Town Council Meeting March 30, 2023

The March 30, 2023 Town Council Meeting was called to order by Denise L. DiFranco, President, in Foster, RI at 5:30 p.m. at the Benjamin Eddy Building.

The following members were present:
Denise L. DiFranco, President,
arrived at 6:08 p.m.
Chris Stone
David Paolino
Heidi Rogers

Also present: Kelli Russ, Finance Director Julia Chretien, Assistant Solicitor Tammy Steinkamp, Recreation Director

I. PUBLIC HEARING

1. Event Permit
Application for Eric
Weiner of P&EE
Consulting Inc. dba
PVD Food Truck
Events, with the
support of the
Recreation
Department

David Paolino opened the meeting and explained that Denise L. DiFranco asked to be excused for a few minutes because she was going to be late.

Mr. Paolino opened the Public Hearing. Heidi Rogers read the advertisement. Eric Weiner spoke and explained that there would be about a dozen food trucks, beer and wine permitted by the Class B caterer license, and live music, hopefully with local musicians.

Heidi Rogers asked about a police detail. Mr. Weiner said that the Recreation Department would take care of that and port-a-johns. Ms. Rogers asked if June 21 is definitely a date that he wants. He said, correct. Ms. Roger said that then it would be a toss-up between the 9th and 23th of August? Mr. Weiner said yes, if the 21st was rained out, then we would have 8/9 as the second date or 8/23. We want to get them all approved so we have the options. Ms. Rogers clarified that the dates would be 6/21 and 8/9 with a rain date of 8/31.

Julia Chretien asked about liability insurance. Kelli Russ and David Paolino said that would be the same as last year.

David Paolino asked if anyone would like to speak in favor of the food truck event.

Heidi Rogers spoke in favor and stated that she thinks it is a great event and brings a lot of people out.

David Paolino asked if anyone would like to speak against the food truck event.

There was no one. Mr. Paolino asked two more times. There was no response. Mr. Paolino closed the hearing.

Heidi Rogers moved, Chris Stone seconded, to allow PVD Food Truck events for 6/21/2023 and 8/9/2023 with a rain date for either of those dates of 8/31/2023 and that all the requirements of the town clerk are met.

Motion passed 3 - 0.

Heidi Rogers, aye; Chris Stone, aye; and David Paolino, aye.

Heidi Rogers moved to recess until 6:00 p.m. Chris Stone seconded. Motion passed 3 - 0. Heidi Rogers, aye; Chris Stone, aye; and David Paolino, aye.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

David Paolino called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

III. ANNOUNCEMENTS / PUBLIC COMMENT

There were none.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

1. Meeting Minutes

Approval of March 9, 2023, March 14, 2023, and February 23, 2023

2. Warrants

Approval of General Warrant FY2023 #15 \$136,334.99

3. Additions and Abatements

2020 Motor Vehicle Tax Roll Abatement \$1210.62

2021 Tangible Tax Roll Abatement \$137.40 2022 Tangible Tax Roll Abatement \$189.95

Chris Stone moved, Heidi Rogers seconded, to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Discussion: None

Motion passed 3 - 0.

Heidi Rogers, aye; Chris Stone, aye; and David Paolino, aye.

V. NEW BUSINESS

 MCM Holdings, LLC/Foster Cell Tower, Plan Review and Special Use Permit Julia Chretien explained that MCM Holdings are relative to the Foster Cell Tower and the placement of it is on town land; so as the owner of the land where the tower will be located, the town has to sign off on the Site Plan Review and the Special Use Permit application.

Christopher O'Connor, attorney for MCM Holdings, spoke regarding the replacement of the cell tower. MCM has a lease with the [Foster Center] Fire Company and the town. The lease was signed in 2001 for a 42-year lease. It doesn't expire until 2042. There was an addition to the fire company building so conditions were placed on the building. It requires us to move back and replace the tower. The application for a Commercial Site Review plan needs to be updated because of this. The tower will be on the town's portion of the property, so we need to obtain consent. Once updated, a Special Use Permit can be approved.

David Paolino asked Julia Chretien if she had reviewed it and if it was ready for the council president's signature. Ms. Chretien said they needed to move to allow Denise L. DiFranco to sign. Heidi Rogers asked about cell phone capability. Mr. O'Connor said the Fire District would get some revenue from it.

