

SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING

MUNICIPAL COMPLEX
DATE: TUESDAY, MAY 3, 2005

PORTSMOUTH, NH
TIME: 7:00PM

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Sirrell called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

Mayor Sirrell led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

II. PUBLIC HEARING

A. PROPOSED FY JULY 1, 2005 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2006 BUDGET

III. PRESENTATIONS

Budget Summary

City Manager Bohenko provided a budget summary and reviewed the budget process. He announced that this public hearing is being held prior to the budget work sessions at the request of the City Council. He said that the public hearing would be recessed this evening until June 8, 2005 to allow for additional public comment following the budget work sessions. He discussed the new budget format and the fixed costs that are pushing the operating budget over the 4% increase. He reviewed retirement contribution rates and the health insurance 10-year rate history. He reported that salaries and benefits make up 83% of the budget.

School Department

Kent LaPage, Chair of the School Board, introduced Superintendent Lister and Business Administrator Torrey to present the School Department budget. Kent thanked and recognized Business Administrator Torrey for his work on this budget and announced that this is Mr. Torrey last budget since he will be retiring this year.

Superintendent Lister reviewed the mission statement of the School Department and the goals of the School Board. He advised the City Council that the focus of the School Board and School Department is to provide a quality education for all students.

Business Administrator Torrey reported that the School Department is requesting a 7.34% increase, which is above the 4% mandate of the City Council and City Manager. He said that 86% of the School Budget encompasses salaries and benefits. He advised the City Council that 81% of the 7.34% increase is based on fixed costs.

Superintendent Lister discussed the impacts of a 4% budget limit. He reported that the 4% put the School budget below fixed cost increases and will likely eliminate modest program staffing increases. He said it could further delay the capital improvements needed to Little Harbour School. He also advised the City Council that the 4% equates to 17 teaching positions currently on hold.

Police Department

Police Chief Magnant reviewed the Police Department budget and their request. He said the department is made up of three divisions, which are the Patrol Division, Detective Division and Family Services. He reported that the Emergency Communications Center handled 41,809 calls for service in 2004. He advised the City Council that fixed costs equate to a 6.73% increase. He said that the Police Department is seeking an additional 1.1% from the City Council. He announced that the 4% equates to a reduction of 4 positions in the Department. He said the main objective of the department is to provide a safe community for all.

Fire Department

Fire Chief LeClaire reviewed the Fire Department budget and their request. He advised the City Council that the Fire Department is seeking a 5.5% increase, which represents fixed costs for the department. He reported that salaries and benefits make up 96% of their budget. He reviewed the major increases effecting the budget and advised the City Council that the 4% mandate would result in the reduction of staffing on night shifts to 13 personnel.

Public Works Department

Public Works Director Parkinson reviewed the Public Works Department budget and its mission statement. He reported that 58% of the budget encompasses salaries and benefits for the 57 employees of the department. He discussed the major budget increases and advised the City Council that salt prices have increased 40% this year as well as the increase in gas prices and the cost of steel.

Recreation Department

Recreation Director Wilson discussed the various programs and facilities offered by the Recreation Department. He reported that fixed costs represent a 5.5% increase. He said that 93% of the proposed budget represent fixed costs and 63% encompass salaries and benefits.

Library Department

Library Director List reviewed the mission statement of the Library. She discussed the areas of the Library budget. She advised the City Council that she compared the services offered at our library with other New Hampshire libraries and libraries through the United States. She reported that Portsmouth exceeds the average for annual visits, circulation and users of electronic resources. She also reported that Portsmouth has more materials available compared to other urban libraries in New Hampshire. She advised the City Council that the Library is seeking a 4.17% increase for their budget.

Social Services

Welfare Director Bates presented the Social Services budget. He reported that the City provides grants to 21 local agencies that provide service to Portsmouth residents. He said that the work of many of these agencies serves to directly reduce costs for the Welfare Department. He discussed the process used for these agencies to request funding from the City. He reported that the City Manager recommended a reduction of \$48,053 from the funding for social services to comply with the City Council's 4% directive.

