

BOARD OF TOWN COMMISSIONERS
WORK/BUDGET SESSION - VIA TELECONFERENCE

April 27, 2021 4:30 P.M.

PRESENT: Commissioner Amy G. Chmielewski, Chair
Commissioner Kevin M. Bianca
Commissioner Erin S. Hughes
Commissioner Donna L. Kahoe
Commissioner Patrick T. Richards
L. Jesse Bane, Town Administrator
Trish Heidenreich, Director of Economic Development
Stephen Kline, Director of Public Works
Michael Krantz, Director of Administration
Lisa Moody, Director of Finance
Charles Moore, Chief of Police
Patti Parker, Community & Public Relations Coordinator
Kevin Small, Director of Planning

OTHERS: Joan Suitt, Recording Secretary

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Chmielewski advised the objective of the teleconference is to conduct normal business of the Town of Bel Air during the COVID-19 pandemic we all are experiencing. A teleconference allows us to comply with social distancing, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Maryland Open Meetings Act.

Chair Chmielewski informed of agenda items for the meeting.

Meeting Etiquette/Protocol:

Chair Chmielewski reviewed the protocol for the meeting and reminded all participants to identify themselves before speaking.

Roll Call:

Chair Chmielewski conducted the roll call. Those present are listed above. One unidentified caller joined the teleconference.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Chair Chmielewski called for approval of the Agenda.

Commissioner Bianca moved and Commissioner Kahoe seconded the motion to approve the Agenda as written.

Ayes: Commissioners Bianca, Hughes, Kahoe, Richards and Chmielewski

Nays: None

The motion carried.

PRESENTATION:

LASOS

Melynda Velez, Executive Director of LASOS, advised several of the Commissioners worked in the community over the last year and appreciates the help. As the Pandemic shut down communities, LASO worked in a proactive way by serving 900 families with food distribution and giveaways. In the Town of Bel Air, summer camp was offered at Thomas Street Park and Shamrock Park where 294 children participated. The 2021 summer camp will be held at Homestead/Wakefield Elementary School.

Ms. Velez informed of children reading grade level books and going to different meeting spots throughout Town for activities. LASOS continues with the Adult Literacy programs and 13 people received their citizenship. The program Links for Prevention offers testing for diabetes, high blood pressure, check on insurances, and help with power of attorney. There is also support for health care, legal fees and casework. Ms. Velez advised 2,736 people in Bel Air identify as residents.

Commissioner Bianca acknowledged LASOS for its great work and appreciates what it does for the Town of Bel Air and Harford County.

Chair Chmielewski thanked Ms. Velez for her efforts.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT:

The Town Administrator continues to keep track with the Governor's Office on COVID-19 restrictions. No further guidelines have been received about spending the 8.5 million the Town is to receive from the American Rescue Plan Act.

TENATIVE AGENDA FOR TOWN MEETING TELECONFERENCE (May 3, 2021)

Public Hearing:

Ordinance 802-21 Amending Town Code Chapter 37 Elections Section 37-18 Absentee Voting

The Director of Administration advised Ordinance 802-21 was introduced to the Commissioners and a public hearing will be held. The amendment adds language that is the same as the Maryland Annotated Code regarding absentee ballots.

Commissioner Richards inquired if there has been any feedback. The Director of Administration advised one person asked for a copy of the Ordinance with no further questions.

Unfinished Business:

Ordinance 802-21 Amending Town Code Chapter 37 Elections Section 37-18 Absentee Voting

The Commissioners will vote on approval.

New Business:

Reappointment to Board of Ethics

The Director of Administration informed Theresa Rose and Bill Bolton are interested in being reappointed to the Board of Ethics. The Director of Administration highly recommends them.

STAFFING UPDATE:

The Director of Administration reported:

- Temporary Custodian - position to be posted
- DPW Equipment Operator and Laborer - positions to be posted

The Director of Public Works advised there has not been any interest in the Custodian position and the reason for the public posting.

CALENDAR:

Calendars were distributed. Please contact Ruth Seitler with additions or corrections.

