to Convene to Closed Executive Session (Closed Session) Pursuant to:

- A. R.I.G.L. 42-46-5(a)(1) Sessions pertaining to discussions of the job performance, character, or physical or mental health of a person or persons – Discussion, considerations, vote or other actions by Town Council

seconded by Councilor J. Burlingame

Discussion: None

Councilor W. Worthy asked the Clerk to Call the Roll

- Councilor Greathouse- Aye
- Councilor Steere- Aye
- Councilor Burlingame- Aye
- Councilor Arnold- Aye

Councilor Worthy- Aye

Discussion: None

MOTION PASSED

AFTER EXECUTIVE SESSION

V. Reconvene Open Session - Disclosure of votes taken in Executive Session & Consideration of the Sealing of Minutes - Discussion and/or Action

MOTION was made by Councilor W. Steere to Reconvene Open Session - Disclose zero (0) votes were taken in Executive Session & to Seal the Minutes of Closed Executive Session; seconded by Councilor J. Burlingame

Councilor W. Worthy asked the Clerk to Call the Roll

Councilor Greathouse- Aye
Councilor Steere- Aye
Councilor Burlingame- Aye
Councilor Arnold- Aye
Councilor Worthy- Aye

Discussion: None

MOTION PASSED

7:00 PM PUBLIC HEARING

- VI. Public Hearing
 - A. Proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2024/2025-Discussion and/or Action
 - 1. Review of proposed budget (as needed)
 - 2. Public Discussion

Councilor W. Worthy stated that this Public Hearing was advertised in the Valley Breeze Observer on 3/28/2024 and 4/11/2024.

Councilor W. Worthy DECLARED the Public Hearing OPEN.

Councilor W. Worthy stated that this hearing is to review and discuss the proposed budget. Councilor W. Worthy stated that first we will have a review of the budget under item #1, questions can be asked under item #2, and Council can discuss the budget and/or proposed changes under item # 3.

1. Review of proposed budget (as needed)

Councilor W. Worthy stated that our Finance Director will present the highlights of the budget for the town and the local schools.

Discussion: J. Steere, Tax Collector and Interim Finance Director, stated that M. Robinson, Budget Board Chair, will be speaking.

M. Robinson, Budget Board Chair, thanked J. Steere, Interim Finance Director and E. Beltram, Asst. Interim Finance Director for their help during the budget process as well as stating his thanks to the entire Budget Board.

M. Robinson stated the budget had both good and bad news. M. Robinson gave a summary of the inflation rates over the past several years and their effect on interest rates. M. Robinson stated that the good news is that the proposed budget increase is less than the inflation rate. M. Robinson stated that the bad news is that this rate was obtained by making cuts to the budget which were needed to satisfy the state law requirement not going over the 4 percent increase.

M. Robinson stated that the other bad news is that the general fund is at 14 percent and by state law it can't go below 12 percent. M. Robinson stated that the capital expenditures were cut to be able to stay within state mandated requirements. M. Robinson stated his opinion that the budget needs to be passed.

Councilor S. Arnold thanked the entire Budget Board for all their time and effort.

2. Public Discussion

Councilor W. Worthy stated that anyone wishing to speak or ask questions, please state your name for the record when called to the podium.

- a. K. O'Connors, Tucker Street, questioned the amount the municipal expenses had increased. It was determined Mr. O'Connors had the wrong budget. K. O'Connors asked about the proposed valuation of FM Global and the proposed commercial valuation. K. O'Connors stated his opinion that he feels his tax rate will go up. Councilor S. Arnold stated that the tax rates work together and that he should not assume the rate will increase. Councilor J. Burlingame stated that the budget needs to be set before the tax rate can be set. Councilor S. Arnold stated that the budget is scheduled for adoption on May 6, 2024. J. Steere, Interim Finance Director, stated there the rate is not set until the tax rolls are closed by the Assessor but that the estimate in the ad that will be published will be a very close estimate.
- b. D. Steere, Putnam Pike, stated his opinion as to specific aspects of the school budget over the last three fiscal years. D. Steere stated his opinion as to the correct number of the school's deficit and the sources of the transfers that reduced the deficit. D. Steere stated that the charter specifies that a deficit can't be paid with fund balance and it was and that only voters can approve the use of fund balance in that way.

- c. P. Henry, School Committee member, stated her opinion that the use of fund balance and the transfers as to the deficit were done by the Finance Director and the finance department. P. Henry stated that none of this was done by the School Committee or the Superintendent as they are not financial people.
- d. D. Steere continued with comments , observations and recommendations relative to issues he saw in the school budget for fiscal year 25.

