

**CITY OF WOBURN
CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
As a Committee of the Whole
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 5, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
WOBURN CITY HALL**

Voting Members present: Chair Charles Viola, Councilor Joseph Demers, Councilor Robert Ferullo, Councilor Joanne Campbell, President Jeffrey Dillon, Councilor Robert Toro, Councilor William Pappalardo, Councilor Lou DiMambro, and Councilor Darlene Mercer-Bruen

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Discussion of the FY 2025 Budget: Inspectional Services – Representing the Inspectional Services Dept. was Building Commissioner Thomas C. Quinn Jr. Commissioner Quinn said his departmental budget is pretty straightforward. He said all items in the maintenance and operations sections are level funds except for an additional \$1,000 for academic courses for training for new personnel. He said any salary increases are contractual. He said there is a vacant Building Inspector's position. He said it is funded for half the year. He said finding qualified Building Inspectors is difficult. He said the \$41,000 in the budget is for provisional staff, consisting of two part-time inspectors who work 15-18 hours a week. He said there is also some money for overtime for the secretarial staff. He said he is very happy with the way the office operates. Councilor DiMambro thanked Commissioner Quinn for everything he does. He said the help he provides is invaluable. He said the Building Dept. staff does a phenomenal job. He said he will be voting in favor of this budget. Commissioner Quinn said it is a team effort. He said there has been some transition with staff over the past year with the addition of a new Building Inspector and a new Plumbing Inspector. He said his office communicates frequently with the City Council. He said the council understands the department's manpower issues. He thanked the council for its support last year. Councilor Mercer-Bruen thanked Commissioner Quinn for everything. She said she appreciates Commissioner Quinn's creativity in the office with the contract help. She said it is a struggle to find good help. She said she asked Commissioner Quinn about receipts. She said she knows things are slowing down. She said Boston is struggling. She said the state is struggling. She said she is concerned about it. She asked Commissioner Quinn to paint her a picture of where the city is with permits. Commissioner Quinn said from January to March 2023 there were 371 building permits issued generating revenue of \$401,000. He said from January to March 2024 there were 389 building permits issued generating fees of \$795,000. He said, however, one project on Mill Street accounts for \$350,000 in fees. He said if you took that one project out, the revenue would be the same as last year. He said that is seen across the board. He said there are some blips but overall the commercial sector has flat lined. He said residential growth is down. He said they know this because they are in the field doing inspections. He said the Vale and Polti projects have been closed out on their end and he is not aware of anything else on the commercial end. Councilor Mercer-Brien said there are a lot of things that have been permitted but the city does not get any benefit until there is a shovel in the ground. Councilor Toro said he wants to echo the comments from Councilor Mercer-Bruen and Councilor DiMambro. He said Commissioner Quinn's office does an amazing job. He said he deals with the Building Dept. on a daily basis and everyone in the office is super responsive. He

