

Council

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year's budget to 4.7 percent. The change in the tax levy is below the state-mandated 5-percent cap and would result in a projected 4.1-percent tax rate increase.

A reserve of \$3.1 million, more than 15 percent of the total budget, would be maintained, according to Keiser.

Sav Rebecchi of Sail Street opined that with a 15-percent surplus in the town budget, he would like the town to consider returning some of the revenue to the people. "It's really from bad budgeting that we have an excess," he said.

Council president DiGiando responded that there were two sides to the argument saying, "It's important to be conservative in estimating revenues and expenses so that we don't leave ourselves short at the end of the year." DiGiando also cited one-time capital improvements needs that can be funded with the excess reserves. These projects only become more expensive if not taken care of in a timely fashion, he said.

Councilman Robert Sutton objected to the comment about bad budgeting. He suggested the town take a hard look at the capital budget, and consider taking on capital improvement projects that might not yet be high priority.

Fire and EMS run efficiently

Keiser presented the Town Council with a line item for a part-

time fire inspector, and he expressed satisfaction with the bottom line of the fire department, despite a \$1,200 increase to cover its fuel costs. In answer to a question about the fuel allowance, Fire Chief James Bryer said, "I'm hoping that if we run over a little, the town's not going to shut us down," sparking grins at the council table.

Susan Little of North Main Road questioned whether the alarm and radio line item could be eliminated with a centralized dispatch system. Chief Bryer said that the line item paid for internal communication channels not handled by a central dispatch.

DiGiando drew attention to the responsibility of the EMS director to "chase people with insurance to offset expenses." The EMS director noted the work was farmed out to a collection and billing service. Collections are not as high as originally anticipated, he added, saying, "We're lucky to collect 30 or 40 dollars for every \$100."

The town administrator said the town expected to receive about \$100,000, out of \$160,000 currently billable. He volunteered to talk with other communities to find out how they are doing with their collections. "We are carrying a substantially high level of uncollected funds." The town established an agreement with Newport Hospital through ComStar, a service that contacts hospitals for insurance information, he added.

EMS volunteer Ralph Aresti not-

ed that the EMS had a yearly operating cost close to a quarter of a million dollars. "Right now, for the year, that's about \$30 per person," he said. Nods at the impressively low figure floated through the room.

Recycling can offset expenses

The town administrator noted that the only increase for the waste removal budget was the operator's contractual raise. Keiser urged that recycling become more of a focus. "Every ton recycled is a direct benefit to the town. It's not only good for the environment, but we reduce our tipping costs by \$56 per ton."

Sutton asked for costs associated with the transfer station, saying that the facility should be paying for itself. "Whatever fees people pay should take care of the operating expenses. People who have their trash picked up curbside should not be subsidizing it," he commented.

DiGiando agreed and suggested looking at the whole operation. "It's time we revisited it. It's not getting any cheaper," he added.

Among other expenses addressed were street lighting expenses, cleaning and maintenance fees for public buildings.

Tree management is good insurance

Keiser praised Tree Warden Steve Saracino, who is also a certified state Department of Transportation arborist, for showing initiative with the tree committee in the tree planting program. "He's taken this all on with a passion," he said about

Saracino, and supported the request of the Tree Committee for an increase in stipend for the arborist's work from \$6,500 to \$7,500. "This will allow for additional hours," Keiser said.

Keiser also endorsed the Tree Committee's request for a tree inventory in the village area, as well as in the Shores area. "If there was a major hurricane, it's like having jewelry listed with your insurer. You have to document the losses. Many communities that have inventories will be way ahead of the game if we want to be considered for federal emergency assistance," Keiser said. The inventory is also used to schedule pruning and tree removal for disease control and safety, he explained.

Parks and Recreation sees increase in night hours

Referring to the increase in electricity expenses, Recreation Director William Piva expressed the hope to bring back night time sports activities to the island. He also said

he hoped to fill the program supervisor's position before the summer. He added that the teen center has been crowded, and the department has to do a personnel study. "We have 50 to 60 kids there on a Friday night. We need a clearer picture of how many people we will need to run the program," Piva said.

Szepatowski pointed out that the teen program was strongly run by volunteers. "We need to look closely at it in case a drop in volunteers occurs," she said. Szepatowski asked for a comparison of recreation maintenance staff pay levels in the Department of Public Works. "I would hate to see you lose the guys you have, they do extra all the time," the councilwoman said.

Sutton voiced support for the direction Piva was taking with recreation, and getting people out of the house. "Kids have to have those things as options," he said.

Council members noted the budget should be finalized by the meeting scheduled for April 28.

Martin

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assistant, a nurse, a couple of construction workers, it runs the gamut," Martin said. The women range from 4 feet 11 inches and 110 pounds to 6 feet 2 inches and 230 pounds, according to Martin. There are currently 25 players on the roster and the average age is in the mid-30s.

Martin will have a houseguest for the next three months. Suzanne Dubey of Switzerland will be spending the 2008 season visiting the U.S. and playing for Intensity. Last season, Intensity was 3-5, which was not where they wanted to be, after going to the playoffs in 2006 with a record of 7-1.

In women's professional football, there are three major leagues that are well known and Intensity is in the IWFL. There are 40 teams in the IWFL across the country and this season Intensity will travel to Montreal, Southern Maine, New Hampshire and Connecticut. The team practices twice a week and has been working

out at an indoor facility in Natick, Mass. for the past two months. They will move to the outdoor practice field in Hopkinton, Mass. as soon as weather allows. Games run from April through June and they are full contact and full gear with modified NFL rules.

As with the men, women's full contact football is not without risk of injury. Martin described her worst injury. "I dislocated and relocated my elbow as I went to tackle somebody. It relocated itself almost immediately. Thankfully we had two byes the next two weeks, so I took it easy. The next time we had practice I just wrapped it tight and kept playing. On a rainy damp day it aches like crazy."

Although the team has solid coaches and players, it is always looking for more women to try out. "Even though I am an outside linebacker, I play all sides of the ball because we have such a small roster. A lot of us will be playing offense, defense and special teams," said Martin. In addition, the team is always looking for more corporate sponsors and to grow the fan base.

Now, four years later, Martin can't say enough positives about her decision to try out for the team. "It is a great outlet for stress. I was looking for football to reconnect me to being an athlete and it has given me so much more. I could not get the same thing from going out and playing softball and that used to be my favorite sport."

In their season opener this weekend, Martin and Intensity will travel to Connecticut to play the Cyclones.

For more information about the team, visit www.newenglandintensity.com.

MURPHY'S LAW

The *neo-cons* serving in government, and working in the media appear to be unworthy successors to William F. Buckley and Barry Goldwater.

The terms *conservative* and *liberal* have been so distorted and re-defined as to be virtually useless in most political discourse today. It is an "Alice In Wonderland" world when the darlings of both ends of the political spectrum adopt the policies and techniques of their opposites.

Regionalization and metropolitan consolidation must be considered now in Rhode Island. The infrastructure of thirty-nine separate municipal governments is too much a burden for taxpayers.

Instead of cutting services to needy citizens, our leaders should look at their own fiefdoms, and start serious pruning there. Those who have received much from our community should show altruism, volunteerism, and self-sacrifice, rather than picking upon the weakest members of society.

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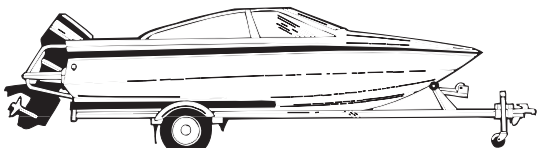
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