Revenues and Conclusion

City Manager Bohenko discussed the revenue side of the budget. He reported that 75% of the budget is funded through property taxes. He announced that the proposed budget would reflect a \$.45 increase in the tax rate which is still lower than the tax rate in FY04. He discussed the effect the Statewide Property Tax has had on Portsmouth since its implementation. He thanked all department heads, School Board, Fire Commission and Police Commission for their work on this budget. He said that the public hearing would be recessed at the end of the evening until June 8, 2005 to allow for additional comments after the budget work sessions have been held.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT/INPUT

Mayor Sirrell read the legal notice, declared the public hearing open and called for speakers.

City Clerk Barnaby advised the City Council that we have received letters from the following individuals regarding the budget:

- Linda Harvey – Supports the 4% mandate for the budget
- Christopher and Roddy Cole – Supports the 7.34% increase for the School Department
- Steven Scott – Supports the 7.34% increase for the School Department
- Meghan Harris – Supports the 7.34% increase for the School Department
- Gary Gowe – Supports the 4% mandate for the budget
- JoAn and Joseph Saxe – Supports the 7.34% increase for the School Department
- Association of Portsmouth Taxpayers – Supports the 4% mandate for the budget

Diane McGee, Portsmouth resident, urged the City Council to approve the School Department request of 7.34%. She said that the 4% mandate would cause a loss of positions and programs. She advised the City Council that the School Board has worked hard to provide a fair budget, but the 4% mandate would devastate the School Department. She reminded the City Council that the School Department funding is an investment in our children.

Stephanie Tate, Greater Bay Chapter of Red Cross, spoke opposed to any cut in funding to social services. She discussed the assistance provided to residents in the City over this past year and the services provided throughout the community.

Phyllis Eldridge, Info Link, spoke in support of the funding provided for social service agencies. She advised the City Council of the importance of these social services to the community. She said that Info Link assists 180 residents each year with their prescription needs. She said the proposed cuts to the social service agencies would cause a domino effect throughout the community.

Amy Brnger, Portsmouth resident, said she supports all the budget requests discussed this evening. She said that the School Department needs the 7.34% as requested and the 4% would have a damaging effect. She said it is important to maintain small class sizes because they enhance the quality of education provided to the children.

Jan Anderson, Portsmouth resident, said that she is retired and concerned about the increase in property taxes. She said that her property taxes are double what she receives in retirement benefits. She advised the City Council that she has done all she can to tighten her household expenses but is unable to keep up with the increase in taxes. She urged the City Council to keep the 4% mandate.

Joe Arnstein, Portsmouth resident, said he is a teacher at Portsmouth High School and urged the City Council to provide the School Department with the 7.34% increase. He said that 17 teachers would be lost if the School Department does not receive the 7.34% as requested. He urged the City Council to provide the School Department with what they need to provide a quality education for all.

Nancy Modern, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the School Department's request for a 7.34% increase. She said if the School Department is forced to stay at 4% it will affect the effectiveness of the teachers and the quality of education. She said we need to hold public education in the highest priority, we need to honor the children and their needs for a quality education. She urged the City Council to support the request of the School Department for the future of our children.

Frank Getman, Portsmouth resident, spoke to the importance of maintaining a high quality education. He advised the City Council that the most important benefit is investing in our schools and children of our future. He said cutting funding means cutting teachers and the erosion in the quality of education for our children.

Melissa Provost, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the School Department budget and their request of a 7.34% increase. She said that the reality of a 4% increase would mean the loss of 17 teachers. She said it is important for the City Council to realize that teachers help with the social and emotional needs in the development of a student. She urged the City Council to support the request of the School Department.

Ann Mayer, Mark Forsyth, Rich Carlin, Robin MacDonald, Helen Maldini and George Cushing, Representatives of SAU 50, Ann read a letter in support of the School Departments request for a 7.34% increase. She said that the proposed increase is necessary to stop any further regression in terms of staffing, class size, and programs. The increase would also maintain current staffing levels and add a minimal number of instructional positions that have been needed for several years. She said that further staff reductions would be detrimental to the excellent educational program that the school districts have come to expect from the Portsmouth School District.

