MEMORANDUM

TO: RTM Members
FROM: Tom Byrne
DATE: May 19, 2020
RE: Procedure at June Budget Meeting

In preparation for our budget meeting on Monday, June 8, I would like to review some procedural matters.

Item 3 on the Call is the BET Proposed Budget which is before the RTM for approval. The Town Charter provides that the RTM may approve the recommended appropriations in full, it may reduce a line item appropriation, or it may eliminate an appropriation in its entirety (with certain limitations). The RTM may not increase an appropriation above the number recommended by the BET.

Because the recommended appropriations constitute the “main motion” before the RTM, any attempt to reduce or eliminate an appropriation is treated as a motion to amend. In order to reduce the possibility of confusion, our practice in the RTM has been to prohibit “secondary” amendments. That is, if a motion to amend has been moved and seconded, we do not allow a motion to amend the pending motion to amend. We have found that members become confused as to what they are voting on when we have allowed such secondary amendment motions to be made.

If a member or committee moves to reduce an appropriation from $100 to $40, we would not allow another member to make a motion to amend the amount of the reduction while we are dealing with the original amendment. For example, after the motion to reduce to $40 has been moved and seconded, but before a vote on the amendment has been taken, a second member would not be permitted to try to amend the motion to amend to reduce the appropriation to only $70. However, if the reduction to $40 is adopted, the second member would be permitted to offer a motion to increase the appropriation to $70. In this way, everyone should know exactly what is before us, and no one is denied an opportunity to seek a proper change in the amount of the final appropriation.

In the example above, the second member’s motion to increase the appropriation from $40 to $70 does not run afoul of the prohibition on increasing appropriations. That prohibition merely prohibits the RTM from raising the appropriation above the number recommended by the BET, in this example, $100.

At our April 20 meeting, we extended the deadline by which we must adopt a budget to June 14. If that deadline is not met, either because we do not take a final vote on the budget, or there is not a majority vote in favor of a budget, the Charter provides the budget as recommended by the BET will take effect. That means that if a majority of members is opposed to the BET Proposed Budget, it must adopt a budget by June 14. To be clear, we will take a final vote on item 3 after going through the line items and making adjustments here and there.
there. If a majority of the members present and voting vote no on the final budget as amended, we will not have adopted a budget, and the BET Recommended Budget would take effect, absent some further action by the RTM prior to June 15.

Over the years, there have been a variety of different attempts to amend the budget resolution that have been considered not to be in legal order by our Law Department. Pursuant to those opinions, a motion to reduce must identify specific line items (Major Account Codes) to be reduced. A motion cannot target “all line items in the budget”, without identifying each line item targeted. The motion must also state the exact dollar amount to which an appropriation is being reduced. The motion cannot merely contain a percentage reduction.

Pursuant to the Charter, RTM approval of a bonding resolution must be by a majority of the membership of the RTM (116 members). The practical effect of that requirement is that anyone who does not attend the June meeting is effectively voting against the bonding resolution. This “majority of the membership” requirement does not apply to approval of the appropriations for the coming fiscal year.

All members should understand that the operative document for item 3 is the section in the budget materials sent out by the Finance Department titled "RTM." It is the last section in that budget document, and it consists of 40 numbered pages with a date of 4/27/2020 on the bottom of each page. On online copy of the document can be found here:

https://www.greenwichct.gov/DocumentCenter/View/15210/Proposed-Budget-2020-2021

The 40 pages of this operative RTM document begin on page 307 of this online document.

When we reach item 3 on the Call, I will begin going through the Major Object Codes one by one beginning on page 1 of that document (Code 101 -- Representative Town Meeting, 102 -- Ethics, 103 -- Historic District Commission, etc.). If a committee, district, or individual member has a motion to reduce addressed to a particular Code, that motion needs to be made when I call the Code. After we reach Code 834 -- Harbor Management Commission, on page 23, we will take up any amendments to the language of the Budget Resolutions that begin on page 26.

We hope to have that budget document on our screen as we go page by page through it. Absent special circumstances, once I have passed an account in the budget document, it is not my intention to return to it to entertain a motion to reduce (i.e., amend).

After disposing of all motions to amend item 3, we will take a final vote on the budget as amended.

I hope the above discussion is helpful in educating you as to the procedure that will be followed at our budget meeting on June 8. Given the limitations in our new remote setting, it is more important than ever to have advance notice of any attempts to change the BET recommendations. If you are planning to make a motion directed to item 3 you are strongly urged to raise that motion with a committee.

Given the time limitations we have found ourselves under in these remote meetings, we want to free up as much time for discussion as we can. It is the consensus of the RTM leadership that our practice of hearing committee reports at the beginning of the budget meeting (taking an hour or more) is not a productive use of our time. All committee reports will be distributed in advance of the meeting and placed on the RTM website.

I hope that the above discussion will help you anticipate the general format of that part of the meeting directed to the budget. As you know, we had to include other business on the June Call given the disruptions that have occurred. We will take up and dispose of the budget before proceeding with those other items.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.