

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

Members Present: Dan Campbell (DC), Tony Mateo (TM), David McCarthy (DM), Bernie Porada (BP)

Members Absent: Sue Kaczinski

Others in Attendance: Town Administrator Andrea Llamas, BNCTV, Boards Clerk Wendy M. Levy, Senior Center Director Colleen Letourneau, Police Chief John Hall

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair DC called the meeting to order at 6:02pm.

II. BUDGET DISCUSSIONS

a. Council on Aging

Senior Center Director Colleen Letourneau presented the Northfield Council on Aging's proposed Fiscal Year 2024 budget. Highlights included:

- Distribution of a document, "Council on Aging FY2024 Budget."
- An increase in the "Meetings and Seminars" and related line items to fund Ms. Letourneau's and the Council on Aging Board Chair's attendance at a conference that is important to the Senior Center and Council's operations. Attending the conference also provides Ms. Letourneau continuing education credits necessary for her license.
- Staff has not been reimbursed for their mileage when driving to places to gather supplies for the Center's operations. This budget reflects remedying that.
- The "Postage" line item has gone up because postal rates have gone up, and the Center's staff utilizes the postal service to communicate — and celebrate birthdays — with their constituents.
- Other than staff raises, all other line items are level-funded.
- The Center will host more congregate meals and outdoor events this year.

A discussion ensued on how many attendees come to the Center. Ms. Letourneau said that, in addition to her volunteers, there are from 19 to over 20 attendees every day. She also noted the great value to the Center from the volunteers' efforts; the free labor would otherwise cost \$132,824.

DC said the Finance Committee will review the Council on Aging's budget and make recommendations to the Selectboard, who will then make decisions about the budget.

DC announced that Police Chief John Hall would arrive soon, so the Finance Committee would address other agenda items until he arrived.

V. REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES 1/30/2023

MOTION BY BP TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES AS WRITTEN FOR THE MEETING THAT TOOK PLACE ON JANUARY 30, 2023. TM SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED

UNANIMOUSLY.

IV. FREE CASH AND REVENUES

Town Administrator Andrea Llamas reviewed the "Free Cash" process. Highlights included:

- The amount was \$436,000.
- It would have been more, but for missing the deadline for Chapter 90. Ms. Llamas explained how this happened. DC asked how this can be avoided in the future; he recommended sending a memo to all departments reminding them that missing this deadline hurts the town. Ms. Llamas said she does that, but she will send additional reminders. DM asked if the same individuals are repeatedly missing the deadline. Ms. Llamas said yes, but sometimes there are legitimate reasons for missing the deadline.
- Free cash is unencumbered funds, which are reallocated immediately following appropriation at Annual Town Meeting. This means the money is then in the bank, and the town does not have to wait until the next Fiscal Year to access it.

II. BUDGET DISCUSSIONS (continued)

b. Police Department

Police Chief John Hall presented the Northfield Police Department's proposed FY24 budget. Highlights included:

- Distribution of a document, "Police FY2024 Budget."
- An announcement of a new full-time police officer: Chad Sumner. He is fully trained, and came from the Greenfield Police Department. Mr. Hall said it is very helpful to have him on staff.
- Another officer is needed, and because this person will also serve as the School Resource Officer, the school will contribute some funding for this person's salary. Thus, it should have a minimal effect on the budget.
- An explanation of why another full-time officer is needed: otherwise, Mr. Hall has to patrol, which takes him away from his duties as Chief.
- An explanation of why having full-time officers, rather than utilizing a pool of part-time officers, is better for Northfield: more accountability, consistency, continuity, and training. The pool of part-timers is small, and is in flux.
- He is reviewing the entire budget, and is working with Erin Degnan in the Accounting office, to develop the budget in a way that he can use. While this budget may be a "worst-case scenario" budget, it does contain a lot of detail that matches the department's actual needs. He worked closely with Selectboard Chair Bee Jacques and Ms. Llamas to develop this budget.
- A reminder that policing budgets can be unpredictable because events requiring the police, such as major accidents and fires, are unpredictable.
- A discussion ensued on whether the increase in the police force and its budget is a response to an increase in crime. Mr. Hall noted there is no increase in crime in Northfield, and he attributed some things — such as a decrease in breaking-and-entering incidents — to the visible presence of police officers on patrol.
- A discussion ensued on the School Resource Officer, and whether calls to the school have increased. Mr. Hall said calls to the school have not increased, but he noted he has only been employed as Northfield's Police Chief for a year.
- A discussion ensued on whether this budget is comparable to what other Franklin County towns

spend on their policing. Mr. Hall said Northfield's wages are comparable, and the town must use wages and morale to attract officers. Ms. Llamas said the town is undergoing a wage analysis, which will provide some information, and the report is coming soon. She noted assessing comparability is difficult; it is not just about population, but about other factors such as schools, main roads, senior housing, visitors, calls, etc.

- A discussion ensued on community policing and the Constable position.
- A discussion ensued on the challenges with a police budget in deciding which line items should cover which expenses, such as wages paid for training and special events.
- A discussion ensued on constables, wages, special details, holidays, when to charge for special events and when not to charge.
- A discussion ensued on the Quinn Bill — this pays officers a higher salary for advanced college degrees — its history, and inclusion in union contracts.
- DC asked if there was any ARPA money left to pay for police vehicles. Ms. Llamas said no, that money has been spent.
- A discussion ensued on the portion of the budget associated with vehicles, whether to purchase a new cruiser or an administrative car, whether to purchase hybrid vehicles, and what kind of equipment is needed in the vehicles.

c. Town Clerk's Budget

DC tabled this because with Sue Kaczinski's absence, if DC recuses himself, the Finance Committee will not have quorum.

III. FINALIZE COLA

Ms. Llamas announced she sent committee members the updated COLA figures, but she is still working on them as more information comes in. More updates will come.

Ms. Llamas responded to DM's request from the previous meeting to provide additional information on higher COLA percentages, but all of the figures are complicated because the raises also include staffing changes. She reviewed some of those changes.

She reported a 6% COLA will add \$227,000 to the budget, which, again, includes other staffing changes. Each percentage increase will add another \$25,000-\$30,000 to the budget.

A discussion ensued on how to proceed with the COLA vote because of DC's recusal and Sue Kaczinski's absence.

MOTION BY BP THAT THE FINANCE COMMITTEE APPROVE A 6% COLA FOR TOWN EMPLOYEES. DM SECONDED.

ROLL CALL VOTE:

DM YEA

TM YEA

BP YEA

DC ABSTAIN

MOTION CARRIED 3-1.

IV. FREE CASH AND REVENUES (continued)

Ms. Llamas continued her report. Highlights included:

- The Balance Sheet is complete, so the Free Cash figures are final.
- The Sewer Department has made a capital expense request, but their retained earnings will cover that. A discussion ensued on the water main replacement versus the project to line the pipes, and that both projects can be done because of the department's retained earnings.
- Emergency Medical Services received a healthy certification, even with the expense of a new ambulance. The town applied for a USDA grant to help pay for the ambulance; if the town is approved, it will provide \$48,000.
- Mallory, the new Grant Developer, is doing great work, including working on a huge federal grant for the Schell Bridge.
- An update on the proposed, new EMS building and the opportunity for other towns to utilize Northfield's EMS.

VI. REPORT ON MEETINGS ATTENDED REPRESENTING FINANCE

BP reported on his recent attendance, with Ms. Jacques, at the School Budget Subcommittee meetings. He noted it is good to have town officials represented at these meetings, and to have open discussions. He announced the school budget vote is on February 15. A discussion ensued on the specific PVRS budget line items for which BP and Ms. Jacques asked for more details: assessments, EMD accounts, and administrative and staffing costs.

BP announced an upcoming meeting of the EMS Building Committee, and that architectural renderings would be presented. He will also send these renderings to the Finance Committee members.

VII. TOWN ADMINISTRATOR UPDATES

Ms. Llamas said she already presented her updates elsewhere in the meeting, but she welcomed correspondence on questions or errors in the budget.

TM asked about placing an article on the Annual Town Meeting warrant to cover maintaining the town clock. Ms. Llamas said she would research this.

Ms. Llamas said she will add a line item to the "Accountant" budget to cover a needed annual audit. Committee members agreed.

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

There were none.

IX. NEXT MEETING

DC announced the date of the next meeting: February 13 at 6pm.

DC said he will keep adding the Town Clerk budget to the agenda until there is a quorum present to

review it while he recuses himself.

Ms. Llamas reviewed the rest of the budget-season schedule.

X. ADJOURN

MOTION BY BP TO ADJOURN. TM SECONDED.

VOTE:

DC YEA

BP YEA

TM YEA

DM YEA

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting adjourned at 7:26pm.

Documents presented:

- "Council on Aging FY2024 Budget."
- "Police FY2024 Budget."

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