Samantha Kelly & Courtney Church, Portsmouth High School Juniors, asked the City Council to support the School Department's request for a 7.34% increase. They spoke to the importance of teachers and the impact that one teacher has had on their lives. They said that Ms. Helaine Whemple expects every student to set high goals and provides the students with the skills to achieve them. They advised the City Council that Ms. Whemple is one of the 17 teachers that will be lost if the 7.34% increase is not granted by the City Council.

Kristin (Last name Inaudible), and Nick Richards, Portsmouth High School students, spoke to the 17 teachers that may lose their positions if the 7.34% increase to the School Department budget is not approved by the City Council. They urged the City Council to support the request of the School Department and provide the necessary funding needed to ensure the quality of education.

Margaret Ronchi, Portsmouth resident and High School teacher, spoke concern with the potential loss of 17 teachers if the School Department's request for a 7.34% increase is not granted. She said the loss of one teacher would cause her average class size to go from 23 to 34 and it is the students that lose. She said individual instruction time would become extinct and personalized education would be only a dream. She said we must do everything possible to keep teachers in the classroom. She urged the City Council not to damage this valuable resource, our educational system.

Julia Buck, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the services provided in the City. She urged the City Council to support the request for a 7.34% increase in the School Department. She said that the schools are the soul of a community and we need to provide the services necessary to provide quality education for our children.

Cindy Hebert, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the 7.34% increase for the School Department. She said that class size is important in order to meet the academic needs of students.

Susan Cole, Seacoast Hospice, requested level funding for social service agencies. She spoke to the importance of hospice and the services provided to the community. She said that the funds provided to Seacoast Hospice are to assist in the end of life care for residents of this community in need.

Elizabeth Malone, Portsmouth resident, spoke against any cuts to the School Department. She said that she is a teacher in the Portsmouth school system and urged the City Council to approve the 7.34% increase as requested by the School Department.

John McCafferty, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the 7.34% increase by the School Department. He said that class sizes are too big now and any further reduction would create further hardship. He suggested reducing the 4 police officers and cutting the Fire Department to 13 men per shift at night before cutting the School budget. He said that the Recreation Department should not be subsidized by the taxpayers and some of the programs could be cut in order to save the School Department.

Rick Horwitz, Portsmouth resident and representative of the Association of Portsmouth Taxpayers, said that most of the people speaking this evening in support of increasing the budget are either Portsmouth teachers or representatives of social service agencies. He said that the taxes are out of control and it needs to be addressed. He said the City Council needs to consider the ramifications when passing employee contracts. He said that the City could do more with fewer employees. He advised the City Council that each year they allow increases over the consumer price index and that needs to stop.

Leslie Stephens, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the School Department's request for a 7.34% increase. She said she doesn't understand how people lose sight of quality education for all children. She advised the City Council that the ramification of a 4% mandate would account for a loss of 25 teachers. She said that 4% doesn't meet rising costs. She said that there is no fluff in the School Department budget.

Lisa Sweet, Portsmouth resident, said that she is astounded that we are here discussing possible cuts to the School Department budget again this year. She said that the City continues to strive for excellence in education for our children. She reported that one-third of the cost per pupil comes from grants achieved by teachers. She said if the School Department budget continues to be cut it will create substandard facilities, property values will decrease and students will no longer receive a quality education. She urged the City Council to support the 7.34% increase as requested by the School Department in order to put the schools back on track.

Hannah Doole, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the School Department's request for a 7.34% increase.

Jan Couture, Seacoast Mental Health, spoke in support of the services requested throughout the social services budget. She spoke in support of the New Heights program. She addressed the various programs provided by her agency for the community.

Sally Struble, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the School Department and their request. She said that a quality education is important for her children. She advised the City Council that class sizes are important for the children's ability to learn. She also addressed the importance of the social service agencies and their request for funding.

Amanda Jones, Portsmouth resident, said that she enjoys living in the City and uses all of the services available to her. She advised the City Council that she is a teacher in the City and it is a true gift. She said that she learns from the students and the students learn from her. She addressed the items that have been lost to the School Department over the last several years, due to budget cuts. She urged the City Council to support the request of the School Department for a 7.34% increase.

Bruce McEldowney, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the School Department budget. He urged the City Council to approve the request submitted by the School Department to ensure quality education for all students.

Kathy Birse Siegel, Portsmouth resident, said that she is a teacher at the Portsmouth Middle School and she supports the request of the School Department. She said a reduction in the budget would require an increase in class sizes, which will effect the quality of education.

Jane Shaw, New Castle resident, said her two daughters attend Portsmouth schools and she supports the request of the School Department for a 7.34% increase. She said it is important that the City secure a high quality of education. She said that teachers provide a wide range of support above education. She said that the City Council needs to value and support everyone in the community.

Heidi DiPetro, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the 7.34% increase to the School Department budget and urged the City Council's support of the request.

Rose Sulley, Portsmouth resident, said that the individual who spoke on behalf of the Association of Portsmouth Taxpayers does not represent all taxpayers in the City. She said the people that spoke this evening came to speak in support of the children. She advised the City Council that it is shortsighted to reduce teachers. She said it is important to balance the needs of the taxpayers, children and the elderly in the City. She also addressed the need to support the Police and Fire Departments to ensure the safety of the community as a whole.

Jim Lamond, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the 7.34% increase for the School Department. He thanked the City staff for their professional presentations this evening on their various budgets. He said that the School Department budget reflects their mission statement and quality education is important for the children and our future.

Peter Harris, Portsmouth resident, said two of his three children's teachers do not have contracts for next year based on the 4% mandate. He urged the City Council to support the 7.34% increase by the School Department.

Paula Glynn, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the 7.34% increase to the School Department budget. She said we shouldn't decrease teachers and increase class sizes. She urged the City Council if cuts need to be made cut things not personnel. She said it is important that we maintain a quality education for our children.

Lucy Salver, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the 7.34% increase in the School Department budget. She expressed concern with the rising class sizes and its effects on the education of our children.

Patrick Ellis, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the School Department budget and public safety for this community. He spoke opposed to the reduction of 4 police officers. He said that the 4% mandate represents not allowing additional funding for the system. He said we need to invest in what we have now and our future.

Mary Lyons, Portsmouth resident, said she is a school teacher and her voice should not count less than another other person speaking this evening. She said that the departments were given an impossible task to stay within 4%. She said that 4% mandate will result in a reduction of staff. She suggested that the City Council create a program to assist people on fixed incomes.

M.L. Geffert, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the community and its civic leaders. She urged the City Council to support the 7.34% increase for the School Department.

Saunte Gray, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the 7.34% increase to the School Department and opposed any increase in class sizes. She urged the City Council to support the request of the School Department because without their support there will be a loss of teachers which is unacceptable.

Robin Najjar, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the School Department request for a 7.34% increase. She said the school system is scraping by and hanging on by a thread to provide a quality education for the children. She said if we do not give the school the 7.34% increase they will lose their grip. She advised the City Council that an increase in class size would cause a loss in quality education. She urged the City Council to invest in our children.

Linda Briolat, Portsmouth resident, spoke in support of the School Department budget as well as the other budgets represented here this evening. She advised the City Council that all the services provided by the City are important and need to be considered.

Martin Cameron, Portsmouth resident, said he is impressed with the re-paving of streets that has taken place in the City in the last few days. He spoke to a recent comment made by a Board member at a School Board meeting directed to the City Council, which bothered him personally. He said that the comment sets a barrier between the School Board and City Council and creates a negative attitude.

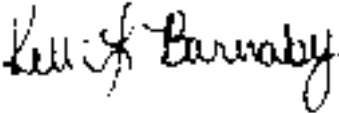
Barbara Early, Portsmouth resident, said that the City Council does not lack nerve and this is a great community with committed members.

V. RECESS PUBLIC HEARING UNTIL JUNE 8, 2005 AT 7:00 P.M.

Councilor Reynolds moved to recess the public hearing until Wednesday, June 8, 2005 at 7:00 p.m. Seconded by Councilor Marchand and voted.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

At 10:25 p.m., Councilor St. Laurent moved to adjourn. Seconded by Councilor Marchand and voted.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelli L. Barnaby". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "K".

Kelli L. Barnaby, City Clerk