MISCELLANEOUS :

Review Town of Bel Air Fee Schedule for Special Events

The Director of Administration reviewed the current fee schedule for Town Sponsored Events and County Sponsored/Non-Profit Sponsored Events. These are areas where the Town of Bel Air has provided services from the Police Department and Department of Public Works. Events are growing in size and hours are adding up.

The Director of Administration requested the Commissioners look at amending or excluding this type of sponsorship plus the \$300 free service.

The Director of Finance informed there is a scheduled meeting with the Alliance next month to discuss reimbursable time for 1st Friday's and the BBQ Bash. These events are expanding and require additional work from Town staff. The Director of Finance notified this will cost the Town more money and there is a need for some type of reimbursable relationship.

The Director of Finance advised the Fee Schedule is reviewed before a new fiscal year.

Chair Chmielewski asked why at some events an exception is made. The Director of Administration stated that is the way the policy was written but as events grow, the burden is put on staff and the taxpayer.

Commissioner Kahoe inquired about the number of County sponsored events. The Director of Administration stated not many and the major events are non-profit based.

Commissioner Bianca wanted more information on cost for the BBQ Bash. The Director of Finance will research the amount.

Chair Chmielewski reminded the people attending large events are visiting our businesses. Chair Chmielewski asked if employees sign up for the overtime hours. The Director of Public Works advised overtime work is on a seniority basis and if no one signs up the emergency response personnel are required to fill the positions. The Police Chief advised using personnel assigned on-duty and ordered to stay over. The Chief will also freeze leave for certain events. During the 4th of July other agencies are used.

Chair Chmielewski asked about the Wine Festival cost. The Director of Finance reported the Town is not reimbursed for all the services but is reimbursed 100% for clean-up personnel cost. The Director of Finance informed the Alliance pays for putting up fencing at the BBQ Bash and \$300 for 1st Friday's. The Director of Finance stated with events getting larger and costs increase for staff; something in the form of reimbursement needs to come back to the Town. The Town wants to maintain its cost the best we can within reason for everyone to win. The Director of Finance looked at the last 3 years for the BBQ Bash and cost ranged from \$11,300 to \$13,500 for Public Works and Police Department.

Commissioner Bianca would like to see the Alliance contribute more and make the events a partnership with a long term goal to stand alone with a limited contribution. Commissioner Bianca is interested in the outcome of the meeting.

The Director of Public Works recommends several Alliance members be present at the meeting. The Director of Finance will reach out to the Alliance.

Commissioner Richards would like a grid created of what, why and historically the Town is charging to be consistent and transparent. Commissioner Richards commented we want to bring more people into the Town and is happy to continue this discussion.

The Director of Administration informed some 5K and other events with road closures/barricades have not occurred because of the pandemic but in coming back it becomes a bigger issue especially with mandatory overtime and morale.

The Community & Public Relations Manager stated when looking at charging or sharing cost, the Town needs to think of our vision and what we want to accomplish. People having events that are not what we want to bring into Town or not in line with the vision should be weighed when relying on the Police or DPW staff. The Community & Public Relations Manager stated there are creative ways and explained how Winter Wonderland made an agreement to donate to the Explorers.

The meeting with the Alliance is May 19th and the Director of Finance will inform the Commissioners of the outcome.

Review Town Code Chapter 272 Itinerant Dealers, Peddlers, and Solicitors License Requirements

The Director of Administration has received requests from local businesses for alternative ways to license food trucks. Currently, the Town checks that the food truck operator has the required Maryland, Harford County and Town license. The fee is collected and the operator is given a map where they are allowed to operate. The Director of Administration advised businesses that deal with a number of food trucks regularly want to facilitate the process on their property.

Chair Chmielewski asked if other municipalities have a policy. The Director of Administration stated Aberdeen and Havre de Grace do have their own Peddlers code that refers to food trucks. Chair Chmielewski understands Harford County is not requiring any mandates. The Director of Administration advised during the current COVID State of Emergency, business licenses have expired and not much inspection is being done. Chair Chmielewski questioned the liability on the business or food truck.

Commissioner Richards advised some businesses suggested if they control the license requirement it will open up the opportunity for other food trucks. Commissioner Richards stated if a business is willing to take on the liability and the food truck is on private property, it does not seem a huge risk. The food truck parking on public streets would have to show its license.

The Director of Administration informed food trucks have not been denied anywhere in Town where they are permitted and if they show up are told about the license. Commissioner Richards advised trucks do not want to come because of having to go through the Town requirement and businesses can only reach out to a small pool of trucks. Commissioner Richards stated when looking at an amendment, if a business is parking a food truck on private property and the business owner is willing to accept the license requirement for the truck, it does not seem there would be an issue.

Commissioner Hughes stated whether or not they have the Town license for the truck, each truck is required to have a County license. The Town license is one more layer but is a way to explain appropriate locations. The businesses with food trucks all the time would have to verify the truck is licensed. The Director of Administration noted the permits do not generate

significant revenue and agrees with reducing the bureaucracy. The Town may want to focus on location instead of processing an additional license. Commissioner Hughes feels it is time better spent in advising dealers about locations to park.

The Director of Public Works informed several people approached the Town regarding the vacant lot on Main Street for food trucks but they would then compete with restaurant establishments. The Director of Administration stated the main opposition is from restaurants and tavern/pub owners. Language with restrictions would be included in the amendment.

Commissioner Richards asked how this is currently restricted. The Director of Administration advised the map would be retained that clearly identifies private properties and streets food trucks are allowed to operate on. Chair Chmielewski inquired who monitors this. The Director of Administration monitors on a reactionary basis.

The Director of Administration will draft a revision to the code and bring it back on a future agenda.

Commissioners' Report

The Director of Finance sent out the Commissioners' Report and reviewed:

- Training/Membership
- Retreat
- Advertising
- MML registration

There were no questions.

FISCAL YEAR 2022 BUDGET DISCUSSION:

Continued Detailed Review of General Fund Expenditures -

Planning Department

The Director of Finance advised Department Heads not presenting are welcomed to exit the meeting.

The Director of Planning reviewed:

- Summer Intern - will work mostly on input to the GIS program and tied to the Comprehensive Plan - \$3,314.

- Training/Memberships - remains the same - \$7,500.
- Boards & Commissions - Hearing/Training - remains the same - \$1,800.
- Farmers Market - some funds to be used to provide an enclosure around the portable restrooms - \$2,000.
- Recording Secretaries - remains the same - \$2,222.
- Traffic Review/Studies - the study for Howard Park was removed.
- Town Boundary Plan - new account to be used for an upgrade to the plan from the 1960's - \$12,000.
- Architectural Review - remains the same - \$4,000.
- Bike/Pedestrian Plan Implementations - removed.
- Tree: Supplies, Training & Promotions - slight increase to fund markers in the Memorial Grove - \$5,000.
- Strategic Plan Implementation - includes
 1. Promotional items to encourage reduction of pesticide use by Town residents - \$5,000.
 2. Expansion of Community Collection to address carbon footprint - \$5,000.
 3. Funding to increase the number of inventoried historic properties. Will be matched with a grant from the Historic Trust - \$5,000.
- Comprehensive Plan - 2020 Census will not be provided until August. Technical Services related to GIS will be a large part of efforts to inform the public and maintain an interactive connection. There are encumbered monies from FY21 and the requested budget amount for FY22 is \$10,000.
- Capital Projects - most have been removed. Grant received last year for Homestead Park - \$115,000 and the Town to match \$15,000.

Chair Chmielewski is concerned about the project cut at Howard Park and reminded about the resident requesting safety improvements. The Director of Planning recommends waiting another year for the study because of not having normal numbers due to COVID-19. Chair Chmielewski requested the resident be informed. The Director of Planning will reach out to the residents who voiced concerns.

Commissioner Bianca asked if the Town applied for a grant from Community Parks and Playgrounds for the Office Street Pocket

Park. The Director of Planning reported the Town did apply and if it is awarded the CPP has a long window to implement the grant.

Commissioner Bianca inquired about the Burns Alley project. The Director of Planning informed this is another grant through Chesapeake Bay Trust for \$15,000 to do some structural design and the Town committed \$5,000 for the surveys.

Commissioner Kahoe asked if the Boundary Plan from the 60's is pressing and, if not, suggested using these funds for another Capital project. The Director of Planning does not have a problem with the Boundary Plan being eliminated and a preference would be Burns Alley.

Chair Chmielewski requested information on the priority.

Public Relations

The Community & Public Relations Manager notified it is hard to report because of not having a year to year comparison.

- Marketing/Public Relations - amount lowered to \$5,000.

The Community & Public Relations Manager reported the budget basically remains the same and because of COVID-19 there was not much greatness put out about the Town.

Commissioner Richards wanted to know about Economic Development marketing structure and if there is a way to maximize marketing through Public Relations. The Director of Finance advised in FY21 Economic Development marketing money was cut to fund the Public Relations budget. The Director of Finance will have a conversation about spending. The Community & Public Relations Manager has communicated with the Director of Economic Development regarding duplication.

Chair Chmielewski asked about the budget for the Community & Public Relations office move. The Director of Administration advised there will be a cost for furniture. The Director of Finance stated it will be charged to Public Relations this fiscal year.

Chair Chmielewski wanted to know a time period for the move. The Town Administrator could give the tenant a 60-day notice and but that the tenant should be out in June.

Benefits/Miscellaneous/Debt Service

The Director of Finance advised the salaries and benefits are now located in each Department.

Benefits:

- Medical Insurance - includes expenses for EAP program, third party administration of FMLA, CareFirst continuation fee and FSA program - \$7,090
- OPED - healthcare for retirees - \$45,000. The Director of Finance advised the trust is growing.
- Transfer to Leave Payout Reserve - \$0. Cannot budget anything per policy because the reserve is maxed out at \$200,000.
- Medical Insurance - by contract at 14.2% rate increase. One high deductible health plan with an HSA. The Town is proposing to continue paying 100% of premiums but no longer contribute a percentage of the deductible to the employee's HSA account.
- Dental Insurance - rate increase of 15.1%. Town pays 50% of premium.
- Vision Insurance - 1% decrease. Town pays 50% of premium.
- Disability and Life Insurance - in the last year of the contracts and no increase.
- Pension Plan - Town contributes 8.7% for civilian, 9.4% sworn - base salary.
- Deferred Compensation - incentivize employees to save for the future. Once employed one year, employee contributes \$45 per pay and the Town contributes \$30. Less than \$45, Town contributes 50%. There is approximately 85% participation.
- Workers Compensation - modification rate is based on experience. Increased from .70 discount to 1.02 premium.

Chair Chmielewski inquired if health savings are put aside for the Town. The Director of Finance advised the Town does not because we are not self-funded.

Chair Chmielewski asked if the pensions for civilian and sworn have been studied.

The Director of Finance informed:

1. Sworn - Town contributes 9.4%, employee 11.62%
2. Civilian - Town contributes 8.7%, employee 5.9%

It is difficult to compare the two plans because of their being different. The plans were instituted in 2004 and 2006 and had employee involvement. The sworn rate increased three times since 2004 and increased approximately 3 times for civilian.

Chair Chmielewski asked if this is the time to discuss contributions. The Director of Administration advised it is a matter of a legal decision and not necessarily a budget decision. The Director of Finance stated the Actuary notified changes to the Town's contribution would require a document change at the expense of the Town.

Commissioner Bianca asked if other responses were received concerning the HSA contribution. The Director of Administration received some verbal feedback and it was not a popular decision to ask employees to fund their deductible.

Commissioner Kahoe asked are the HSA funds lost if not used within the year. The Director of Administration informed the funds stay with the employee and the employer keeps the account if the employee separates from the Town.

The Director of Finance stated this was not an easy decision to make and it is always difficult to take away a benefit. The removal of the HSA was the least impactful.

Commissioner Bianca asked if a new employee starts with the same benefit as someone with 20 years of service. The Director of Administration advised a full time employee receives the same medical package.

The Director of Public Works stated most Town employees do not know there is a proposed increase of salaries. Employees did hear about the increase on insurance and are not happy with no increase of income.

Miscellaneous:

- General Insurance - general liability, police liability, auto liability/physical damage, vehicle endorsement, crime insurance, property insurance, environmental insurance, public official liability, volunteer insurance. LGIT provided a preliminary rate increase of 7% which is about \$9,000 increase. Requested budget \$125,200.
- Employee Recognition - includes the crab feast and Christmas party - \$9,400.
- Wellness Program - hoping to continue the Wellness Fair and Lunch & Learn. The STEP program was removed - \$12,530.
- Safety/Attendance Program - encourages employees to work safely and good attendance. Funds reviewed on semi-annual basis - \$4,800.
- Donations/Contributions - remains the same and planning for the events to happen in FY22 - \$20,000.
- Other - account for salaries/benefits for the new pay scale as well as a merit increase - \$613,554.
- Transfer to Capital Reserve - policy requirement \$20,000.

Debt Service:

- Equipment/Vehicles - includes equipment/vehicles for this fiscal year - \$324,688.
- JCI Energy Project - budget neutral and seeing energy savings. Final payment in 2032 - \$75,927.
- PD/Town Hall Renovation - proposing \$.03 tax increase to pay the debt service - \$462,000.

Commissioner Richards asked for the terms of the loan for the renovation and if there is a pre-payment penalty. The Director of Finance advised the loan is 30 years and will have to check on any penalty.

New Salary Schedule:

Civilian Plan Proposal

The Director of Administration notified the goal is to increase the starting wage and work toward a minimum wage of about \$15.00 per hour. It also addresses some deficient long-term wages in the lower tiers of the plan.

- Starting wage GP 10 step A - increase from \$13.36 to \$14.19 per hour. GP 11 step A increase to \$15.32 per hour - this is entry level for DPW staff.
- Level out percentages between pay grades - proposal would equal to standard 8%. Policy recommended where an employee would not go back in a step for promotion or pay raise.
- Budget includes an adjustment of migration for all employees to the new pay plan. Includes new pay grades, 1.7% COLA, and Merit step.

The Director of Administration advised employees have seen the promotional opportunities within that grow career paths. The Maryland \$15.00 mandate becomes law in 2025 and the Town is ahead of the curve.

Commissioner Richards wanted clarification that the concept presented 2 years ago is now different in blending grades. The Director of Administration stated it is different and the proposal that did not pass was leveling out step percentages between grades from beginning to the end. This caused a giant disconnect with anyone in the middle of the pay plan.

Commissioner Richards asked for comments from the Director of Public Works regarding fairness and marketability for his staff.

The Director of Public Works has reviewed the proposed plan and feels the DPW staff will be happy. This will affect long term and short term employees differently but both should be pleased. The Director of Public Works informed Harford County has promoted their plan to give each employee \$3,000, 3% COLA and some personnel \$1,000 because of working during the pandemic. The Director of Public Works believes the majority of DPW staff will be pleased if the plan moves forward.

Commissioner Richards asked if this proposal may make a difference in turnover risk. The Director of Public Works commented people have left for \$.50 or \$1.00 per hour and do not see what the Town provides in benefits. The Director of Public Works senses staff will see they are better off with this proposal.

Sworn Officer Plan Proposal

The Director of Administration is concerned with recruiting and retaining police officers with the current environment. The Director of Administration notified the current Police Officer structure was implemented in 2013 and is inconsistent.

Current -

- Officer to Officer 1st Class - begins 4% to about 8%
- Officer 1st Class to Corporal - begins 3.3% to 5.74%
- Corporal to Sergeant - begins 7% and narrows to 3%

New Proposal -

- Add missing steps for all grades - 15 steps to 17 steps.
- Implement standard 3% progression between each step.
- Added Senior Officer 1st Class grade (between Officer 1st Class and Corporal) - 4% higher than Officer 1st Class. Employees to move into the Senior Officer pay grade after 10 years of service.
- Implement the standard 8% progression between each major pay grade.

The Harford County Sheriff's Office has a Senior Deputy rank and adding the Senior Officer level to the Town will possibly better compete with the Sheriff's plan. This proposal puts the Town ahead of what Aberdeen and Havre de Grace offers but when the Sheriff's new plan is implemented, the Town will be 3% to 6% behind again.

The Director of Administration looked at wages outside the immediate area in Maryland and found the Town's entry level rate would be competitive but the upper end is still lacking.

The Director of Administration advised the Sworn and Civilian plans align and creates fairness, equity, and allows to manage both plans moving forward. Proposals can be presented to the Commissioners in the future to expand the percent between grades to promote advancement.

Commissioner Bianca questioned if the scale goes far enough for Sergeant pay to encourage staying. The Director of Administration advised it is a major concern because other agencies have Lieutenants and Majors to rely on. Our Sergeants and Corporals

are put into a high responsibility when the Chief is absent. The Director of Administration thinks the Town has made progress with this potential proposal. It does not solve it forever but gets us going in the right direction now.

Commissioner Bianca inquired if the Police Department asked for the Senior Officer position. The Director of Administration advised at the meet and confer meetings the officers did not ask for this but it was revealed and proposed by the Town after looking at the competitive market.

The Town Administrator noted the opportunities in Town to become a Corporal or Sergeant are not as great as other agencies. During discussions in past meet and confer, the officers made comparisons between the Town and Sheriff's Office pay. This proposed pay plan is matching what the Sheriff's Office is providing personnel at the lower ranks. The Town Administrator stated officers are not only looking at what is being made now but also their pension down the road which is based on the three highest years of service. The Senior Officer rank will look out for the officer who did not have the opportunity for promotion when he or she retires.

The Town Administrator stated there needs to be a contingency with the Bel Air Police Department because of not knowing what the future holds. In the future, the Town will have to take a stronger look of what we pay officers based on what is happening out in the employment arena. The Town Administrator requested the Commissioners give some feedback on the proposed pay plan.

Commissioner Richards inquired aside from the COLA; will every employee receive something from the adjustment. The Director of Administration stated yes. Commissioner Richards asked for the cost of both plans. The Director of Finance informed \$359,000 for the shift in the pay plan and decided to roll in the 1.7% cost of living that will come out of the Unassigned Fund Balance. The Merit increase is \$252,000. The Director of Finance explained without the Merit increase one-third of the workforce would receive less of a pay increase if staying on the existing pay scale.

Commissioner Richards asked how close this solution comes to recent discussions with the police union. Commissioner Richards advised the answer can be in a follow-up email.

Commissioner Richards is supportive of this solution moving forward.

The Town Administrator informed there is not much difference in what the union requested in meet and confer and the Union wanted a pay plan competitive with the Sheriff's Office. The union did not request the Senior Officer and the pension was not on the table. The Town Administrator advised the union wants to make sure the Town gets good officers.

Chair Chmielewski wanted to know what the additional steps provide. The Director of Administration stated additional earning potential and being competitive. In past years, employees at the end of the 15 step scale had to be satisfied with only a COLA increase.

Chair Chmielewski asked about the Senior Officer position. The Director of Administration advised the officer would automatically move to the Senior Officer rank after 10 years of good standing service.

Discussion by Commissioners on Budget Issues

The Director of Finance emailed the list to the Commissioners and informed:

4. Answer will be provided during the next budget session.

Added:

- If Boundary Plan is cut (\$12,000) what Capital project would utilize funds.
- Looking at marketing budget of Economic Development and Community & Public Relations.
- Prepayment on loan - after 10 years.
- Percentage of gap between the proposed sworn officer scale and police union proposal.
- Salary pay.

The Director of Public Works received positive information from Bob Cassilly and Susan McComas that the Town is in the running for some playground grant money from the DNR.

COMMISSIONERS COMMENTS:

None.

ADJOURNMENT:

With no further comments, the meeting was adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

Approved: May 3, 2021

Signature on file

Amy G. Chmielewski, Chair
Board of Town Commissioners

Signature on file

Michael L. Krantz, Town Clerk