

MINUTES
Town Council
Town of East Greenwich
Special Session
June 8, 2017 at 7:00 PM
Town Hall, 125 Main Street, East Greenwich, RI 02818

(1) Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag

Town Council Present (5/5): S. Cienki, S. Todd, A. Deutsch, N. Granatiero, M. Schwager

Town Staff Present: T. Coyle, III, D. D'Agostino, L. Carney, K. Benoit, J. Duarte, L. Bourbonnais, W. Schmidle, C. Bradley, S. Brown, S. Cirella, R. McGillivray, E. McAndrew, S. Kitchin

Others: C. Malaga

President Cienki called the meeting to order at 7:10pm and led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

(2) Public Hearing

- (a) An ORDINANCE to amend the Charter and the Code of the Town of East Greenwich to strike and revise language throughout referring to the Financial Town Meeting which voters approved to eliminate at the November 2016 election (SECOND READING).

There was no Council discussion or public comment.

Motion to approve and move the third reading on June 12th

Sean Todd/Andrew Deutsch/Motion Carried

Ayes: Cienki, Deutsch, Granatiero, Schwager, Todd

(3) Unfinished Business

- (a) FY 2018 Operating Budget

A motion was made to approve the budget of \$61,598,368 by Councilor Granatiero, seconded by VP Todd.

President Cienki called for discussion.

Councilor Schwager asked for clarification on the ground rules for discussion since the process has changed from previous years.

President Cienki would accept comments on the motion only.

Councilor Schwager proposed that only discussion should take place and no vote since there has been no opportunity for Council to publicly review and discuss anything that has been presented in the last 72 hours including the Town Manager's budget, departmental budgets and the consultant's

report, all of which dramatically reconfigure the budget. He asked Solicitor D'Agostino for an opinion on what would happen if no vote was taken.

Solicitor D'Agostino explained that the Town Charter requires adoption of the new budget by June 10. If not adopted by July 1, Rhode Island General Law 45-2-3.2 states that amounts from the previous year are still available but are subject to monthly or quarterly allotments as determined by the Chief Financial Officer. There is no impact on bonds or indebtedness. The Council can continue to meet but must act by July 1st or prior year allocations will be triggered until the Council votes.

Councilor Schwager asked if there were any regulatory or legal impacts by delaying the vote. Solicitor D'Agostino reiterated that legally, the State will impose a budget if Council does not approve one by July 1 and the Charter would be violated if not adopted by June 10.

President Cienki noted that the Schools need their budget now and it would not be fiscally prudent to make them wait. The School Committee has a decision to make on hiring and recalling layoffs and this must be done now. The vote is on a number and the allocation given to the schools is included in the budget.

Councilor Schwager disagreed and noted that delaying the vote would be obligatory to the taxpayers and the School Committee to allow time to discuss the major changes presented within the last 72 hours and asked for more time to deliberate.

President Cienki added that the School Department is treated as a big department whose function is to oversee education and the Town allocates the funds for the schools. The tax levy has increased 390% over the past 30 years and the tax levy and spending is four times the rate of inflation. A vote would take pressure off the School Committee so they could get to work implementing their budget. The One Town approach removes administrative costs from their budget and sets money aside in the Town's budget for additional needs.

Councilor Granatiero remarked that the ability to pay for rising costs is not there. He has reviewed all materials and is ready to vote.

Councilor Schwager asked where the line item is in the Town budget for the pool of money held in reserve for school services.

President Cienki replied that Town capital expenses were reduced and debt is rolling off giving over \$600K to the School Committee to spend as they want.

Councilor Deutsch asked if there was a way to keep taxes even and find more efficiencies on the Town side.

President Cienki explained that after meeting with the Auditor General, part of the plan was to work with the schools to identify how to correct the emerging structural deficit and come up with a corrective action plan. Additionally, identify ways to allocate more money for the schools, holding it on the Town side until the schools ask for it. Finding more efficiencies is not the sole answer but structural changes need to be done.

Councilor Schwager asked what capital items are not being funded.

President Cienki explained that the Town Manager will prioritize projects and has been instructed to hold back the first two quarters of the year to see if the schools need additional funds.

Councilor Deutsch asked if the money can not be used for certain things.

Solicitor D'Agostino explained that the Town holds the money and controls the power to appropriate based on the needs presented by the School Committee.

VP Todd reiterated that the schools cannot receive any less than last year and that consolidation of services is long overdue.

Councilor Schwager was opposed to the idea of a rainy day fund for the Schools.

President Cienki replied that the Town is taking the administrative costs from the Schools allowing them to do what they want with those funds and setting aside additional funds for any unforeseen needs. She explained what access they have to their fund balance.

Councilor Schwager spoke about the discrepancy between what was previously presented and what is being discussed. He pushed for more deliberations in open meetings to discuss other allocations, payment for the consultants, etc. He asked for the Town Manager to review the budget and Department Heads to present their budgets.

President Cienki stated that the bottom number is the same and has not changed since the Town Manager presented the budget on May 1st.

Councilor Schwager added that the budget always changed in previous years after reviewing with the Town Manager and Department Heads.

VP Todd said that the Town Manager was instructed to level fund the budget.

President Cienki called the question.

Councilor Schwager asked to keep the discussion open.

President Cienki called the question.

Councilor Schwager called for a point of order to clarify if debate can be unilaterally closed by a single Councilor according to Roberts Rules of Order.

Solicitor D'Agostino stated that the Chair runs the meeting and although he was unsure if the Charter indicates that meetings are run according to Roberts Rules of Order, the Chair holds the ability to make and decide questions of order.

Councilor Schwager added that traditionally, Council has followed Roberts Rules of Order as a mutual agreement.

President Cienki called for a vote.

Motion to approve the budget of \$61,598,368

Nino Granatiero/Sean Todd/Motion Carried

Ayes: Cienki, Deutsch, Granatiero, Todd

Nays: Schwager

Motion to adjourn at 7:50 pm

Sean Todd/Andrew Deutsch/Motion Carried

Ayes: Cienki, Deutsch, Granatiero, Todd

Nays: Schwager

(4) Executive Session

- (a) (1) discussions concerning the job performance, character, or physical or mental health of a person in the employ of the Town of East Greenwich, provided that such person affected shall have been notified in advance in writing and advised that they may require that the discussion be held at an open meeting.

There was no motion for Executive Session.

Submitted By:
Leigh A. Carney, CMC
Town Clerk

Approved By Town Council:

(Pending)