

City Council Minutes
Tuesday, June 17, 2014
City Hall Auditorium
7:00 p.m.

1. **Call to Order** at 7:00 pm
2. **Pledge of Allegiance** – Led by Councilor Sherwood
3. **Roll Call**- Councilor Sherwood, Councilor Sickorez, Councilor, Councilor Bartley, Councilor Ferguson, Councilor Kelcourse, Councilor Lavoie, Councilor McClure, Councilor Moavenzadeh and President McMilleon.
4. **Act on minutes** – None at this time
5. **Mayoral Appointments** – None at this time
6. **Licenses & Permits** – List of Licenses issued - City Clerk
New
Pleasant Valley Marina Café, 14 Pleasant Valley Rd. – Common Victualler
7. **Correspondence**
 - a. President/Vice President Communications – Councilor Ferguson wanted everyone to know that there will be a dedication of the Mike Farmer Commemorative Cross Country Track at Woodsom Farm on Tuesday, June 24, 2014 at 3:00 p.m.
 - b. Communication from Elected Officials, Boards and Commissions – None at this time
8. **Public Comment**

Jim Thivierge, 8 School St. spoke in regards to questions he wants answers to.

 - 1.) If there is an increase or decrease in the tax base.
 - 2.) What is the amount of the current overlay surplus?
9. **Council Response to Public Comment** – None at this time
10. **Public Hearings:**
2014-001 FY2015 Annual Operating Budget

Councilor McMilleon opened the public hearing.

Mark Rinaldi, 8 Henry St. stated he is a teacher at the Middle School since 1999. He is concerned with the budget and that the Middle School seems to always go un-noticed. It is the school with the highest population and suffers most of the cuts.

Jim Thivierge, 8 School St. spoke about the FY2015 operating budget about available funds, and the state budget and the effects on it. He feels that they are not ready to vote this budget yet. As per Mass General Law Ch. 44 sec 32 he asked that they continue this for the next three months as he has requested of the Mayor. It will give us time to know certified free cash, general fund, water fund, sewer fund, Landry fund and time to determine the impact of the new FY15 tax base, digest the annual report

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context in September, know the finalized 2015 State budget and the charges and reimbursements and their net. It will allow for us to prorate the tax base from July on instead of coming back from December to July in retro. It would allow us to put together a better approach to assuming the spending plan and make adjustments. He asks that the Council make the right decision.

Gail Brown, 2 Woodlawn St. spoke to the fact that this town is full of parents and community members who are involved in the community and supporting their kids. Through the petition signed by over 1000 residents, we want services, good schools, the Library to be supported, we want the city to be safe and would like to see full funding of the budget this year to keep our quality services.

Matt Einson, 64 Fern Ave., asked that they please don't cut the budget.

Councilor McMilleon closed the public hearing.

Councilor Kelcourse thanked everyone for coming out and for all efforts put forward. He stated he feels this budget is the best we have to offer right now. He commented that they will all be working hard on next year's budget and that there is a lot of discussion among the state leaders right now about how we are going to resolve this issue going forward.

Councilor Lavoie commented that this year the auditorium has rarely been packed but the mere presence of the number of names shows that people care in this community and for the record it has been communicated. What matters to this Council is what matters to the general population. We need to correct the structural problems that we have that create the imbalance in the school budget relative to unfunded mandates and other unfortunate costs that local taxpayers have to bear instead of where the costs should be taking place which is on the state level.

Councilor Sherwood thanked everyone for coming out. He feels the budget is in line with the growth we have seen over the last five years. He mentioned the Fire Department positions that have been funded through a federal grant which will be expiring and the city will be assuming those costs in this budget but the impact of losing those positions would have increased overtime costs.

Councilor Ferguson thanked everyone for their participation. She would love to vote for more money for the Schools but that money needs to be sustainable. She commented that she and the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent have sat down and reviewed the budget and they found the increase in costs of Special Education has increased by \$440,000.00. She believes that every child deserves a good education and it shouldn't be taken away from one group to fund another, they need to find a solution to this. We need to start with unfunded mandates from the city and federal government. She vowed that she will spend the rest of her term fighting for funding of mandates. She suggested that everyone contact their State and Federal Representatives by phone, not by e-mail.

