



**TOWN COUNCIL
COUNCIL CHAMBERS
Virtual Meeting
SPECIAL MEETING
APRIL 25, 2022
APPROVED MINUTES**

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Trinks called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

Present: Mayor Donald Trinks, Deputy Mayor Lisa Rampulla Bress, Councilor Nuchette Black-Burke, Councilor James Dobler, Councilor Ronald Eleveld, Councilor Kristin Gluck Hoffman, Councilor Kenneth Smith, Councilor Jody Terranova, and Councilor Len Walker

1) PUBLIC COMMENT

Alan Bellefleur, 427 Tributary Lane, spoke of his concerns about the disparities and services at River Town Village. He asked the Council to amend the proposed budget. He has spoken several times about the 55+ communities in town. Mr. Bellefleur stated that he is asking for fairness for the services they pay, but do not receive.

Marilyn Adamo, 453 Tributary Lane, spoke about some of the Council members who requested additional information about the services provided by the different towns to community associations. She gave examples of what the other towns offered to the Council. Ms. Adamo asked for the Council to review the budget for fairness to all.

Richard Oulahan, 31 Elm Street, spoke about preschool and what an investment preschool brings. He stated that there is nothing in the budget for preschool and asked if the Board of Education (BOE) did a study to look into more detail to get our children ready for school and if the cost is not much why has it not been on the agenda. He said that taxes for investment would bring money and children's education to Windsor. Hopefully next year, the Council would give this more thought.

2) PRICE GUIDE

Town Manager Souza stated that annually the Town Council receives a price guide to review. There are a variety of changes proposed this year by various departments.

Councilor Eleveld stated that the Building Department application for the second thousand-dollar has not changed since 1999, but the first did in 2018. Why hasn't that changed? Town Manager Souza said that over the years the value of construction has increased and that is why it hasn't changed. Town Manager Souza stated that Windsor is not the highest in fees as other neighboring communities, but we are within reason. Councilor Eleveld stated that since 2003, the cost per square footage for a new home and re-inspection fee hasn't changed. Councilor Eleveld said that it is a little on the low side. Town Manager Souza said that it's based on the cost of doing the inspection services. Town Manager Souza stated that the town generates approximately \$650,000 to \$700,000 on an annual basis which is above and beyond the cost of our inspection services. There are larger industrial projects that may demand more inspections



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because they have a longer construction period. Councilor Eleveld stated that once every decade we should review these costs and adjust the number closer to the current costs. We should be reasonable in making adjustments to some of these fees. The cost of living and everything has gone up.

Councilor Smith asked how Windsor compares with other towns. Town Manager Souza stated that each year staff is asked to do a comparison. He said that the town is in the middle range. Some fees are set by state law and sometimes the State law does not change for a while.

Mayor Trinks stated that recreation issues seem to be centered on the increasing cost of labor. Town Manager Souza said that labor costs particularly in the last two years with minimum wage increases have gone up as well as the cost of commodities and supplies. Mayor Trinks stated that it's the cost of doing business.

Councilor Eleveld asked Town Manager Souza about the recreation and leisure increase and if it is primarily due to the higher cost of labor. Town Manager Souza stated that it's due to the ratios of the programs. Recreation is planning on a larger number of participants and additional program offerings. Councilor Eleveld asked if the prices have increased across all of the programs due to the underlying cost. Mr. Henderson, Assistant Recreation Director, said that the increase in the minimum wage and the cost of materials and supplies have been a factor. Councilor Eleveld asked if the increase to \$732,000 is majorly due from price hikes. Mr. Henderson said that a little of it is, but it is also due to covid. Councilor Eleveld asked about the American Rescue Fund and would any of that apply to this. Town Manager Souza said that staff is working on allocating funds for the wellness health and fitness initiative.

Councilor Smith asked about Town Hall room rentals and he assumed there are other places that are rented in town. Is there any anticipation of raising the fee? Town Manager Souza stated that in terms of Town Hall, there are very few requests to use it. Mr. Henderson said that the fee for the parks is in the medium range with surrounding towns that have rental pavilions. Councilor Smith asked if the users are required to remove their own trash. Mr. Henderson said that there are trash barrels and they are required to clean up after themselves. There is a rental fee of \$25 for four hours.

3) PRELIMINARY DELIBERATIONS

Councilor Terranova spoke on behalf of her colleagues and stated that they would really like to see no tax increase this year for the taxpayers. It's still been a challenging year for many people. She said that we are very fortunate to have a well-managed town and a healthy reserve fund. To avoid a tax increase, the budget would need to be reduced by almost \$2.6 million. Councilor Terranova stated that one of the Council's priorities is to always maintain services in the town and to not cut any. Councilor Terranova said that not having a cost to taxpayers is a challenge, but the town is in a good position right now and they are proposing a three-pronged approach.

1. Use opening cash to reduce the tax levy;
2. Use some of the American Rescue Funds in places that are appropriate to provide funding for qualifying expenditures and to fit in with some of our long-term strategic planning;



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3. To find ways to use some of our cash reserve funds to fund one-time expenditures instead of coming out of the general fund.

Councilor Eleveld stated that his colleagues discussed finding a responsible way to a zero increase. One idea discussed was moving some capital expenditures off to pay as you go. The Caring Connection has been losing money for five years. The childcare was profitable for two years, but covid caused issues that the American Rescue Fund would help with. Councilor Eleveld said that as far as the Caring Connection, we can fund it for the next two years, but if it's not profitable it needs to go. Councilor Eleveld said that the town received money for the Caring Connection from the State, but it's not enough. Councilor Eleveld said he would reduce the budget for the BOE and Town Council to use funds from open cash to make it work. In two years, there would be a revaluation of properties which may cause funding issues.

Deputy Mayor Rampulla Bress said that she fully supported the three-pronged approach. She stated that she is very proud of the town for its fiscal management. She is glad we are able to pass on these savings to our citizens. Economic Development has brought in the past few years Amazon and some warehouses along with some challenges. The challenge they don't present is the money they bring to the town that allows our taxes to be low. Deputy Mayor Rampulla Bress stated that she is really hopeful about using the three-pronged approach with the Council to continue to assist our citizens in the coming year without having to eliminate services.

Councilor Walker said that he is in total agreement. He stated that wages have increased a lot of time because the labor force is short. We earn more but we spend even more now. Whatever we can do to retain the services and give the residents of Windsor a break would be great. Councilor Walker is all for it.

Councilor Black-Burke stated that we are all in agreement here. Many citizens are really still in a difficult place. Anything to offset and reduce wherever can be found helps. Hopefully we can get to zero to help the residents.

Councilor Smith stated that he is on the same page as everyone else.

Councilor Dobler said that he is also in agreement. The ideas are good on how to get there. He stated that he would rather find a way to not cut services. Councilor Dobler said that any cutting should be addressed next year.

Mayor Trinks stated that we all know where we want to be. He stated that on Wednesday night, we would have a budget that all nine Town Council members can stand behind. Let's give the taxpayers as much of a break before heading into that.

Councilor Smith stated that to hold it to a zero increase is a monumental task, especially with inflation running at 11.5%. Councilor Smith said that he knows the Council is going to work hard and he knows we would get through it together.



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Mayor Trinks encouraged everyone to come back and work together to get the best for our taxpayers.

Councilor Walker asked if there is a plan in place to assist the 55+ community and the tax burdens they have. Town Manager Souza said that he would be updating information that was provided to the Town Council approximately eight years ago when the budget process is over. Not just the age-restricted communities, but the private roads in town. Town Manager Souza suggested that once the budget has totally been done, this could be talked about at a Finance Committee meeting.

4) ADJOURNMENT

MOVED by Councilor Gluck Hoffman and seconded by Councilor Eleveld to adjourn the meeting at 7:18 p.m.

Motion Passed 9-0-0

Respectfully Submitted,

Lisa Ozaki
Recording Secretary