

GLOUCESTER CITY COUNCIL MEETING

Tuesday, June 6, 2023 – 6:00 p.m.

REMOTE MEETING

-Minutes-

Councilors Present: Council Vice President, Councilor Sean Nolan; Councilor Tony Gross; Councilor Jason Grow; Councilor Frank Margiotta; Councilor Scott Memhard; Councilor Jamie O’Hara; Councilor Tracy O’Neil; Councilor Jeff Worthley

Also Present: Acting Mayor, Val Gilman; CAO, Jill Cahill; City Clerk, Joanne Senos; CFO, John Dunn;

This meeting was conducted remotely through Zoom

All votes were ROLL CALL votes

Meeting called to order at 6:00 p.m.

Councilor Nolan announced: “In the interest of government transparency with regards to deliberations and decisions made by the City Council and according to open meeting law, since this meeting was posted as a Zoom meeting, this meeting is recorded by video and audio and will be conducted by remote participation. Additionally, all votes taken by the City Council during this and future remote meetings will be by roll call vote. If you are calling in on a phone, you can press Star 9 (*9) to request to speak. If you are watching on a computer or device, there is a “raised hand” button that you can tap or press to request to speak. Please use either of these options during oral communications to be recognized to speak.”

“It is the finding of the City of Gloucester that no individual should be denied equal treatment or opportunity because of their age, ancestry, color, disability, including intellectual and developmental mental disability, family status, immigration status, gender identity or expression, military status, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation.”

The **City Clerk, Joanne Senos**, announced that there are no Oral Communications at Special City Council meetings.

CONSENT AGENDA:

• ***MAYOR’S REPORT***

1. Memorandum from CFO and #2023-SA-26 in the amount of \$75,000 re: purchasing of new voter equipment (Refer B&F)
2. Memorandum from CFO and #2023-SA-27 in the amount of \$300,000 re: school grease traps (Refer B&F)
3. Memorandum from CFO requesting to pay FY22 invoices with FY23 funds (Refer B&F)

• ***COMMUNICATIONS/INVITATIONS***

1. City Approval letter of support to the State Legislators regarding funding for free school meals for all (FCV 6/13/23)

• ***APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS COUNCIL AND STANDING COMMITTEE MEETINGS***

1. FY24 Budget Review Meetings: 5/3/2023, 5/10/2023, 5/18/2023, 5/30/2023 (under separate cover) (Approve/File)

ITEMS TO BE ADDED/REMOVED FROM THE CONSENT AGENDA: **Councilor Gross** removed the letter of support to the State Legislators regarding funding for free school meals for all. He stated that he believes that all councilors should sign off on the letter. **Councilor Nolan** agreed.

MOTION: On a motion by Councilor Gross, seconded by Councilor Memhard, the City Council voted by ROLL CALL 8 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 (Gilman) absent, that all councilors should sign the letter of support to the State Legislators regarding free school meals for all.

MOTION: On a motion by Councilor Grow, seconded by Councilor Memhard, the City Council voted by ROLL CALL 8 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 (Gilman) absent, to accept the Consent Agenda as amended.

SCHEDULED PUBLIC HEARINGS:

1. PH2023-0028: Public Hearing on FY24 Proposed Budget (FY24 Mayor's Recommended Budget: <https://www.gloucester-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/9355/FY24-Proposed-Budget>)

The Public Hearing was opened at 6:09 p.m.

Those speaking in favor: The CAO, **Jill Cahill**, stated, on behalf of **Mayor Verga**, that she is asking for the City Council support of the FY24 budget proposal. She thanked the CFO, **John Dunn**, and all department heads for their work to deliver a level-service, sensible budget while being cognizant of rising inflation. She stated that there has been a record increase in ch. 70 spending which is reflected in the City's record investment into Gloucester Public Schools, as well as maintaining the increase in the paving budget. She stated that the City is also able to maintain the Community Health Navigator position through a strategic investment with funds from the opioid settlement. She reiterated that the Administration is mindful of the long-term effects of rising inflation on the City's taxpayers.