said the fill-in help has been great. He said he appreciates the Building Dept. on both a City Council and a customer service level. Commissioner Quinn said his office takes a team approach. He said they all show up and they do their job. President Dillon said Commissioner Quinn and his team do a great job. He told Commissioner Quinn to keep it up. He said the office is doing great. He asked Commissioner Quinn to update the committee about compliance with the energy code. Commissioner Quinn said a lot of people aren't going to be happy. He said they are trying to get projects logged in for further review before the uptick. He said how it plays out will be interesting over the next 10-15 years. Councilor Pappalardo said Commissioner Quinn and his office have been phenomenal. He said he calls the Building Dept. with questions and they always have an answer. **Information Technology** – Representing the Information Technology Dept. was IT Director David Mastronardi. Director Mastronardi wished his son a happy birthday. He said his son turned nine. He thanked his children and his wife for their patience while he works long hours. He said he cannot say enough about what the IT staff has accomplished at City Hall and other sites. He said it is great working with the mayor and the City Council. He said in 2024 the IT Dept. received a state grant of \$105,000 dedicated to standardization. He said there is not much change to the budget. He said there are a couple of minor increases. He said there is a \$10,000 increase in the Munis Consulting account, an additional \$10,000 for Computer Programs, and an additional \$1,000 for emergency needs. Councilor DiMambro said the IT Dept. does a great job. He asked how secure the city is. Director Mastronardi said the staff puts a lot of time and effort into security. He said the cybersecurity dynamic has changed a lot. He said almost every system has been changed. He said the department is constantly thinking about security. He said it is a never-ending effort. He said they do really good with what they have. He said he thinks the city is in a good position. Councilor DiMambro asked if data retrieval is well-protected. Director Mastronardi said they are trying to be proactive. President Dillon said the IT Dept. does a great job. He said these are critical positions. He said the IT staff has to be aware of changes on an everyday basis. He said it is important to protect the records and information of residents. He said other towns have had problems and it is paralyzing them. Councilor Pappalardo said he worked in the tech sector for many years. He said one security break will paralyze all operations. He said he thinks the IT staff is doing a great job. Councilor Campbell said it seems like a lot of items in the IT budget are going up and asked if there is a reason. Director Mastronardi said there is a \$21,000 increase in the maintenance budget from the previous year. He said it is pretty close to the previous year. Councilor Campbell said the council may need to find pennies here and there in the budget and asked Director Mastronardi if he needs these increases. Director Mastronardi said the operating costs for some items affect all city departments. He said Munis operates throughout the city. He said this is an annual increase. Councilor Campbell said everything is going up. Councilor Toro said he supports the IT budget. He thanked Director Mastronardi and his staff for what they do. **Veterans Services** - Representing the Office of Veterans Services was Veterans Agent Robert Davis. Agent Davis thanked the members of the City Council who showed up to the Memorial Day event. He said his budget is essentially level funded except for an increase on the United Veterans Council page. He said there is an increase in the flags and graves line item due to an increase in costs. President Dillon thanked Agent Davis for holding a beautiful Memorial Day program. He said there is a debt that can never be repaid to veterans. He asked Agent Davis to tell the council about a grant the Office of Veterans Services received. Agent Davis said his office received a \$130,000 donation from the South End Italian Club. He said it is a very generous grant. He said he truly appreciates the club's donation and it will be put into a

revolving account. He said the money from the SEIC donation will be used to serve veterans who need assistance but fall below the threshold for being eligible for direct cash aid. He said he cannot thank the SEIC members enough for their incredible contribution. **Parks** – Representing the Parks Dept. was Parks Supt. James DeLong. Supt. DeLong asked if any members of the committee have questions. Councilor DiMambro asked Supt. DeLong what he needs. Supt. DeLong said he needs everything. Supt. DeLong said manpower is the key. He said the department is finally getting back to where it should be in terms of manpower. He said the ordinance calls for seven full-time workers in the Park Dept. He said at least they are getting back to six. He said since they have been responsible for the school grounds as well as the parks. He said maintenance of all those fields takes time and diligence. He said his guys work really hard. He said they do the best they can. He said his men are very dedicated. He said they have only five full-time men. He said there is no part-time help. He said the whole thing is staggering to think about. He said they take care of 80 acres of land. He said his men make the fields look great. He said there are between 18-20 areas and they all look superlative. He said in March he received an award as New England Sports Turf Manager of the Year. He said that's not because of him, it's because of his men. He said that award meant so much to him and his men. He said there are other towns that don't take care of their grounds properly. He said Woburn does. He said Mayor Concannon is trying to help him out by funding a new position. He said it's going to help. President Dillon thanked Supt. DeLong for what he does. He said he knows Supt. DeLong has great people. He said he also sees him working in the morning on weekends. He said Supt. DeLong and his staff are dedicated. He said he is glad to see the staff is being increased. He said he wishes he could do more. He said Supt. DeLong is one of a kind. Councilor Campbell said she is so happy Supt. DeLong is getting another laborer. She thanked him for his dedication. She said it's been years but the city finally got him someone to help. She asked if a 7-person crew is realistic. She said she hopes another laborer can be added next year. Supt. DeLong said since 1999 the Parks Dept. has taken care of the school grounds. He said there is enough work for 10 people. He said he sees things every day that get neglected, but there just isn't time to do everything. He said maybe it is time to look at the agreement with the School Dept. again. Councilor Campbell said the Parks Dept. does a tremendous job. She congratulated Supt. DeLong on his award. She said Mayor Concannon is to be commended for adding another laborer to the budget. She said she will push for another laborer next year. Councilor Pappalardo said Supt. DeLong is a victim of his own success. He said the fields are always well-maintained. He thanked Supt. DeLong for what he does. Councilor Ferullo thanked Supt. DeLong for all he does. Chair Viola thanked Supt. DeLong and his department for all they do. Supt. DeLong said he is 90 percent sure he is going to be retiring at the end of 2024. He said there are going to be changes. **Auditor Dept.** – Representing the Auditor Dept. was City Auditor Charles Doherty. Auditor Doherty said his departmental budget is pretty much level funded. He thanked the staff for its hard work. He said there is a lot of time and effort put in. He said the addition of the Deputy Auditor has been helpful and has brought stability to the office. He said Deputy Auditor Sabrina Homem is doing a fantastic job. He said she is fitting in well. He said there is a new position of budget analyst that is budgeted but has not been filled. He said they are trying to identify someone for the position. He said one of the issues will be finding space in their office. He said he is looking forward to filling that position during the year. He said local receipts are on target. He said they are better than expected and coming back to pre-Covid levels as far as hotel/motel taxes, meals taxes and permits are concerned. He said right now the numbers have been holding strong. He said the WuStat program has been very successful. He said it allows the

administration to identify and assess the needs of municipal departments. He said the DPW, Fire and Police among others have found it to be useful. He said overall the departmental budget has gone up in two line items. President Dillon thanked Auditor Doherty and the employees in his department. He said anytime the city can fund a position that analyzes the budget he thinks that is money well-spent. He said he thinks Auditor Doherty is of like minds with members of the council in that they have the best interests of the taxpayers in mind. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she wants to echo President Dillon's comments. She said she has known Auditor Doherty since he was a councilor and remembers when he was President of the City Council. She remembers late budget meetings that went until after 1 a.m. She said Auditor Doherty is thorough and passionate about his work. She said things change so quickly. She said he is always so transparent. She said she appreciates everything. She said she worries about the long-term impact of the economy on local receipts. Auditor Doherty said Woburn people are still an important component of the meals tax. He said Woburn's hotels are affordable compared to hotels in Boston and serve as an alternative. She said Woburn really relies on those receipts. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said the schools the city built with taxpayers money were in no small part due to the efforts of Auditor Doherty. She said he is responsible for that. She said she is not sure people at home know that. Councilor DiMambro said he wants to echo the comments of his previous councilors. He said he thanks Auditor Doherty so much. He said Auditor Doherty serves an important role and he is good at it. Auditor Doherty said he wants to thank Administrative Assistant Gail Freeman. He said Ms. Freeman is the person most people see first when they walk into the office, and she has an ability to work with different departments. He said she also bakes cookies for the employees in the building every Thursday. He said he also wants to take a moment to recognize Head Clerk Sheila McElhiney for her efforts. **Woburn Public Library** – Representing the Woburn Public Library was Director Hermayne Gordon. Director Gordon offered a presentation with visual aids on the overhead projector. said there has been a huge increase in library patronage over the last calendar year. She said the community prefers in-person programming. She said there is a buzz in the community about the library. She said programming is at an all-time high. She said the library has goals for FY '25. She said the library received a grant from the Cummings Foundation. She said there is an emphasis on public/private partnerships. She said the library has relationships with community groups like Social Capital Inc., the Woburn Boys & Girls Club, and the Recreation Dept. She said there have been staff development conferences. She said the Friends of the Woburn Public Library group is back. She said the Woburn Public Library Foundation has been helpful with program funding. She said Woburn Rotary recently donated a defibrillator. She said the library also has a relationship with Woburn Public Schools. She said it is important for students to have library cards. She said the library has a summer reading program. She said Asst. Library Director Megan Kass worked hard to get the grant from the Cummings Foundation. She said as far as trends are concerned, everything is up – visits, programs, attendance, etc. She said there are some staffing needs. She said the library has to make sure there are 6-8 staff members available to the public at all times. She said Woburn has a lot less staff to work with than libraries at some surrounding communities. She said Woburn is on the short side when it comes to professionals in the building. She said it is not always easy but Woburn does have the best staff. She said she looked at what percentage of the budget goes to the library. She said last year it was 0.89 percent and this year it will be a little more than 1 percent. She said that is a good trend. She said the Children's Dept. is open 65 hours a week. She said there needs to be two staff members in the Children's Dept. at all times. She said there are two full-time staff members and three part-time