Councilor McClure thanked everyone for coming out and stated that it is very clear that it is time for the state to step up and fund the mandates they impose on us. She stated that testimony during this process has painted a picture of two Amesbury's; 1 of 12 families are receiving food at Neighbor's Table, Seniors are getting financial counseling at the Senior Center because a \$50.00 increase could mean the difference of keeping or losing a family home. The Boston Globe study says we are upside down about 15% on our mortgages. We are still learning how to expand our commercial and industrial base in order to lessen the burden on the taxpayers. There are signs of things that we are turning around; the school system received \$800,000.00 out of a \$990,000 increase. The Finance Committee recognizes that for the

first time we are receiving timely and complete documented data to support the budgeting decision making process. The new TIF; the zoning overlay gives hope that the long vacant Golden Triangle may finally pay off. We are happy to see our Mayor embrace the surplus of underutilized and deteriorating assets and move them back on to the tax rolls. We will be forever grateful to our retiring CFO, Mike Basque and our retiring Head of Business Development, Joe Fahey; we wish them the best. Our new CFO, Chuck Benevento coupled with the promotion of Bill Scott who has impressed us all this year with his depth of knowledge and hustle makes us confident that Amesbury's financial future is headed in the right direction. As Mayor Gray noted it took many years to get us into this and will take a few years to fix. As Finance Committee Chair she thanked all the hard work and dedication of her colleagues.

Councilor McClure read the Finance Committee recommendation.

Councilor McMilleon stated that he was ready for a motion.

Councilor Kelcourse moved to approve the 2014-001 Finance Committee recommendation for a total appropriation of: \$ 50,775,222
Councilor McClure seconded.

Councilor Sherwood gave a review on what Debt Service is and his concern in the process in which the school budget was presented to the School Committee as they did not present a line item budget until the night of their actual vote on the budget which makes it hard to do the job of understanding the contours of the operating budget that is being considered without something like a line item budget in hand. Some of the impacts were not clear to the School Committee or the administration at the time that was passed. The loss of the positions was news to everyone. He asks that everyone who was involved in that process to heed the calls we have heard and continue that participation and make it happen moving forward.

Councilor Kelcourse stated that we need to stay on top of our State leaders. If we could get even just a percentage of our transportation costs it could allow for a teacher in the school system. Need to find some creative ways to share some of the scarce revenues we have within the school systems.

Councilor Lavoie stated that the Finance Committee has met five times with each department head and they have a budget book submitted by the Mayor and have checked this year to last year. He wanted the public to know that no stone has gone unturned in terms of finding available revenue. He commended the Mayor and the School Department for finding creative ways to put some balance back into the School budget. He pledged that starting the next meeting he will be working hard to tackle the state level issues.

Councilor Kelcourse moved to amend his motion to approve the 2014-001 Finance Committee recommendation for a total appropriation of: \$ 50,775,222

That to fund said appropriation, the City Council approves \$49,638,359 to be raised by taxation and other revenue sources and further that \$ 1,136,863 be applied from the sources detailed below:

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SOURCE	AMOUNT
Sale of Cemetery Lots	\$ 17,000
Ambulance Receipts	730,000
Youth Revolving	309,363
Cemetery Interest	14,000
Waterways Improvement	7,500
Regional Health	59,000

Further voted that the City Council approves the following enterprise fund budgets:

Landry Stadium	\$ 9,000	Total Landry
Sewer Department	\$ 2,806,782	Total Sewer
Water Department	\$ 3,914,226	Total Water

Therefore, the City Council hereby appropriates the following:

TOTAL APPROPRIATION \$ 57,505,230

Councilor McClure seconded the amendment.

Roll Call Vote - Unanimous (9 Members present)

Mayor Gray thanked the City Council and the School Committee for uniting to work through this difficult time.

11. First Readings

12. Adjourn

Councilor Kelcourse moved to adjourn at 7:51 p.m. Councilor McClure seconded and it was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Dunning
Assistant City Clerk