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NEWS ARTICLE: MASHPEE TRIBE PLANS SPENDING
\$30 MILLION IN 2012, CAPENEWS.NET
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Mashpee Tribe Plans Spending \$30 Million In 2012

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A budget released by the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Council, calling for more than \$30 million in spending for 2012, offers the most detailed look since federal recognition into the tribe's finances.

The overall budget includes \$16 million of revenue from investors, money that has been loaned to the tribe through a casino deal and will need to be repaid, as well as a \$9.7 million loan from the US Department of Agriculture and \$4.6 million in revenue from federal grants.

The tribe projects spending more than \$6 million on "gaming predevelopment," or 39 percent of the total 2012 loan spending from Arkana Limited, an affiliate of Genting Group and the Malaysian firm funding the tribe's pursuit of a casino and other operations.

Other money from the investors is proposed to go to dozens of different local projects and programs, including \$2.4 million for "tribal government operations" and \$2 million for a tribal government center.

The investors' loan will also pay for smaller programs, like \$52,860 for the food pantry, \$100,000 for the Mashpee Wampanoag Scholarship Fund, \$144,810 for the historic preservation department, and \$224,054 for the Indian Child Welfare Act program, leaving the stamp of the investors' financial backing on departments across tribal government.

The annual Mashpee Wampanoag Pow Wow is set to receive \$42,745 from the investors, or 42 percent of the event's total budget.

The tribal council, the elected government of the approximately 2,600-member tribe, presented its annual budget to tribe members at a meeting last weekend. A copy of the more than 100-page document, which includes spending by category for grants and other programs, was provided to the Enterprise by tribe members. The budget is the tribe's spending plan for Fiscal Year 2012, which coincides with the calendar year.

The budget offers a glimpse into the tribe's priorities as it begins to take full advantage of federal recognition and prepares to select a casino site, an expected announcement that will set off a series of legal negotiations with the state government.

Cedric Cromwell, chairman of the tribal council, declined a request to answer questions from the Enterprise about the budget.

According to tribe members who attended the Sunday general tribal body meeting, the budget was delivered to tribe members a few days in advance of the meeting. The budget was strongly backed in a vote of the approximately 150 tribe members at the meeting.

The tribe's constitution requires the tribal council to make an annual budget presentation to members, but,

according to several members, this year marked the first time a formal budget, with a detailed accounting of revenue and expenses, has been presented.

According to a letter from Mr. Cromwell sent with the budget to tribal households, the tribal government last year made significant progress in financial reporting and accounting to enable the budget presentation. The government implemented the use of Sage, a financial software program, and hired a comptroller to oversee the finance department and create procedures to track the tribe's financial status.

"I commend Treasurer Mark Harding for his excellent leadership of our dedicated Finance Department and the vision and strategy implemented to oversee this department and ultimately achieve this comprehensive budget," Mr. Cromwell wrote.

David L. Pocknett Sr., a former vice chairman of the tribal council, said in an interview this week that the presentation of the budget marked a "big step forward" for the tribe. However, he said the process still had several shortcomings, including not giving tribe members adequate time to ask questions about the budget before the scheduled vote and not providing detailed salary information on all tribal employees, as is done in the annual town report for municipal employees.

"I am not saying it is a bad or good budget. I am saying that I have questions, and I can't vote yes on a budget that I have questions on. What I am saying is, 'Explain to me why this is.' The more you explain to me why this is, the more I am okay with it," he said.

Some tribe members have concerns about the increasing spending, he said.

To the question of what happens to the tribe's finances if the casino does not go through, Mr. Pocknett said that inquiry should be addressed to Mr. Cromwell.

"For some reason, I think the attitude is that, if the casino doesn't come through, we don't owe anything. But in fact, that isn't true," he said. "In the last deal with South Africans, the deal was that if federal recognition didn't happen, if the casino didn't go through, we didn't owe them. They were going to view it more like venture capital that didn't work out. But this deal with the Malaysians is a loan. This deal has to be paid back. This isn't contingent on a casino."

"I am not trying to throw stones at that administration. I am not here to do any of that kind of stuff. I am just here as a concerned citizen of the tribe, trying to get answers to my questions," Mr. Pocknett said.

The budget proposes spending about \$11 million on professional and legal services, more than twice what was spent in Fiscal Year 2011. In addition to the casino, the tribe is also pursuing the construction of a new housing development on Meetinghouse Road in Mashpee and a new government center on Great Neck Road South, both of which required considerable legal and professional services.

The tribe spent \$5 million in borrowed money from the investors last year, a figure proposed to increase more than threefold to \$16 million in Fiscal Year 2012.

The total budget increased from \$8,730,387 to \$30,764,699 from last year to this year.

By comparison, the Town of Mashpee omnibus budget is about \$46 million per year.

The budget also notes two line items, \$80,000 for "Citizen Goodwill" and \$25,000 for "Veterans Goodwill," that have become a source of controversy within the tribe.

The accounts provide money for Mr. Cromwell to give out up to \$2,500 to tribe members and tribal families in need of assistance. However, tribe members said in recent interviews that until recently, Mr. Cromwell could hand out the aid without permission or even reporting to the other elected members of the tribal council. That process changed, however, so that the chairman now must inform the tribal council of the assistance provided.

2 Responses to "Mashpee Tribe Plans Spending \$30 Million In 2012"

1. *Rhondamills* says: 02/17/12

I can only say Thank You for all your hard work and I know my Grandmother Nina Tobey/Dias would only say "that's awful nice dear". And that's something I hear Uncle Edgar saying and my Grandmother Emma along with Aunt Del just being so happy for a better education and housing for our people. These are the ones who made Mashpee and overcame the differences....let's do this in peace.....Love to all my people!!

2. *Strong Horse Keith* says: 02/21/12

The tribe has worked hard to be in this position. I want to continue to thank the Chairman and his staff for their leadership in this awesome venture.