staff members in the department. She there are 10 departments in the library, two of which need leadership within the department itself. She said leadership is the key. She said that is how the library becomes a smooth-running operation. She said department heads have to attend network meetings through the Minuteman Network. She said each week the library offers 10 children's programs and 14 adult programs. She said there is a lot of behind-the-scenes programming. She said the library is fortunate that the Woburn Public Library supports programming. She said they have been having issues with teens in the library. She said just having someone there is helpful. She said the library has to account for staff absences due to vacations and sick leave. She said in February the library initiated a substitute pool. She said that has provided a lot of relief for staff.

Motion made by Councilor Ferullo and seconded by Councilor Demers to accept a printed version of Director Gordon's presentation and make it part of the permanent record; approved, 9-0. President Dillon said Director Gordon and her staff do a great job. He said he has been going to the library since he was a kid and it has always been a great place to go. He said since Director Gordon has taken over she has given the building a soul. He said you can sense the vibe. He said the programs are wonderful. He said he enjoys taking his grandkids to the library. He told Director Gordon to keep up the good work. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she wants to echo President Dillon's comments. She said it wasn't that long ago when they were having different conversations about the library. She said one of the slides in Director Gordon's presentation that stood out what about programming and how other cities and towns compare to Woburn. She said it is about quality and not quantity. She said Woburn is lucky in that regard. Councilor DiMambro said Director Gordon and her staff do an amazing job. He said the staff is unbelievable. He said the library is the epicenter of the community. Councilor Pappalardo thanked Director Gordon and her staff. He said they do a phenomenal job that is second to none.

Police – Representing the Police Dept. was Police Chief Robert Rufo. Chief Rufo said four recruits graduated from the police academy two weeks ago. He said staffing levels are keeping up with attrition. He said two years ago the police department received a \$100,000 grant to a drone program. He said there are five patrolmen involved in the program. He said a couple of weeks ago the drones responded to an incident in Townsend. He said drones operated by officers Minghella and Maher located an individual with dementia who was then rescued. He said he is thrilled the department has added a K9 unit. He said on Presidents Day the department was approved for a \$52,000 grant for the K9 program with a dog named Odin. He said Odin is about to complete the training program. He said Odin will assist the department with searches for bombs and drugs. He said the department is looking to add eight new positions. He said all new patrolmen must graduate from the academy before they are on the street. He said four officers are retiring in the next fiscal year. He said they are trying to keep up. President Dillon said Chief Rufo and his department do an awesome job. Chief Rufo said the city accommodates in excess of 200,000 people during the work day. President Dillon said people need to know that. He said the police department does incredible work. He said he does have to make a disclosure that he does have family members. He said Chief Rufo and officers are out there without regard for their safety. He said he will support the police department's budget. Councilor Toro thanked Chief Rufo and his officers. He said he is glad to see the new Deputy Chief has been hired. He said he and Chief Rufo had a conversation about staffing levels and the city's staffing level is similar to what it was in the 1980s before the population exploded. He said what the chief does with his staffing levels is incredible. Councilor Mercer-Bruen thanked Chief Rufo for everything. She said a lot of people read about what the police department does but a lot of things they do don't make it into the newspaper. She said on television police work looks glamorous, but it isn't