Ms. Chretien said all the vote would be is to sign off on it then it's still up to Planning and Zoning to approve it.

David Paolino asked if they could renegotiate the lease. Ms. Chretien said she would have to look at it. Ms. Chretien explained that they are not approving the lease but empowering the signing of it.

Chris Stone moved, Heidi Rogers seconded, to give Denise L. DiFranco the authority to sign off on the application for the Site Plan Review and application for a Special Use Permit for MCM Holdings. Discussion: Harold Shippee, Jr. said the highway department also uses that tower. Anna Rao asked how many years are left on the lease. Mr. Paolino said 19 years.

Lynne Rider asked how much taller this tower would be compared to the original. Mr. O'Connor said the proposal is for 150 feet, so it is 50 feet higher. Ms. Rider noted that it is in a national historic district and that should be taken into consideration. Motion passed 3 - 0.

Heidi Rogers, aye; Chris Stone, aye; and David Paolino, aye.

Denise L. DiFranco arrived.

2. **RESOLUTION 2023- 04** Approving the issuance of general obligation bonds and / or notes in the amount of \$3,000,000 to fund a new police station

Heidi Rogers read the Resolution (see Exhibit A). David Paolino moved, Chris Stone seconded, to approve the Resolution.

Kelli Russ explained that they already approved this at the Financial Town Meeting so we have actually started the process of applying for these bonds. She met with the bond council on Monday with the financial advisor and the council itself has to now give the authority and have a resolution to actually move forward.

Guenter Bay asked who would pay. Kelli Russ explained that when it was passed it was to use the ARPA funds, fund balance, and capital and that is how we are going to fund it. Ms. Russ also noted that the Providence Water payments are ending when the grant payments begin. Taxes won't go up or down. Anna Rao asked how much the interest would be. Ms. Russ estimated that there was a fixed rate of 3.85% or lower if refinanced. Ms. Rao asked how many years. She was told 20 years.

Catherine Bay asked what would happen if we went over the cap of 3 million dollars. Ms. Russ said we would have to fund through capital. David Paolino said they are also going to the State for 1 million dollars because of increases.

Motion passed 4 - o.

Heidi Rogers, aye; Chris Stone, aye; David Paolino, aye; and Denise L. DiFranco, aye.

3. Resignation of Town Council Member Heidi Rogers read the letter of resignation from Steve Bellucci (see Exhibit B).

David Paolino moved to accept the resignation with regrets. Chris Stone seconded.

Discussion: Heidi Rogers asked about the liaison appointment. David Paolino said he had taken over but that it has to be voted on and can't be voted on tonight so it would have to be put on a future agenda. Kelli Russ said we should also add the special election that has to be held.

Motion failed 2 - 2.

Heidi Rogers, no; Chris Stone, no; David Paolino, aye; and Denise L. DiFranco, aye.

David Paolino asked what that meant. Heidi Rogers said it doesn't mean anything, we can't force him to stay here; it's symbolic.

Ron Cervasio says he thinks it means that since you have not accepted it, he has to not be here three times before you can remove him and set an election. David Paolino said the law says if you submit a letter of resignation, it's effective immediately unless you

have set a future date and you rescind it before that date. We call it the George Costanza law; he resigned and wanted to come back on Monday? You can't do that. Julia Chretien said it's case law and had been adopted by a lot of circuits, but if the council confirms by the election deadline she can do that. The Town Council will pick an election date on April 13, 2023.

VI. PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Mobile Food
Establishment license
application for On the
Rhode Cafe, 73B Gene
Allen Rd, Foster, RI
02825 for the year
ending December 31,
2023.

Denise L. DiFranco opened the public hearing. Heidi Rogers read the advertisement. Applicant Caitlin Wallitsch's mother, Dawn Wallitsch, was present. Ms. Wallitsch said she applied for the permit because she would like to park at the Village Gas daily Monday through Friday. It's a mobile coffee trailer—ice coffee, hot coffee, chai—she does do special events.

Denise L. DiFranco asked if anyone would like to speak in opposition to this.

Heidi Rogers said she has no objection if it is okay with the gas station. Ms. Wallitsch said it was and that he had approached her.