Jane Fox Dobson, [address not learned]

Ms. Fox Dobson asked when she can speak about the voting machines and the grease traps that are on this evening's Consent Agenda. She was informed by **Councilor Nolan** that those matters have been referred to the B&F Standing Committee. **Ms. Fox Dobson** started to speak again about the voting machines and grease traps and was told that she needs to keep her comments to the Mayor's proposed budget.

Peg Russell, [address not learned]

Ms. Russell stated that she is in support of the budget as discussed. She wished to speak on the construction/utility work in the downtown area. **Councilor Nolan** informed **Ms. Russell** that the matter in front of the Council is the Mayor's proposed budget.

Larry Russo, 56 Ye Olde County Road

Mr. Russo stated that he wished to speak on Rust Island fire protection but sensed, from the previous callers, that his comments would be out of order. **Councilor Nolan** informed **Mr. Russo** that he appreciated his call and looked forward to working with **Mr. Russo** in the future on his concerns.

Councilor O'Hara called a Point of Order at 6:19 p.m. He stated that constituent issues could be budget-related issues. **Councilor Nolan** explained that the matter before the Council is the Mayor's FY24 budget. **Councilor O'Neil** asked how the public is supposed to know if there is money in the budget to "fix the water situation" if they cannot ask their questions and question the budget. **Councilor Nolan** reiterated that the Mayor's proposed budget is the matter before the Council. **Councilor O'Hara** stated that **Mr. Russo** was speaking about fire protection on Rust Island which he believes is a budget-related issue. **Councilor Grow** asked if **Mr. Russo** has a budget-related question regarding the fire protection on Rust Island. **Mr. Russo** asked that the DPW create a master plan of City water projects and rank them by priority based on fire safety and appropriate the necessary funds to conduct a deep water feasibility study to install fire hydrants and deep water connections to the residences and businesses on Rust Island; he stated that he would like to see these requests funded in the budget.

Lisa Rigsby, 3 Taylor Court

Ms. Rigsby had questions regarding the local fiscal recovery funds and asked if those funds are allocated throughout the budget. The CFO, **John Dunn**, stated that all funds received by the City as grants are not included in the General Fund budget or the Enterprise Fund budgets because those funds may not be received year-to-year. He emphasized that ARPA funds are grant awards and that the City has received tens of millions dollars in grants over the years that are not included in the operating budget. **Councilor Nolan** suggested that **Ms. Rigsby** reach out to the Mayor's Office to find additional information regarding ARPA fund allocations. The CAO, **Jill Cahill**, wished to make clear that ARPA funding is not allocated funding and will not be found in the operating budget.

She explained to **Ms. Rigsby** that information regarding ARPA funding can be found on the Mayor's page on the City website and that there are several press releases, as well as listening group input and general outline of the spending. She stated the website will be updated as funds are allocated.

Peg Russell, [address not learned]

Ms. Russell was allowed to ask a follow-up question and asked if there are considerations for downtown improvement to include sidewalk maintenance. **Councilor Nolan** stated that there are no specific line items in the budget related to downtown and stated that it is part of the regular DPW maintenance. The **CAO** reiterated that the general operating budget is what is before the Council. She stated that there has been an increase in the paving budget that is being maintained from last year; within that, it is up to the Administration and departments to determine where that paving goes. She stated that the Administration is also working to allocate funding related to a parking study for downtown and that a working group has been launched around a possible improvement district or a downtown management organization and that the Mayor is committed to providing the initial seed funding.

Gregory Doe, [address not learned]

Mr. Doe stated that the City should "stop spending money like it's not their money" and that it is "taxpayer's money." He stated that "someone in the budget" approves National Grid projects "years in advance" and questioned why work was being done on Main Street in the spring of Gloucester's 400th birthday.

Pamela Steele, [address not learned]

Ms. Steele stated that she has been watching Council meetings since 2018 and feels as though "every time there is a need for money it is just rubber stamped." **Ms. Steele** referenced the meeting held recently regarding the Good Harbor Creek contamination and stated that her takeaway is that the City has an infrastructure problem. She stated that she did not see any money in the budget for infrastructure and stated that it is a health and safety issue. She stated that she has concerns regarding spending and feels that none of the councilors are representing her on any issue that she has brought up.

Jane Fox Dobson, [address not learned]

Ms. Fox Dobson was allowed to speak again. She referenced an out of service fire hydrant on Concord Street. **Councilor Nolan** told **Ms. Fox Dobson** that the fire hydrant is not a budget-related matter and that he would be happy to speak with her after the meeting or the next day.

Written communications: The **City Clerk, Joanne Senos**, stated that one communication was received from Pauline Bresnahan and that it has been forwarded to all councilors. She asked that the City Council make an effort to urge department heads to make cuts in their budget and also not to increase the school budget.

The Public Hearing was closed at 6:47 p.m.

Questions from Councilors

Q1. (O'Neil): Stated that she agrees with Pauline Bresnahan that the school budget should not be increased. Stated that part of the school budget includes a new track. Asked if the vocational students have a track and where it is located.

A1. (Grow): Explained that "track" is referring to an educational track of programs and that it is not referring to a running track.

Q2. (O'Neil): Asked who the director of the Emergency Management section is.

A2. (Nolan): Stated that the director for the City is Fire Chief Eric Smith.

Q3. (O'Neil): Asked if Chief Smith has an assistant who acts as a City-wide compliance officer for DLS and OSHA and safety-related issues.

A3. (Memhard): Shook his head in agreement.

Councilor O'Neil stated that the Water Enterprise Fund has increased by 10% and stated that she thinks it is a bit much and that the Sewer Enterprise Fund has increased by 6%. She also stated that the Talbot Rink should be making money and not losing money.

Q4. (O'Neil): Stated that the Waterways Enterprise Fund has an increase of 19.79% and asked how many Assistant Harbormasters the City has and stated that the last time she asked the **Harbormaster** it was eight which she stated that she thinks is a "bit much". She also stated that she does not think a 20% increase is sustainable or necessary. Asked why the entire City does not benefit from the income of the harbor.

A4. (Gross): Stated that the Assistant Harbormasters are part-time employees with no benefits. Stated that none of this falls on the taxpayer as it is an enterprise fund which is funded by visitors or mooring holders.

Councilor O'Hara stated that he had a conversation with **Chief Smith** regarding the requested position for OSHA compliance. **Councilor Grow called a Point of Order at 6:58 p.m.** **Councilor Nolan** stated that most of the questions being asked this evening should have been asked at the standing committee level at B&F and that councilors have had ample time over the last month to seek answers to their questions. **Councilor Grow** stated that any councilor will have an opportunity to offer an amendment to motions during the budget voting process.

Without objection, the City Council voted 8 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 (Gilman) absent, to take a brief recess at 6:58 p.m. The meeting resumed at 7:06 p.m.

Councilor O'Neil asked why the Council was "here" if the Council cannot ask questions and deliberate. **Councilor Memhard** stated that great effort was made to ensure that all Budget & Finance Committee meetings were also Committee of the Whole meetings and that all councilors were invited to participate to go over each line item by department. He added that all meetings were recorded and available for review and councilors could have submitted questions as well after reviewing the meeting if they could not attend. He stated that at the budget meetings all councilors had the opportunity to ask any questions to the department heads as well as ample time after to ask questions. **Councilor O'Neil** stated that she appreciate the hard work of the councilors and that she works early mornings and late evenings.

Councilor Worthley stated that he would like to have a better grasp of the City's long-term and short-term debt, as well as the City's borrowing capacity. He stated that he, per the charter during budget season, is also requesting a list of all City employees.

Councilor Gross stated that the purpose of this evening's meeting is to hear from the public.

MOTION: On a motion by Councilor Worthley, seconded by Councilor Gross, the City Council voted by ROLL CALL 8 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 (Gilman) absent, to adjourn the meeting at 7:12 p.m.

Submitted by: Sherry White, Clerk of Committees

Items submitted at the meeting: None.