

**FINANCE COMMITTEE
MONDAY, MARCH 6, 2023
REGULAR MEETING: TOWN HALL
MEETING MINUTES**

Members Present: Chair Dan Campbell (DC), Bernie Porada (BP), Sue Kaczinski (SK), Tony Matteo (TM), David McCarthy (DM).

Members Absent: none

Others in Attendance: Town Administrator Andrea Llamas, BNCTV, Treasurer / Collector Michelle Turner, Assessor and Assessor Board Member Beth Walker

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair BP called the meeting to order at 6:01pm.

II. BUDGET DISCUSSIONS

a. Treasurer / Collector

Treasurer / Collector Michelle Turner presented her budget. Highlights included:

- She is looking to add an Assistant Treasurer / Collector at 10 hours per week. Having a backup person will be good for transitions, illnesses, and vacations.
- Ms. Llamas explained there is no job classification yet for the assistant, but the Selectboard approved the job description. Ms. Llamas put an estimated salary in the budget.
- Ms. Turner is requesting an increase in her hours because of a clear need, which was supported by the auditor. This will enable her to complete her tasks and keep the accounts regularly reconciled.
- DC asked if this increase will allow for public hours, and hours when Ms. Turner is not available to the public. Ms. Turner confirmed this, and noted non-public hours allow her to catch up with her work, uninterrupted.
- DC asked if the assistant will be bonded. Ms. Llamas responded: yes.
- Ms. Llamas noted some — perhaps all — of the increase in wages will be recouped from the Water Districts because Ms. Turner collects water payments.
- SK asked how many hours per week Ms. Turner spends on the water district-related tasks. Ms. Turner responded: two or three hours per week.

A discussion ensued on the water districts.

A discussion ensued on details about the assistant position.

b. Assessors

Assessor and Assessor Board Member Beth Walker presented her budget. Highlights included:

- A total increase of \$4,205.
- Most of the increase is for her department's computer software upgrade and support, and to move the records to a cloud server. This will replace keeping the records on a town server,

which requires the town to buy a new server every five years. Using a cloud server will also allow Ms. Walker to work remotely. Ms. Llamas noted the town's accounting software is already on a cloud server.

- Other items which have increased to reflect their cost increase: the mapping contract, postage, office supplies, and dues.
- There is an article on the Annual Town Meeting warrant specifically for her own department's legal counsel. Someone has appealed their taxes, and this requires a specialized attorney. Ms. Llamas noted that beginning with the FY2025 budget, there will be a regular line item for this expense.

c. General Town Budget

Ms. Llamas presented her budget. Highlights included:

- The Selectboard section shows some increases in the following:
 - The COLA for salaries.
 - Technology, which pays for several annual subscriptions.
 - A new phone system. The old phone system was struck by lightning and was no longer supported anyway. The IT vendor helps with the phone system's support, too. And, the new phones allow calls to a person's desk to be forwarded to their cellphones, enabling remote working. Ms. Llamas was able to offset some of the phone's cost by reducing other budget line items the town has not used.
- Other line items which have increased:
 - Meeting budgets for Ms. Llamas, which she was able to offset by mileage and expenses she has not used.
 - The accountant's fees.
 - Technology cost of services, and peripheral replacement.
 - Copiers, which are less expensive for staff to use than their own printers.
 - The monthly subscriptions for town-owned email accounts. This also reflects the ongoing process of switching more town staff and boards/committees emails from personal email addresses to town-owned email accounts. Additionally, there are two new Selectboard members this year who need email accounts. This cost was also slightly offset by other things.
 - The Town Offices' sewer costs are up because it's used more.
 - Elevators, alarms, and office supplies, because their costs have gone up.
 - Flags for the Veterans' memorial.
 - Health insurance and other employee benefits.
 - Payroll expenses.
- Legal services is level-funded.
- The town clock is level-funded because it's better maintained now.
- The cost of fuel oil for the Town Offices, which is used as a backup, has gone up. But, the main heating source, wood pellets, has gone down, and those burn slowly, as well.
- Some line items have decreased:
 - Maintenance costs, because the town takes better care of its buildings now.
 - The Town Report.

- The Animal Control Officer, which is now a regional service and is working well. Because of this expansion, other towns are covering some of its cost.
- Retiree health insurance.

Ms. Llamas noted that because of offsetting, the total increase is minimal.

A discussion ensued on repair and maintenance costs at the elementary school.

Ms. Llamas reported the school figures are to-be-determined, and the current figures listed are an estimate, because the assessment figures have not yet arrived; neither have the tuition costs from the schools. She said student transit costs are expensive.

BP asked about the Pioneer Valley Regional School's capital request figures, and what the request is for. Ms. Llamas responded: She does not know, and will ask them for more clarity. DS noted the Finance Committee does not have to recommend approving their budget if they have inadequate information on their capital request.

The Franklin County Tech School's costs are an estimate, and representatives from the school are coming to the March 13 Finance Committee meeting to present their budget.

A discussion ensued on the Veterans' Association and state laws governing the assessment.

The figures for the FRCOG are an estimate because their assessment has not yet arrived.

The workers' compensation line item may go up next year because of two minor claims this year.

TM asked for the total cost to this year's COLA. Ms. Llamas responded: it's approximately \$160,000 for all staff, but this includes the steps because this cannot be separated in the budget from the COLA figures.

III. REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES

MOTION BY TM TO APPROVE THE FEBRUARY 6 MINUTES. BP SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED 4-1, WITH SK ABSTAINING.

DC noted minutes from other meetings are coming soon.

IV. REPORT ON MEETINGS ATTENDED REPRESENTING FINANCE

TM reported the CPC approved the fireplace repair project at Squakheag Village. TM explained the project's scope and details.

BP reported on the EMS building project's recent meeting for pre-qualified bidders. This committee completed their tasks to check all bidding companies for eligibility, which is a very specific and regulated process. All bidders were approved for pre-qualification. On Wednesday, March 8, the bid goes live. Everything is on-schedule.

V. TOWN ADMINISTRATOR UPDATES

Ms. Llamas presented her updates. Highlights included:

- She will send out the Annual Town Meeting warrant articles soon.
- A review of borrowing details for the EMS building.
- A review of meetings leading up to Annual Town Meeting:
 - March 14 is the non-partisan caucus meeting for those seeking election.
 - March 21 the Selectboard reviews the warrants for the first time.
 - March 27 the Finance Committee reviews their warrants.
 - Approximately April 4 the Selectboard signs the warrants.

A discussion ensued on the Town Clerk's change from an elected position to an appointed position as a regular employee.

Ms. Llamas reported on the national opioid settlement and a discussion ensued on the funding that will arrive to Northfield from this settlement. The town must create a stabilization account for it. Additional settlements are coming, as well as more information from the state. This account's existence appears in the current proposed budget, so Ms. Llamas wanted to explain why it's there and what it is.

VI. OTHER ITEMS NOT ANTICIPATED 48 HOURS IN ADVANCE OF THIS POSTED MEETING

There were none.

VIII. ADJOURN

MOTION BY BP TO ADJOURN. SK SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:13pm.

Documents presented:

- Budget Workbook FY2024 v.1
- Treasurer - Collector FY2024 Budget Worksheet
- Assistant Treasurer - Collector new job information
- Assistant Treasurer - Collector Job Description
- Assistant Treasurer - Collector Narrative (continued)
- Assessors FY24 Department Budget Worksheet
- General Town Budgets FY24 Departmental Budget Worksheet
- Assessors Article for FY24

Respectfully submitted by Wendy M. Levy from minutes taken by Wendy M. Levy.