Denise L. DiFranco asked if anyone would like to speak in favor of this.

Kathleen Swanson said she is super excited by it. Denise L. DiFranco closed the public hearing.

Heidi Rogers moved to approve the Mobile Food establishment license application for On the Road Cafe. David Paolino seconded.

Discussion: None. Motion passed 4 - 0.

Heidi Rogers, aye; Chris Stone, aye; David Paolino, aye; and Denise L. DiFranco, aye.

 Preliminary Budget, including the Capital Budget, for FY 2023-2024 Denise L. DiFranco said that next is the budget which includes the Capital Budget, and she opened the public hearing.

Heidi Rogers read the advertisement.

10 - General Government

Denise L. DiFranco said this includes the Conservation Commission and Land Trust, which was formally 11, 31, and 32. Some of the highlights that the council has determined to increase salaries for staff in the hope of retaining them. We have the town clerk and the deputy town clerk's salaries have increased.

Lynne Rider asked about the cost of the special election. Denise L. DiFranco said it would come out of this year's budget.

Guenter Bay asked about electricity. Denise L. DiFranco said that we are on hold with the solar company for potential solar panels on the school and town house.

Lynne Rider asked if it was possible to put solar on the DPW garage. Denise L. DiFranco said she had talked to Mike Antonellis when he was here about putting it on the Town Hall, so we are looking for various things.

George Hasapidis, 6 Kennedy Road asked about how the 10% raises were determined. Denise L. DiFranco said that we are one of the lowest paying townsKelli Russ said the lowest—in the state. So we were looking to bring them somewhere close to [the others]. Kelli Russ explained that we took a municipal salary survey that the RI Cities & Towns created about two years ago, and every employee is going to be the lowest paid in the state. We had people who were \$15,000-\$20,000 less than the lowest paid. We have lost a significant number of people, we can't keep people, and we can't get people. David Paolino added that the town workers, when COVID hit, there was a pay freeze. People voluntarily suspended a raise for a year, which put them behind the cost of living 2 or 3 percent. They sacrificed. We agreed that now we have to move forward and treat our people more fairly. It looks like a lot but kept them down for a long time. Cheryl Hawes said they have been below the bottom of the barrel for so many years that it's embarrassing and insulting for them, and she applauds them for doing this. Denise L. DiFranco said she agreed. Helene Dolce asked about the Land Trust budget and what the increase is. Kelli Russ said they provide us a budget that they vote on and we budget it as a revenue as a transfer in so the net impact of their budget is actually zero. They receive 100 percent of our conveyance fees but we have to advertise their budget as part of our budget but the fees actually fund their budget. It consists of a RI filing fee, memberships to the RI Land Trust, equipment and maintenance and an admin expense.

11 - Finance

Denise L. DiFranco said this includes the Treasurer and Assessor, which was formerly 15 and 16. The increases are salary and we've, under the advisement of Kelli Russ, have rearranged duties because of the Tax Assessor, Tax Collector, and Deputy. Ms. Russ explained that we've lost both those roles twice now in the last two years, so we are restructuring the office. All employees are cross-trained. We also budgeted an increase for GIS and mapping budget is \$5,000 annually, divided between our office and Planning, to bring data current.

Helene Dolce asked about tax rolls and if software is in this. Ms. Russ said yes, there is a software license, one under 14, which is mostly finance, and one under assessor. It's a requirement.

12 - Social Services

Denise L. DiFranco said this included Human Services and Community Funding. Kelli Russ explained that there is a 2-hour increase in pay; she went from 20 hours to 22. Kelli Russ said the need for her department has increased exponentially since COVID. People are struggling with the cost of living. Lynne Rider said she was very glad to see the increase in her salary. She does so much for this town

David Paolino said when she was making her presentation, he was criticized by the audience for bring it up. He did it for the benefit of the audience to let them know what she was doing and how she was doing it.

Cheryl Hawes asked where the van came under. Kelli Russ said she has a grant.

Guenter Bay asked what Gateway and Sojourner House were. Denise L. DiFranco said that those are agencies that work with people in the town, and we support them. Kelli Russ said for example, Cranston Cap actually pays her for an extra 8 hours for them to provide heat assistance, food pantry, etc.

14 - Planning

Denise L. DiFranco moved on to Planning which also includes Building & Zoning. Kelli Russ said the major increase was from 2020-2021 where it was a part-time position. We recently made it a full-time position.

15 - Libraries

Denise L. DiFranco said the increase for libraries was to raise salaries to match minimum wage rates

20 - Public Works

Lynne Rider questioned the decrease in fuel oil. Kelli Russ said that's what they are actually spending. He felt the money should go to other areas. Chris Stone and Denise L. DiFranco noted that we have more fuel-efficient vehicles.

21 - Parks & Recreation

Heidi Rogers explained that the increase there is due to the parade. It's the rental of the buses from Foster-Glocester regional. Denise L. DiFranco asked Tammy Steinkamp [Recreation Director] to contact them to ask if we can reserve 4 buses for the parade band because she had been unable to reach anyone.

30 & 32 - Police & Dispatch

Helene Dolce asked about compensation. Kelli Russ said Group-A is a term used by the State of RI so we used their chart. That is the total for their base pay, any longevity that they would get or any kind of pay out. Anything not overtime related.

33 - Public Safety-Others

Denise L. DiFranco said this includes the EMA Director and Assistant EMA, the Ambulance, South Foster, Moosup Valley, and Foster Center. Guenter Bay said that only South Foster received an increase. Denise L. DiFranco said, yes, because they are absorbing the Ambulance. Kelli Russ said that rescue companies were now a "d/b/a" so their insurance increased \$22,000.

Catherine Bay wanted to confirm that the increase was not due to building but to insurance. Kelli Russ said now that there are employees, it's part of the VIS liability. IOD and liability.

Lynne Rider asked if there was a reason why it is listed again in the last column? Kelli Russ said to sum it up by department.

Catherine Bay wanted to know if the \$440,000 came from ARPA. Kelli Russ said no.

60 - Long-term Debt and Obligations

Kelly summarized Providence Water, which is increased by the prime rate.

George Hasapidis asked if the bond would be a fixed rate. Kelli Russ said it would. A year from July [Providence Water] will be paid off.

Capital Budget

Kelli Russ said she put a description in the far right column.

Lynne Rider noted that there was a substantial increase for the highway, which she assumed was due to the road plan program. Would that be going up? Ms. Russ said no, it's good for the next several years. Ms. Rider said it's hard for people to see where the money goes. Ms. Russ said we could put the Road & Bridge Plan on the website on the DPW page. You would be able to see where the greatest need is. Ms. Rider said you don't always know what's going on at other parts of town.

Helene Dolce asked about the Economic Development plan and specifically when we would see the new signs. Denise L. DiFranco said that was not budgeted here at this time; we will be working on it. The Council and Planning Board will meet and discuss what the priorities are and what things we want to move forward with.

Guenter Bay asked what "final lease pymt" was. Kelli Russ said it was the final lease payment for a sixwheel dump and another piece of equipment for DPW that we leased.

Lynne Rider asked if the Rec field was totally paid for and if that's why it's zero now? Kelli Russ said we have been paying for it as we went. We had money left over from last year because we haven't finalized the payment. The money is already put aside. We used some money from the ARPA funds and the rainy day fund.

80 - Misc. Transfers

Denise L. DiFranco asked if there were any questions on the Misc. Transfers. There were none.

80 - Capital 2% (Transfers to other funds)

Kelli Russ said we have to fund more than the 2 percent mandated by the Charter because the 2 percent is not nearly enough. Two percent is \$315,000 and we spend \$350,000 paving the roads. We need at least 4%.

50 – Education Elementary

Dr. Barnes stated that Paine School had a 0% increase for several years but they now need to increase it to 4% for going forward because the need to increase two teacher assistants to accommodate special education department demands and a half-time nurse. He appreciated the collaboration with the town. Kelli Russ said they have a capital budget fund which helps to fund their capital expenditures rather than having it go through the town. Helene Dolce asked about the school population change. Mr. Barnes said it had been diminishing and

we had been reducing staff; now we are expecting our kindergarten enrollment will be spiking; from 20 to 50.

Helene Dolce asked if there were resource officers. Dr. Barnes said there was a school safety committee that has police, fire, and first responders. Without revealing specifics, he said we have "hardened" the school facility.

Anna Rao asked how many students are coming from the outside. Mr. Barnes said all students in the Paine school reside in Foster.

Dr. Barnes also said that the Northern RI collaborative renting a portion of the school facility is a big asset. We do not pay the teachers or staff there.

Region

Guenter asked why it was zero. Kelli Russ said they went up in operations but their request from the Town of Foster was less because of the population shift. We level-funded it.

Schools in Total

No comments.

Expenditures

Kelli Russ said it would be wrong to represent that we are only going up \$450,000, so she put a line in there specifically to remove the capital from it. This year we decreased what we were funding for capital projects, we went up 3.56% in expenditures.

Revenues

Kelli Russ summarized the revenues.

Lynne Rider asked how much in taxes remained uncollected where we just write it off. Kelli Russ asked if she was referring to the 10-year. Ms. Rider said she was. Ms. Russ said they didn't write the 10-year motor vehicles off last year. There is legislation out there to change tangible property taxes to phasing it out like motor vehicle tax. It's very difficult to collect that tax.

Anna Rao asked about abandoned property going out to tax sale. Ms. Russ said tax sales are advertised. Kathleen Swanson asked about collection rate. Ms. Russ said their rate of collection is rising. Denise L. DiFranco closed the Public Hearing.

Ms. DiFranco said they adopt the budget on April 13. Denise L. DiFranco announced that the Financial Town Meeting will be on May 2nd at 7 p.m. at the Capt. Isaac Paine School.

VII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

- 1. PURSUANT TO RIGL 42-46-5, (A), (1) Personnel
 - a. Inman & Tourgee, Solicitors
 - b. Police Chief Contract

Heidi Rogers moved, Chris Stone seconded, to go into Executive Session pursuant to RIGL 42-46-5 for a work session regarding Personnel and Job Performance according to RIGL 42-46-5-(A)1 and Litigation according to RIGL 42-46-5A(2) and to reconvene into open session and to further keep the minutes of said meeting closed and the minutes of all executive sessions held previous to this meeting remain closed in accordance with provisions in RIGL 42-46-4 & 5. No discussion.

Motion passed 5-0.

Town Council Meeting March 30, 2023

- 2. PURSUANT TO RIGL 42-46-5A (2) Litigation,
 - a. PC22-04591 Mill Road Realty Associates, LLC et al. v. Town of Foster et al

The council reconvened in to Open Session at 8:18 p.m. Denise L. DiFranco announced that 3 votes were taken in Executive Session.

One, to move Item b to the first position.

Motion passed 4 - 0.

Two, to amend the police chief's contract to add two personal days.

Motion passed 4 - 0.

Three, to accept the contract as amended.

Motion passed 4 - 0.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 8:25. p.m.

Submitted by,

Michaela Johnson, Deputy Town Clerk

Exhibit A TC Mtg. 3-30-2023 1 of 2 TOWN OF FOSTER RHODE ISLAND

RESOLUTION 2023-04

APPROVING THE ISSUANCE OF GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS AND / OR NOTES IN THE AMOUNT OF \$3,000,000 TO FUND THE ACQUISITION, CONSTRUCTION, FURNISHING, EQUIPPING, AND INSTALLATION OF A NEW POLICE STATION, ROADS, BRIDGES, AND DRAINAGE FACILITIES AND ENERGY EFFICIENT IMPROVEMENTS IN MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS AND APPROVING THE FINANCING THEREOF AND AUTHORIZING THE TOWN TO ACQUIRE LAND FOR THE PROJECTS.

Be it resolved that:

SECTION 1. Pursuant to a Resolution passed at the Financial Town Meeting held on June 15, 2021 (the "FTM Resolution"), the Town of Foster (the "Town") appropriated the sum of \$3,000,000 to fund the acquisition, construction, furnishing, equipping and installation of a New Police Station, roads, bridges and drainage facilities, and energy efficiency improvements in municipal buildings and authorizing the Town to acquire land for the projects in the Town (the "Project").

SECTION 2. Pursuant to Rhode Island General Laws Section 45-12-2, the FTM Resolution and Section 7-1-1 of the Home Rule Charter of the Town, as amended, the Finance Director and the President of the Town Council be and hereby are authorized to issue on behalf of the Town, an amount not exceeding Three Million Dollars (\$3,000,000) bonds of the Town, at one time, or from time to time in order to meet the foregoing appropriation.

SECTION 3. The said officers from time to time may issue and refund not exceeding \$3,000,000 interest bearing or discounted notes in anticipation of the issue of said bonds or in anticipation of the receipt of federal or state aid for the purpose specified in Section 1 hereof.

<u>SECTION 4.</u> The manner of sale, amount, denominations, maturities, conversion or registration privileges, interest rates, medium of payment, and other terms, conditions and details of the bonds or notes may be fixed by the officers authorized to sign the bonds or notes.

<u>SECTION 5</u>. The said officers from time to time may apply for, contract for and expend any federal or state advances or other grants-or assistance which may be available for the purposes specified in Section 1 hereof.

SECTION 6. Pending the issuance of the bonds under Section 2 hereof or pending or in lieu of the issue of notes under Section 3 hereof, the Finance Director, at the written direction of the Town Council, may expend funds from the general treasury of the Town for the purposes specified in Section 1 hereof. Any advances made under this section shall be repaid without interest from the proceeds of the bonds or notes issued hereunder or from the proceeds of applicable federal or state assistance or from other available funds.

Exhibit A
TC Mtg. 3-30-2023
2 of 2

SECTION 7. The Finance Director and the President of the Town Council are also authorized, empowered and directed, on behalf of the Town, to: (i) execute, acknowledge and deliver any and all other documents, certificates or instruments necessary to effectuate such borrowing, including, without limitation, a Preliminary Official Statement, a final Official Statement, all in such form and with such provisions as such officer shall deem advisable; (ii) amend, modify or supplement the bonds or notes any and all other documents, certificates or instruments at any time and from time to time, in such manner and for such purposes as officers shall deem necessary, desirable or advisable; (iii) do and perform all such other acts and things deemed by such officers to be necessary, desirable or advisable with respect to any matters contemplated by this resolution in order to effectuate said borrowing and the intent hereof.

SECTION 8. The Finance Director and the President of the Town Council are authorized to take all actions necessary to comply with federal tax and securities laws including Rule 15c2-12 of the Securities and Exchange Commission (the "SEC Rule") and to execute and deliver a Continuing Disclosure Certificate in connection with the bonds or notes in the form as shall be deemed advisable by the Finance Director and the President of the Town Council in order to comply with the SEC Rule. The Town hereby covenants and agrees that it will comply with and carry out all of the provisions of the Continuing Disclosure Certificate, as it may be amended from time to time. Notwithstanding any other provision of this resolution or the bonds or notes, failure of the Town to comply with the Continuing Disclosure Certificate shall not be considered an event of default; however, any bondholder or noteholder may take such actions as may be necessary and appropriate, including seeking mandate or specific performance by court order, to cause the Town to comply with its obligations under this Section and under the Continuing Disclosure Certificate.

SECTION 9. The Finance Director and the President of the Town Council are hereby authorized to take all lawful action necessary or desirable under the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended (the "Code"), to insure that the interest on any bonds and notes will remain exempt from federal income taxation to the extent provided in Section 103 of the Code, and to refrain from taking any action which will cause interest on such bonds and notes to lose the benefit of exclusion from gross income provided by Section 103(a) of the Code. The Finance Director and the President of the Town Council are further authorized to take all lawful action necessary or desirable to designate the bonds and notes as "qualified tax-exempt obligations" within the meaning of Section 265(b)(3) of the Code.

SECTION-10. This resolution shall take effect upon passage.

WHERETO the following bear witness:

Susan M. Dillon

Town Clerk

Foster Town Council

Denise L. DiFranco
Town Council President

Exhibit B
TC Mtg. 3-30-2023

March 27, 2023

Town Clerk 181 Howard Hill Rd. Foster, RI 02825

Dear Susan,

Effective immediately, I am resigning my position as both the Vice President of the Town Council and the Town Council in general. I feel very honored and privileged to have received so much support by the voters of Foster and have not made this decision lightly; however, due to unforeseen circumstances, I have no other option.

In all of my years serving on the Town Council, I have never worked with a more professional town staff. The Town of Foster is truly fortunate.

Sincerely

Steve Bellucci

Cc: Kelli Russ, Finance Director