always that way. She said she would like to welcome new graduates to the academy with a ceremony at a City Council meeting, which was traditional before Covid. She said perhaps the new K9 could be introduced to the council. She said she misses those ceremonies. Councilor Demers said he wants to echo the comments of his fellow councilors. He said Woburn is an interesting community due to its proximity to Routes 93 and 95. He said he takes great pride with the way the police department steps up to protect the commuters who arrive here for work every day. He said the council has talked in the past about increasing pay for reserves. Chief Rufo said there is a court case about pay while the reserves are in the academy. He said the pay rate for reserves will continue to be discussed. Councilor Demers said entering the police academy is a big commitment. He said the city should be honoring that commitment. Councilor DiMambro said Chief Rufo and his team do unbelievable work. He said the amount of traffic that the department has to manage is incredible. He said he sleeps well at night knowing the city is well-protected. He said he is thrilled with the news about the K9 unit, drones and new recruits and will support this budget. Councilor Campbell said she is thrilled. She said every year she hopes the city will be getting more police, and now there are going to be eight new officers. She said that is wonderful. She said feels safer knowing there are more police officers. Chief Rufo said it is a gradual process. He said if they get eight recruits, they will still be down three. He said hiring is the most difficult component of the job. Councilor Ferullo commended the police department for the rescue in Townsend that involved the drone search. He said that call saved a life. He said the Woburn Police Dept.'s reputation is tremendous. He said the team Chief Rufo is putting together makes him feel proud. He said the job the police department does is tremendous. He said the chief is building a team that is phenomenal. Chair Viola said he is glad to see the department is getting a K9 unit. Chief Rufo said this will be the first time the department has had a dog since 1982. **Planning/Woburn Redevelopment Authority** – Representing the Planning Dept. and the Woburn Redevelopment Authority was Planning Director John Cashell. Councilor DiMambro welcomed Director Cashell back to Woburn. He said he has enjoyed working with Director Cashell for the past three months. He said he appreciates everything Director Cashell is doing. He said he and Director Cashell have had some good conversations. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she agrees with Councilor DiMambro. She said she appreciates everything Director Cashell is doing. She said Director Cashell walked in to quite a bit. President Dillon said the city could not have hired a better guy to guide it through a difficult time. He said Director Cashell has a vision for Woburn. He said when he met with Director Cashell he said Woburn has to look into the future and he appreciates that. Councilor Demers asked what he expects from the new grant writer position. Director Cashell said the new grant writer was hired recently. He said the new grant writer is a former President of the Woburn City Council. He said the grant writer is more than qualified. He said he thinks the grant writer is going to be a fantastic fit. He said he has been impressed with the grant writer's work so far. He said he has also been impressed with the work of Asst. Planner Karen Smith and Economic Development Manager Casey Hagerty. He said Woburn is working aggressively to acquire grant funding. He said this is the most aggressive group of people he has worked with in general. He said he has been working with the city's delegation in the state legislature. He said state Rep. Richard Haggerty is a superstar working for Woburn. He said Rep. Haggerty really tries his best with what the city needs. He said grant writer Kevin McDonough comes to the position with a wealth of experience. He said Mr. McDonough is tuned in already. He said he does not want to cost the taxpayers. He said he wants the Planning Dept. to have a positive cash flow for the city. He said he has never seen a City Council that works as competently and professionally as this one. He said he is very proud to be

a part of it. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked how the grant writer's progress is going to be monitored. Director Cashell said there is a tally sheet that will be used to monitor the grant writer. He said the green communities program is a very important program. He said the grant writer is working with the DPW on a program that will make the department more energy efficient. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she looks forward to an update in a few months. Director Cashell said Ms. Hagerty and Ms. Smith worked diligently on grants before Mr. McDonough arrived. He said they were acting as grant writers and applied for every available grant. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said now that she understands there is a metric and that's what she is looking for. Director Cashell said the minimum is that he pays for what he is earning. He said the expectation is the grant writer will bring in a lot more. **Law** – Representing the Law Dept. was City Solicitor Mark Salvati. City Solicitor Salvati said the mayor asked him to join the team and he welcomed the invitation. He said there are seven union contracts to negotiate right out of the gate. He said it has been a learning experience. He said he has a good legal secretary in Theresa Borelli who has helped. He said he also learned a lot from former City Solicitor Ellen Callahan Doucette during the transition. He said he has dealt with just about every department in the city so far. President Dillon said he appreciates how cooperative City Solicitor Salvati has been. He said City Solicitor Salvati can take a difficult situation and break it down and explain it. He said he looks forward to working with City Solicitor Salvati. Councilor DiMambro said he also appreciates the ease with which City Solicitor Salvati is able to break things down and explain them. President Dillon said Ms. Borelli is an excellent person who works hard. **Human Resources** – Representing the Human Resources Dept. was Human Resources Director Shawna Healey. Director Healey said she relies on Administrative Assistant Karen Crawford. Director Healey said there have been 41 full-time and part-time hires. She said the department has received a wellness grant of \$11,000. She said the department sponsored a training class for dealing with first amendment auditors and she thinks the staff really appreciated it. She said a new insurance plan was introduced. She said 20 retirees changed to that plan. She said there was an assessment center for the Deputy Police Chief, captains and lieutenants. She said she is working on seven union contracts, which she said hopefully will be settled this fiscal year. She said there is a small increase to the drug and alcohol testing line item and pre-employment physicals line items. President Dillon thanked Director Healey and Ms. Crawford. He said they do an important duty. He said the City Council does not get to deal with the HR Dept. on a regular basis but it is important that it is acknowledged. Councilor Ferullo thanked Director Healey for the enthusiasm she brings to the office. He said her efforts do not go unnoticed. **Engineering** – Representing the City Engineer's office was City Engineer John Corey. Engineer Corey said he had a meeting with the other department heads in the city and it reminded him that for the last 26 years he has worked with elite professionals. He said this year's budget has modest increases to the line items for software and vendors. Councilor DiMambro thanked Engineer Corey for everything. He said Engineer Corey's wealth of knowledge is unbelievable. He said every time he asked Engineer Corey a question he came up with the answer. He said he appreciates the support Engineer Corey and his staff gives him. Engineer Corey said he has been fortunate to have continuity in the office, first with Asst. City Engineer Greg Rheume and Brett Gonsalves and then with GIS Coordinator Matt Barrett. He said he relies on Mr. Rheume and Mr. Barrett. Councilor Mercer-Bruen thanked Engineer Corey for all he does. She said he has become the expert on storm water management. She said he has also become the council's traffic consultant. She said everyone has benefitted from his help. Engineer Corey said that is part of the job. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said people don't understand how difficult it can be wrangling with

all the city's partners. She said Engineer Corey handles this with class and patience. She said the other day she was reminiscing with her daughters about traffic issues and it reminded her of how long she and Engineer Corey have worked together. President Dillon said Engineer Corey, Mr. Rheaume and Mr. Barrett do incredible work. He said every time he goes into the City Engineer's office they find what he needs. He said the City Engineer's office has made him a better City Councilor. He said their support means a lot to him. Councilor Demers said he has worked with the City Engineer's office from the time he was a legislative aide at the State House to his tenure on the School Committee to the City Council and he has always appreciated the conversation he has had. He said he was always treated as a colleague even when he was a legislative aide. Chair Viola said when he calls the City Engineer's office he always receives an answer and thanked Engineer Corey for that. Engineer Corey said he looks forward to working with the new grant writer. He said his office has been able to obtain a number of grants. He said he has known Mr. McDonough for 30 years. He said Mr. McDonough is going to be very good. He said he has also known Director Cashell for 30 years.

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MOTION made by Councilor Demers and seconded by Councilor Ferullo to adjourn; all in favor, 9-0. Chair Viola adjourned the meeting at 8:13 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD ATTEST

Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees