

**COMMITTEE ON FINANCE,
SITTING AS A COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
MAY 24, 2018 AT 7:00 PM
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
WOBURN CITY HALL**

Voting Members:

Attending: Chair Michael Concannon, Alderman Michael Anderson, Alderman Mark Gaffney
Alderman Richard Gately, Alderman Lindsay Higgins, and Alderman Darlene Mercer-Bruen

Absent: Alderman Edward Tedesco, Alderman Joanne Campbell, and President Richard
Haggerty

Chairman Concannon said the City Council received the mayor's budget on Tuesday night, and that the Finance Committee would be meeting as a committee of the whole with the city's various department heads. Chairman Concannon said there have been a lot of moving parts and that the schedule for the budget hearings had to come together quickly. He said the Finance Committee would be meeting on the following nights: May 24, May 29, May 31 and June 7, and that the City Council's public hearing for the budget is scheduled for June 11. He said tonight's meeting would be comprised of discussions with six department heads.

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Veterans Services – Appearing was Director of Veterans Services Larry Guiseppe, who said Mayor Scott Galvin asked him to submit a level-funded budget, and that is what he provided. He said there are three notable differences from last year. He said the senior tax work off program line item has been reduced to zero, because the money will be coming out of the general fund. He said flags have become more expensive and this year he has paid nearly \$7,000 for flags, and that he usually has to borrow money to pay for flags. Director Guiseppe said the \$280,000 line item for veterans cash aid should last about six months and will likely need to be replenished in January. He said direct cash aid is reimbursed by the state at a 75 percent ratio. Alderman Gately asked why the part-time assistant's position received a \$4 per hour cut in pay. Director Guiseppe said his former assistant, Jennifer Murray, used to receive \$16 per hour for up to 19 hours before it affected her benefits. He said he has hired a new part-time assistant, Donna Kashian, and the city's Human Resources director and the mayor have indicated that she should start at a part-time wage of \$12 per hour. Alderman Gately asked what line item the flags are on. Director Guiseppe said there is a flags and graves line item for \$5,000 on page 52 of the budget. Director Guiseppe said he spends more than \$5,000 on burial ground flags, and that he tries to do everything within the restrictions of the budget. Alderman Gately asked how many veterans are receiving cash aid. Director Guiseppe said he has had eight new cases this month. He said he is spending about \$40,000 per month on cash aid. Alderman Gately told Director Guiseppe that he is doing a good job, that the veterans need him, and that the city needs him. Chairman Concannon asked Director Guiseppe if it is still his desire to hire a full-time assistant. Director Guiseppe said that at this time, he is satisfied with a part-time assistant, and that everything that needs to get done gets done. Chairman Concannon said he appreciates Director Guiseppe's honesty. Alderman Higgins asked what activities the Veterans Services office is planning for Memorial Day weekend, in case anyone watching on local cable television is watching. Director Guiseppe said on Friday he

and volunteers from the American Legion will be decorating graves of veterans buried at Calvary Cemetery. He said all the graves of veterans in both Woburn and Winchester in the cemetery are decorated because there are people from Woburn buried in the section of the cemetery in Winchester. On Saturday, the graves at Woodbrook Cemetery and the First and Second Burial Grounds will be decorated. On Monday, there will be a parade from St. Charles Church to Woburn Common and then to Woodbrook Cemetery.

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Treasurer/Collector - Appearing were Treasurer/Collector Timothy Donovan and Deputy Treasurer/Collector Alex Dizio. Treasurer/Collector Donovan said there have been a couple of changes in personnel over the current fiscal year, with one staff member moving to a different department and another staff member taking a job in another community. The two positions were filled in November and January, according to Treasurer/Collector Donovan, and the office staff is now full. Treasurer/Collector Donovan said on-line payments have been changed to a different provider which offers more options for the taxpayers, including the ability to pay by phone or text and look up their bill history. He said there are not a lot of changes to the budget. There are a couple of line items, payroll fees and lock box fees, that have increased by \$1,000 each. He said Affordable Care Act requirements have also caused some additional expenses each year. He said the increase in lock box fees is due to a combination of different processes and inflation. He said fees for tax title takings are reduced because the city does not have to pay anything until the cases are closed. Treasurer/Collector Donovan said otherwise his budget is status quo. Alderman Gately praised Treasurer/Collector Donovan and his staff for doing a good job as usual. Alderman Gately asked how much is owed in back taxes. Treasurer/Collector Donovan said the current amount of owed back taxes is about \$2.6 million, which is down from \$5 million-\$6 million a few years ago. He said the amount has stabilized at \$2.6 million. He said the city hires attorneys that help work on the cases in land court, and that the city is no longer allowing residents to accrue large sums of back property taxes, because when they let it go for too long, they get buried. Chairman Concannon noted there are line items for a principal clerk and a senior clerk in the budget and asked if they are new positions. Treasurer/Collector Donovan said everyone in the office works very hard and very well, and there are a lot of new things the staff is doing. He said there is no cause to add two new people but sometimes it feels like they could use someone else. Alderman Anderson asked how \$2.6 million compares to the percentage of back taxes owed. Treasurer/Collector Donovan said he estimates there are about 200 accounts in arrears. He said some of the unpaid accounts are going to stay in tax title because there is contaminated land involved. Treasurer/Collector Donovan said a contaminated parcel in the Commerce Way area was recently auctioned off and the buyer took it. Alderman Anderson asked if the city still gets paid in an instance when contaminated land is sold. Treasurer/Collector Donovan said the city was able to close off that particular account. He said he would have to check but he thinks the percentage of accounts in tax title is similar to the percentages in Burlington and Winchester. Alderman Anderson said the number of accounts in tax title is probably the best way to look at it.

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Planning Dept./Woburn Redevelopment Authority – Appearing was Planning Director Tina Cassidy who said the Planning office may be small, but there is no shortage of work. She said

her budget is pretty simple. She said there are no new line items, though a couple of line items did get some tweaking. She said one line item that was cut was for subscriptions and dues, and that money can be recouped by moving some money from other accounts as needed. She said she put in for more money for legal ads because of the number of public hearings that need to be advertised. She said the fees for the permit applications are for advertising, so the applicants pay instead of the taxpayers, and sometimes the account has run in the red. She said the cost depends upon the number of hearings there are per year. Alderman Gately said there were \$50,000 budgeted for consultants last year and it has been dropped down by \$5,000 this year. Director Cassidy said she had some specific things which required the hiring of consultants that she does not anticipate spending money on this year. Alderman Gately asked if \$45,000 in the line item is workable. Director Cassidy said it is. Alderman Anderson noted the actual budget this year for consultants is \$125,000. Director Cassidy said consultants were paid \$25,000 for work on a Four Corners drainage issue, and \$6,000-\$7,000 for economic development study of the New Boston Street area. Alderman Anderson asked if the latter study is related to the New Boston Street bridge. Director Cassidy said the bridge is expected to open in 2021, and in advance of that the city wanted to talk to people in the area about what they plan to do. She said there will be a follow-up meeting later in the year. She said a study of the Commerce Way area is on-going. Chairman Concannon asked if there is an update to the truck route study. Director Cassidy said funding for the study was issued as part of the city's capital improvement plan and the city is ready to sign a contract. She said the study will take about nine months to complete. The study will provide an analysis about that is happening today and present the city with information about potential truck routes.

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Engineering - Appearing was City Engineer John Corey, who thanked Director Cassidy for all the time she has worked with the metropolitan planning organization. Engineer Corey said the Engineering Dept. continues to work on two substantial projects – the Montvale Avenue corridor widening project and the reconstruction of the New Boston Street bridge, which will require aggregate funding of more than \$20 million. Engineer Corey said his departmental budget is level-funded and any projects initiated by the Engineering Dept. are usually funded through a capital improvements budget. He said the Montvale Avenue corridor widening project has been in the works for 18 years and confirmed the New Boston Street bridge is expected to open in 2021. Engineer Corey said his office working in concert with the DPW plans to pave 100 roads in the next five years, and he will be coming to the council to seek local funding for any work that is not covered by state Chapter 90 road improvements money. He said new parking lots have been added by Library Place and along Main Street at the former Strand Theater block. He said Eversource needs to move some utility poles before the Main Street lot is opened. Engineer Corey said his office is involved in the 11th year of cleaning and relining pipes in the city's water distribution system. Alderman Gately asked about a \$2,500 line item for Tier 2 Classification remediation work. Engineer Corey said the money will be used to submit a report regarding the cleanup of Leland Park, and added he is confident this is the last year the city will have to submit an environmental report about the project. Alderman Gately asked about a reduction in the GIS equipment and maintenance line item. Engineer Corey said he will have to find another way to fund the line item and said he does not see that as being problematic. Engineer Corey noted former Senior Engineering Aide Brett Gonsalves left for a job in Danvers and he has been replaced by Matthew Barrett, who he said is marvelous and has reduced the department's need for outside consultants. Alderman Gately asked if the city has been consulted about a project to

clean the Aberjona River. Engineer Corey said Woburn is on the periphery and it is more of an EPA project. Chairman Concannon asked about the timeline for the opening of the Main Street parking lot. Engineer Corey replied he expects the lot will open within a month, after some minor modifications are made.

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Recreation – Appearing was Recreation Director Rory Lindstrom, who said her budget has been level funded since Wellness Coordinator Brian Nagle was hired in 2012. She said summer programs start in less than a month, and the department is undertaking improvements to the field at the Clapp School and resurfacing the tennis courts at Library Park. Director Lindstrom also said she expects the new dog park to open in the fall. Alderman Gately said Director Lindstrom is doing a great job and asked about a reduction in the line item for custodians from \$33,000 to \$23,000. Director Lindstrom said the department spends close to \$96,000 on custodians when the facilities as the schools are used and any shortfall comes out of a revolving fund. She said overtime rates for custodians are increasing and she will have to raise the program rates if the cost of overtime increases. Director Lindstrom said she does not think the increases in the program rates will be drastic. Alderman Gately asked about a reduction in the maintenance budget. Director Lindstrom said she had requested a sand filter for the pool in East Woburn, which she said will need to be replaced but she expects the filter can make it through the summer. Alderman Mercer-Bruen asked if there are any safety concerns at the pool in East Woburn. Director Lindstrom said there will be a little bit more sand, but the water will still be clean and safe to swim in. Alderman Gaffney asked about the status of the dog park. Director Lindstrom said a grant has been submitted for the hiring of a landscape architect and once the plans are drawn she will seek funding for the park itself, which will be located in the outfield at Ferullo Field. Director Lindstrom said there was a public meeting in February and it was determined Ferullo Field was the best location for the dog park. She said the playground and the pool will be far enough away from the dog park to avoid conflicts. Alderman Gately asked about the issues with softball at Library Park. Director Lindstrom said she has addressed those issues with the men’s softball league, but there will always be players in the league who don’t listen and won’t follow the rules. She said she does not believe there were too many issues with the softball league last year. Alderman Gately asked what time the lights are turned off at Library Field. Director Lindstrom said the lights are turned off at 11 p.m. and she is still trying to get a timer because sometimes the police are preoccupied if they are out on a call or booking a prisoner. She said all 48 bulbs on the lights at Library Park have been replaced and hopefully in a couple of years the city can re-lamp with LED lights, which will save the city some money. Alderman Gately said he hopes it will be a peaceful year at Library Park. Director Lindstrom said she also hopes it is a peaceful year. Alderman Gately said Library Park is now in his ward and he did not receive a lot of complaints last year.

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Fire Department – Appearing was Fire Chief Stephen Adgate. Chairman Concannon said he has consulted with the state Ethics Commission about any potential conflicts regarding whether a member of the City Council may participate in discussions involving a municipal department in which a family member is employed. Chairman Concannon said he was told he may participate in budget discussions but he should abstain from voting on the page of the budget on which his family member’s name appears. He said this is the situation he is in with the Woburn Fire Dept.

Chief Adgate said the Fire Dept.'s budget is level-funded except for contractually-obligated line items. Alderman Gately noted the following cuts were made by the mayor: \$15,000 to overtime/reserve; \$10,000 to 16th man overtime; \$10,000 to sick leave buy back. Alderman Gately asked how many ambulances are in service during the weekends. Chief Adgate said there is one ambulance on the weekends. Alderman Gately asked if there ought to be two ambulances working on weekends. Chief Adgate said the city would have to come up with the payroll to run a second ambulance and the mayor will have to determine the risk assessment. He said his role is to provide the best service he can provide to the city of Woburn. He said the debate about running a second ambulance on weekends will go on. Alderman Gately asked how many ambulance runs the Fire Dept. makes. Chief Adgate said there about 8,000 calls, about 6,500 of which result in runs. He said there are about 4,500-5,000 EMS calls per year. Alderman Gately asked about the impact of between 800-1,000 residential units that are expected to be built in the coming years. Chief Adgate said the department will have to assess the location and number of the units, which are expected at the old Atlantic Gelatin site and Lexington Street. He said the growth of the city is a concern to the department. Alderman Gately said the Fire Dept. is going to have its work cut out for it. Alderman Gaffney asked about the potential acquisition of turnout gear, noting the council's Liaison Committee earlier this month hosted a presentation from a member of the state fire academy that addressed the health hazards of firefighters not being equipped with a second set of turnout gear. Chief Adgate said turnout gear will be part of the capital budget. Chief Adgate said turnout gear has a 10-year shelf life and the department is trying to get two sets of turnout gear for each firefighter. He said turnout gear is of utmost importance and the acquisition of a second set for each firefighter is going to get done. Alderman Higgins asked which fire station is closest to Commerce Way. Chief Adgate said right now the closest station is Engine #2 in North Woburn, with Engine #4 in East Woburn right behind. He said the city will need to look into another fire station in the Commerce Way area if the residential population continues to expand. Alderman Higgins said the city might want to look into an outpost building for fire and police in that area. Chief Adgate said he is open to any and all ideas. Alderman Anderson referenced the expected ambulance receipts of \$825,000 listed on page 25 of the budget and asked if receipts would double with a second ambulance. Chief Adgate said he would have to look into it but reiterated the call volume is an indication a second ambulance is warranted. Chairman Concannon said he is happy to hear about the turnout gear because the presentation from the representative from the state fire academy was eye-opening.

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Motion made by Alderman Mercer-Bruen and seconded by Alderman Campbell that the meeting be ADJOURNED, all in favor, 9-0. The meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Attest: _____

Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees