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WESTFIELD CITY CLERK

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

May 15, 2023 at 5:30 PM

The meeting was called to order by Chair Bridget Matthews-Kane at 5:30 PM. In attendance were Finance Committee members Councilor Bridget Matthews-Kane, Councilor Richard K. Sullivan, Jr. and Councilor Brent Bean. Also in attendance were City Clerk Kaitlyn Bruce, Mayor Michael McCabe, Airport Manager Christopher Willenborg, Interim Director of Public Works Francis Cain, Animal Control Operation's Manager Margaret Terkelsen, City Treasurer/Collector Matthew Barnes and Scribe of the Finance Committee Karisa Zerbato.

Councilor Matthews-Kane asked if anyone from the public would like to speak during public participation. There were no speakers for public participation.

A motion was made by Councilor Sullivan to take items #9 and #12 out of order. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Matthews-Kane, Councilor Sullivan and Councilor Bean voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor Sullivan for the appropriation of \$19,050.00 from Free Cash (1000-3590000) to City Clerk's Office Purchase of Services Account (11610000-520000) to purchase 12 Electronic Poll Pads. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean.

Prior to the vote, City Clerk Kaitlyn Bruce stated this request is for electronic poll pads which were a part of the City Clerk's Office Capital Plan project. Currently the office has four electronic poll pads that are used for early voting. The electronic poll pads are much more efficient. She further stated she is hoping to get everyone trained on them so they are ready to use for the 2024 Elections. She added that the electronic poll pads provide a faster check in process, help check voter status and help reroute voters who are in the wrong polling location. Councilor Sullivan asked if there would still be a paper back up. Mrs. Bruce confirmed. She further stated that if in the future same day registration is allowed or if ID's become mandatory the poll pads would accommodate this. Mrs. Bruce stated of the three bids LHS was selected. The office has used LHS before. Councilor Sullivan asked if any of the expense is reimbursable. Mrs. Bruce stated currently there are no grants available. Councilor Matthews-Kane questioned poll pads scanning ID's. Mrs. Bruce stated it is optional, some people would rather scan an ID instead of spelling a name out. Councilor Matthews-Kane asked if people can still vote without it. Mrs. Bruce confirmed. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Matthews-Kane, Councilor Sullivan and Councilor Bean voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor Sullivan for the transfer of \$38,538.14 from the Reserve for Future Salary Increases Account #19500000-519999 to various accounts to fund the recently signed AFSCME 35-Hour Unit Successor Agreement for the period of July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2025. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean.

Prior to the vote, Mayor Michael McCabe stated as a result of negotiations this is the amount needed to fund the FY23 portion. Councilor Sullivan asked other than the salary increases if there were any other financial items in the contract that were new. Mayor McCabe

stated new employees to the unit will be granted two weeks of vacation time prorated after 90 days. He further stated this is an effort to recruit and retain employees. He added that employees who are in the 30th, 35th and 40th year will receive an additional \$500.00 in addition to any increases for the years. Mayor McCabe stated adding Juneteenth as a holiday does have an effect on the budget. He added that an earlier notification system for when employees are going to use vacation/personal time was added which leads to better planning for individual offices. He stated the removal of the payroll clerks from the Union to PSA's was due to the fact that payroll clerks have unique access to information in Munis. He further stated the IT Clerk was added to the unit. Mayor McCabe stated that if City Hall is closed unexpectedly and an employee was already out using sick, vacation or personal time the employee would not be charged for that time. He further stated that the incorporation of MOA's hasn't been done in over a decade and will be worked on. He added that effective July 1 there is a 1% increase after 9 years, this is in addition to the 2% increase in the contract. Councilor Sullivan thanked the Mayor for explaining the language changes. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Matthews-Kane, Councilor Sullivan and Councilor Bean voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor Sullivan for the appropriation in the amount of \$356,771.00 from the Community Preservation Undesignated Reserve Account #2410-340000 and \$243,229.00 from the Community Preservation Undesignated FY23 Account #24101770-580000 to the CPA American Legion Building Account #24101770-580200-5211 to preserve, restore and rehabilitate the circa 1870 American Legion Building. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean.

Prior to the vote, American Legion Post 124 Senior Vice Commander Eric Volke stated the project centers around restoring the building to structural integrity. He stated the first part is to restore the building and bring it back to historical significance from the front. He stated this includes making it more assessable for individuals to use the building. This includes removal of brick in the front of the building. This also includes the installation of an elevator so there is access to the second floor because currently the only way to reach this floor is by stairs. Councilor Bean asked if Chris Carey is the architect for the project. Mr. Volke stated Chris Carey was selected as the architect and Sacred Oak Homes was selected as the general contractor. He further stated the first estimate was done over a year ago and did not include the work to remove the ramp and repair the foundation in the front of the building. This is an additional cost of \$50,000.00. Mr. Volke stated the lift is important as more than half of the members have trouble getting up and down the stairs thus limiting what activities they can participate in. Councilor Sullivan asked if multiple bids were obtained. Mr. Volke stated a year and a half ago three contractors were reached out to. One contractor quickly stated no, one contractor showed a little interest but then declined to get involved with the project and that the only one that followed through was Sacred Oak Homes. Councilor Bean and Councilor Matthews-Kane expressed their concerns with not having three bids. Councilor Matthews-Kane stated this project would be the fourth highest amount of money ever spent from CPA funds and there is only one bid. Councilor Sullivan stated he doesn't want the project to get caught up with the process not being correct. Wade Brunelle stated this became a sole source project by default as two bidders chose not to participate. The project needs to be completed sooner than later due

to the degree of compromise with the building. A delay in the project could cause serious construction problems with the back wall falling of the building. Securing additional bids would add unknown time to the project. Councilor Sullivan asked how the three contractors were found. Al Masciadrelli stated phone calls were made to the contractors. Councilor Sullivan asked if the proposal and bid process was presented to the CPA Committee and if it was part of a vote. The American Legion members confirmed. Dan Call added during the CPA meeting this was all discussed. Councilor Sullivan made a motion to amend the original motion to move approval subject to CPA sign off and approval of the bid process. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean. Councilor Bean asked about the timeline for the project. Erik Volke stated that a sit down between the architect and contractor will be done to prioritize the work. Councilor Matthews-Kane asked that after reading through the paperwork that was submitted is there an additional appropriation from Senator Velis that is trying to be secured. Erik Volke stated they already received \$20,000.00 from the State that is included in the funding for the project. Dan Call stated the members of the American Legion have a goal of raising \$50,000.00 towards the project, currently they have raised \$34,000.00. Councilor Matthews-Kane asked if the public has access to the American Legion if they aren't going with a member. Erik Volke stated no if they aren't going with a member as it is member only access however there are lots of people that do come in as guests. Councilor Bean asked if this could change in the future. Wade Brunelle stated this could be changed by going to the National Commission and having the bylaws amended. In addition to the National Commission approval, it would have to start with the membership of the organization approving the solicitation of changing the corporate charter. He further stated currently there are social functions held by the American Legion where the community is invited to participate in. Erik Volke stated the American Legion also supports a Scout Troop that uses the hall and are not members. Councilor Matthews-Kane asked if there are some posts that are open to the public. Erik Volke stated this post is one of a few in the state that is still veteran based. Past Commander, Ted Gage stated without the building, the members wouldn't be here, and the community wouldn't be supported with scholarships and sponsorships of baseball teams. Mr. Gage further stated that this post has a rifle detail (one of two in Western Massachusetts) that performs the service for veteran's that aren't buried in a State or National cemetery. Councilor Bean stated the Councilors understand the value of having the members in the community. Dan Call added the Historical Commission supports this project. The motion as amended passed 3-0 with Councilor Matthews-Kane, Councilor Sullivan and Councilor Bean voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor for the appropriation in the amount of \$6,557.44 from the Community Preservation Historic

Prior to the vote, Kathleen Palmer from the Historical Commission stated the cemetery was started in 1668, a year before Westfield was incorporated. She further stated that Westfield is fortunate to have the burial grounds in almost original condition. She stated last year a car smashed into and destroyed the gate. Unfortunately, the person responsible for the crash was not found. Three bids were obtained, and Brodeur Fence was chosen for the project with the bid being under \$10,000.00. She further added that the gate was repaired due to its historical significance as well as to maintain the integrity of the graves inside. A citizen started a Go Fund Me to help with the expense of the repairs and raised approximately \$2,500.00. Councilor

Matthews-Kane stated the acceptance of the Go Fund Me money was already approved. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Matthews-Kane, Councilor Sullivan and Councilor Bean voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor Sullivan for the appropriation in the amount of \$65,957.44 from the Community Preservation Undesignated Reserve Account #2410-340000 and \$43,442.56 from the Community Preservation Historic FY23 Account #24101770-580200 for a sum totaling \$109,400.00 to the CPA Pine Hill Cemetery Account #24101770-580200-5210 for the preservation and restoration of the stone entry gates. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean.

Prior to the vote, Kali Fantakis Office Manager for Pine Hill Cemetery stated Pine Hill was established in 1842 after the old burying ground was almost full. She stated that impoverished burials still occur at Pine Hill today. She stated that the gates are between 70-80 years old and have been repaired many times. She stated that Pine Hill does not have the finances to restore the gates. She further stated that there aren't a lot of grants available for cemeteries. All three gates serve as memorials as well. Councilor Sullivan asked if there are restrictions on who can be buried at Pine Hill. Ms. Fantakis stated there are no restrictions, it has always been completely non-discriminatory. Councilor Sullivan stated he will support this, however this cannot be how the cemetery maintains itself as this is the second project they are requesting funding for in a short amount of time. Ms. Fantakis stated she discussed with the CPA that this is their second request, and they don't intend to come back yearly. She further stated it would be sad to see the gates be less than what they were. The Friends Committee was up and running and then due to Covid and deaths/illnesses of some of the board members the Friends Committee was hard to keep going. It is the intention of the Friends Committee to be able to fundraise for expenses going forward. Councilor Matthews-Kane stated she will support this because it is in a prominent location and a symbol of Westfield. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Matthews-Kane, Councilor Sullivan and Councilor Bean voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor Sullivan for the appropriation in the amount of \$20,000.00 from Free Cash (1000-359000) to the Department of Public Works Supplies Account #14990000-540000 to upgrade fifteen irrigation systems and controllers among the City's athletic fields, parks and green. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean.

Prior to the vote, Fran Cain stated the irrigation controls are timers that turn valves on and off and that is how the watering sequence is determined. He further stated there is a variety of controllers throughout the City and the settings are changed thus creating havoc with timers and switches. He further stated he is looking to update all of the controllers with a standard controller that will give remote access to change settings, to get alarms if there was a malfunction and would allow maintenance personnel to carry a remote device and sequence the irrigation heads as needed. He stated this would allow for more efficient use of water. He stated from a conductivity standpoint a jet pack from Verizon will be used. The Water Department will purchase the jet pack. Councilor Sullivan asked if remote access would include phone access Mr. Cain confirmed and stated it would be password protected. He also stated there would be one or

two ruggedized controllers as well since they would be exposed to water. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Matthews-Kane, Councilor Sullivan and Councilor Bean voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor Sullivan for the appropriation in the amount of \$108,000.00 from the Community Preservation Undesignated Reserve Account #2410-340000 to the Hampton Ponds Playground Account #24101770-580500-5315 for rehabilitation work at the playground. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean.

Prior to the vote, Councilor Matthews-Kane stated Peter Miller sent an email that explained that the basketball court will be renovated, the tennis courts will be renovated to include pickleball courts and sidewalk work will be done to be more handicap accessible. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Matthews-Kane, Councilor Sullivan and Councilor Bean voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor Sullivan for the appropriation of \$158.42 from the Airport Overtime FY23 Account #11990000-513000 to the Airport Overtime FY22 Account #11990000-513000 and \$850.00 from the Airport FT Hourly FY23 Account #11990000-511100 to the Airport FT Hourly FY22 Account #11990000-511100 for retroactive pay to cover a step raise awarded, but not paid to Airport Motor Equipment Operator Patrick Dillon. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean.

Prior to the vote, Christopher Willenborg stated Patrick Dillon was due a step raise for FY22 and unfortunately it was missed. Councilor Sullivan asked if this will catch him up. Mr. Willenborg confirmed. Councilor Sullivan asked if this is budgeted for FY24. Mr. Willenborg confirmed. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Matthews-Kane, Councilor Sullivan and Councilor Bean voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor Sullivan for the approval of a resolution for the acceptance of a gift donation in the amount of \$1,308.00 from ProAmpac to the Westfield Animal Shelter to be used for improvements. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean.

Prior to the vote, Margaret Terkelsen stated ProAmpac did a raffle during the holiday season to raise money for the Animal Shelter. She stated she would like to use the money to improve the quality of life of the animals at the shelter. Ideas include replacing fencing, sound proofing and the purchase of a audio system to play calming music. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Matthews-Kane, Councilor Sullivan and Councilor Bean voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor Bean to accept and place on file an in-lieu-of-taxes contribution from Westfield Gas and Electric in the amount of \$556,001.00 for FY24, with payments to be made monthly in the amount of \$46,333.00 commencing after July 1, 2023. The motion was seconded by Councilor Sullivan.

Prior to the vote, Councilor Bean stated this isn't the amount that would be paid if they were a private organization, however, they do other things outside of cash for the City. Councilor Sullivan stated they are a great community asset and great community partners however this number can and should be larger as this is not the most they ever paid and in addition doesn't

consider inflation. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Matthews-Kane, Councilor Sullivan and Councilor Bean voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor Bean to withdraw the Treasurer/Collector's Office and Law Department to provide a list of properties in tax title and a total of back taxes that are owed to the city, residential and commercial.

The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Matthews-Kane, Councilor Sullivan and Councilor Bean voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor Bean for the motion of Councilors Bean and Sullivan to discuss tax title process and cash management options for city budget and refer to Treasurer/Collector and finance. The motion was seconded by Councilor Sullivan.

Prior to the vote, Matthew Barnes stated that you don't want to work with an interest number as it is not a good number to compare to other cities. He further stated some of these properties may be held for future City use. Councilor Bean added that the City may not want some of the properties as well. Matthew Barnes stated the principal was \$2,221,000.00 right after the tax taking of FY 2021 which was November 29th which is the highpoint of the year. He stated looking at May 15th it is \$1,826,000.00. Councilor Bean asked about the process for back taxes. Matthew Barnes stated that he talks to the Law Department daily in regards to different properties. He stated there are four real estate bills that are mailed out quarterly. The demand bill goes out after the 4th quarter bill is due. There is 15 days to collect demands. After that everything goes on hold for about a year. The tax taking process usually begins at the end of June beginning of July with a list of all properties that are delinquent, and it is reviewed with the law department to resolve any issues beforehand. First letters go out mid September, then a notice of advertisement which is required by the State, after the advertisement there is a due date to pay if they don't pay the taking is recorded with the Registry of Deeds. Councilor Sullivan asked about interest rates. Matthew Barnes stated the interest rate is 14% until the day of the taking. Once the taking has been recorded the interest rate goes to 16%. The interest rates are set by the State and can't be changed. He further stated that a foreclosure can't happen for six months. He stated in April a letter is sent out asking the property owner to contact the City within 20 days to figure out a plan/payment plan. If after 20 days, there is no payment a letter is sent to the mortgagee asking for a response within 15 days in regards to what their plan is. The last letter is a 60 day letter which lists the options of paying in full, obtaining financing or listing the property for sale at a price that will cover what is owed to the City. At that point if no plan is made the next step would be to file in Land Court to foreclose. The last three steps are constantly being worked on strategically with the Law Department. Councilor Bean asked if the City is aggressive in the last three steps. Matthew Barnes confirmed. He stated when a case goes to Land Court they make sure the above steps and the processes are followed. He stated taking a home is the last resort. Matthew Barnes stated if the City starts working with an owner on a payment agreement, the owner has to pay all of their current utility bills and real estate taxes first before the tax title years can be paid on. Matthew Barnes stated Land Court sets the time schedule once a case is brought there. Land Court will not issue a judgement until all the steps are followed. Councilor Matthews-Kane asked if the number fluctuates with the economy.

Matthew Barnes stated it goes up and down, how much is in foreclosures also has to be looked at. Matthew Barnes stated to do a taking it adds several hundred dollars to a person's tax bill. He further stated doing the work in house with the Law Department saves money for the City as well as gets a quick response time. Councilor Sullivan asked about cash management of the City's cash flow. Matthew Barnes stated general fund money is restricted, it needs to be liquid so warrants can be paid on time as well as have funds available. The general fund money is in savings or money market accounts and those interest rates are ranging from 1-4.08%. Transfers are done on Wednesday's for payroll and Thursdays for vendor payables. Councilor Sullivan asked about CD's that have higher rates. Matthew Barnes stated a CD is an option but it has to be for less than a year and then if the money is needed it is locked in the CD. Councilor Sullivan asked if the cash flow the City has is being maximized as safely as it can be. Matthew Barnes confirmed.

A motion was made by Councilor Sullivan to adjourn the meeting at 6:51 PM. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean. The motion passed 3-0 Councilor Matthews-Kane, Councilor Sullivan and Councilor Bean voting YES.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karisa Zerbato". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Karisa Zerbato, Finance Committee Scribe