D. Steere stated a summary of his opinion as to last two fiscal years in the town budget and their effect on fiscal year 25 budget. D. Steere stated several comments, observations and suggestions as to items in the proposed fiscal year 25 town budget.
- e. P. Henry, School Committee member, stated that the school committee and superintendent are not finance people and do not look at audits because they concentrate on curriculum. P. Henry stated that the responsibility lies with the Council.
- f.. M. Robinson, Pineledge Drive, stated his appreciation for D. Steere’s comments and invited him to attend Budget Board meetings in January.
- g. R. Shields, Recreation Director, stated that \$7000 was cut from his budget. R. Shields offered to forgo his salary as well as the salary for the assistant director which would total \$2600 so he would ask for \$5000 to be added back into his budget.

Councilor W. Steere asked R. Shields the total amount that the Region has charged the town for the use of the facilities. R. Shields stated that about \$3000 for use from November to April. R. Shields stated that he is looking to use West Gloucester school instead of the Region for next year. Councilor W. Steere stated his disagreement with the Region charging the town to use the facilities already being paid for by the town’s taxpayers .

R. Palazzo, Superintendent of Region, stated that the policy of charging for use was not enforced in the past and now it is being enforced. R. Palazzo stated that whoever fills out the building use form is the entity that is charged.

- h. W. Steere, 1380 Putnam Pike, stated that the budget as adopted needs to be followed and he was sad to hear all the negative comments tonight about the proposed and past budgets. W. Steere questioned the increase to transportation for the Region. P. Dubois stated she believed it was due to the pass through. E .Beltram, Sr.Acct/Fin. Analyst and Asst. Interim Finance Dir. , stated that the budget included the revenue for the transportation on the front page and the expense on page 12. W. Steere questioned how the superintendent and assistant superintendent will be paid as there is one superintendent listed in the budget with one salary. Unknown speaker stated yes in response to Councilor W. Steere stating that he saw a nod and asked if it meant

a yes that the one salary will be for both. W. Steere questioned the special appropriations that were not on a ballot as he felt they should have been. W. Steere stated his opinion that money be put into the budget for Regional proration.

- i. K. Lamontagne, resident, stated her agreement with the suggestion by W. Steere for money to be set aside for future proration at the Region. Councilor W. Steere stated that there have been referendums where the voters voted the pro ration down. Councilor J. Burlingame stated an explanation of how and why the proration funds are needed.

K. Lamontagne stated a concern that if there is an additional and separate referendum for the police station that the Board of Canvassers may need additional funds from what is contained in the proposed budget.

K. Lamontagne stated her opinion that the amount of expenses stated in the proposed budget for Land Trust is not sufficient based on the funds already received.

K. Lamontagne questioned the salary amount for the town planner as in her opinion it is too high compared to the other department head salaries.

K. Lamontagne questioned several grants as to the sufficiency of funds for the type of project.

- j. K.Scott, Town Planner , stated that the amount stated in the proposed capital budget expenditures for paving and drainage is the same number included in the new state municipal road and bridge program with the town matching at 67 %. K.Scott stated these funds have already been allocated. K.Scott stated that there are no funds in the proposed FY 25 budget to be used in this new state road and bridge program.

K.Scott stated that grants have gone out for qualification and she is hoping to bring a contract back to Council in the near future in response to Councilor W. Steere's question.

K.Scott explained that the wastewater management grant is trying to set up a third party entity to serve as the manager of the wastewater district for those individuals that participate and part of the funds will serve during the transition to the third party.

- k. S. Lyman, resident, asked if the senior exemption would be increased to \$2000. J. Steere, Tax Collector stated that the current senior exemption is \$2000 with an additional \$1000 for residents over 80 years.

Councilor W. Steere stated that there has been a recurring narrative about not having a finance director. Councilor W. Steere stated that the Tax Collector has served as the Interim Finance Director and that the Sr. Accountant/Financial Analyst has served as the Assistant Interim Finance Director. Councilor W. Steere stated that both the Interim and Assistant Interim Finance Directors

have worked very hard and are very competent.

Councilor S. Arnold stated his thanks to all ; that all want the same things and that there is a lot on our plate. Councilor S. Arnold stated his appreciation for all the comments and that Council is trying to deliver the best budget they possibly can. Councilor W. Steere also stated his thanks to all who came and spoke. Councilor S. Arnold stated that Council has not made any changes yet to the proposed budget and if anyone wanted to talk to him then they could just contact him. Councilor S. Arnold stated that there are two weeks before the final budget.

K. Lamontagne asked if Council could change the Regional Financial meeting to an all day referendum. Councilor J. Burlingame stated that the Council did not have that authority as the Region was created by state law.

Councilor W. Worthy DECLARED the PUBLIC HEARING CLOSED.

3. Council Discussion and/or Action
 - a. Amendments, Additions, Changes to proposed budget - Discussion and/or Action

No Action Taken by Council

VIII. Adjourn

MOTION was made by Councilor S. Arnold to ADJOURN at 8:50 P.M.; seconded by Councilor W. Steere

Discussion: None

VOTE: AYES- C. Greathouse, J. Burlingame, W. Steere, S. Arnold , W. Worthy

NAYS-0

MOTION PASSED