

**FINANCE COMMITTEE
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2023
REGULAR MEETING: TOWN HALL
MEETING MINUTES**

Members Present: Dan Campbell (DC), Sue Kaczinski (SK), Tony Matteo (TM), David McCarthy (DM), Bernie Porada (BP). *Please note: Dan Campbell is also the Northfield Town Clerk, and he recused himself as Chair for a portion of this meeting, as noted below, so he could present his office's proposed budget.*

Members Absent: none

Others in Attendance: Town Administrator Andrea Llamas, BNCTV, Boards Clerk Wendy M. Levy, Selectboard Chair Bee Jacques, Fire Chief Floyd "Skip" Dunnell, Highway Superintendent Tom Walker, and representatives from the Dickinson Public Library: Jon McGowan, Misha Storm, and Alex Strycky.

I. CALL TO ORDER

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

II. BUDGET DISCUSSIONS

a. Fire Department

Fire Chief Floyd "Skip" Dunnell presented the Northfield Fire Department's proposed budget. Highlights included:

- There's a slight increase in fuel costs and supplies.
- The biggest increases are in the following:
 - A new smartphone app to replace the pagers, which have poor coverage.
 - New incident-reporting system software to replace the old software which is now obsolete.
- The telephone line item has gone down because the telephone bill has gone down.
- Some line items have increased to reflect the actual costs incurred in Fiscal Year 2023.
- Some line items are level-funded, or have gone down.

A discussion ensued on the new breathing apparatus, which will cost \$135,000, and the fire department's work with Town Administrator Andrea Llamas and Grant Development Director Mallory Sullivan to try to secure grant funding for at least some of its cost. The grant amount, and whether a match is required, is to be determined.

Mr. Dunnell said the Fire Department postponed purchasing a new rescue truck for a few years, so they are purchasing the breathing apparatus now.

A discussion ensued on the new EMS building. The plan, said Mr. Dunnell, is to have a bid total ready for Annual Town Meeting. Ms. Llamas explained the sub-bid process and how it affects the overall bid process.

A discussion ensued on the history of the EMS building project, which Mr. Dunnell said go back at

least 19 years. He said this building is not a "want," it's a "need." All three of the current EMS facilities (rescue, fire, and police) have structural and storage challenges.

A discussion ensued on air-packs. Mr. Dunnell said the ones the fire department currently has are old, and new ones have crucial safety features.

DC thanked the Fire Department for helping with the downed trees during the recent snowstorm. Mr. Dunnell said he is requesting reimbursement from the Commonwealth for the storm-related expenses.

b. Highway Department

Highway Superintendent Tom Walker presented the Highway Department's proposed budget. Highlights included:

- The budget shows the following line items increasing because their associated costs have increased:
 - Highway Superintendent's expenses for the FROCG and meetings.
 - Salt.
 - Fuel.
 - Sand to supplement the sand the Highway Department makes, once that has run out.
 - Machinery maintenance.
 - Facilities' maintenance.
- Because the town is still in a contract for cemetery maintenance, this line item is level-funded.

A discussion ensued on mapping the cemeteries, which is time-consuming. Ms. Llamas noted the town can probably get funding to pay for it, perhaps from the Community Preservation Commission.

A discussion ensued on changing the town's street lights from sodium vapor to LEDs. Mr. Walker noted this is in his budget, but it is a project overseen by Ms. Llamas. Ms. Llamas explained some of the details on this potential project.

DC asked Mr. Walker how the Finance Committee can support the Highway Department in submitting the Chapter/Free Cash-related forms by the deadlines. Mr. Walker explained the associated challenges and considerations that are out of his control that contribute to the missed deadlines.

A discussion ensued on the paving schedule and how it is affected by supply challenges and cost fluctuations.

DC asked whether the Highway Department's capital needs — two large pieces of equipment that are on the department's capital needs schedule — can be put off for a year. Mr. Walker said this is not advised, because the trailer is very old and his department uses it frequently, and the pickup truck will allow the department's workers to stop using the larger, less-efficient dump trucks for the daily roads inspection and other smaller jobs. Mr. Walker discussed the challenges of ordering trucks ahead of time. A discussion ensued on sourcing new and used trucks.

Mr. Walker noted this budget is a "worst-case scenario" budget, and some equipment costs may be lower.

DC thanked the Highway Department for their excellent work clearing and opening the town's roads during the recent snow storm. Mr. Walker said that with climate change, storms and their related expenses are getting worse. He recommended establishing a fund to cover these expenses. A discussion ensued on how to work this into a budget.

c. Library

Jon McGowan, Misha Storm, and Alex Strysky from the Dickinson Public Library attended the meeting to discuss the library's budget. Ms. Storm presented the budget. She said that every line-item is level-funded except for salaries, which have increased according to the COLA.

DC asked about special library projects. Ms. Storm noted the library provides services to the public beyond books, including:

- A photocopier.
- Computers.
- Programs for children and adults, including summer reading programs.
- Programming for Northfield's 350th anniversary celebrations.
- A public place to see other people, of which there are not many in Northfield.
- A meeting room.
- A food pantry.
- Museum exhibits.
- A local history room.
- Genealogy research.

DC recused himself from the meeting, because as Town Clerk, he must present his budget without voting on it. Vice-Chair Bernie Porada became temporary Chair of the meeting.

d. Town Clerk

Town Clerk Daniel R. Campbell presented his office's proposed budget. Highlights included:

- The costs of elections — including elections wages — and postage have gone up due to an increase in the minimum wage, early voting, vote-by-mail, postage rates, and items the Commonwealth requires get mailed. "Constable wages" are to pay them to attend elections, which is less expensive than paying the police to be there.
- Mr. Campbell is concerned he is underestimating the cost of postage, because election mailings are very expensive. There are approximately 2,235 registered voters.
- Northfield now has an Assistant Town Clerk, and she needs supplies, and attends classes and meetings to get her certification. She will also need to be bonded so she can accept cash payments in the Town Clerk's office. These costs are included in the proposed budget.
- The "code updates" line item is a place-holder, because in the next few years many codes and manuals are getting updated.

DC resumed his position as Chair of the meeting.

III. REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES 2/6/2023

DC tabled this item to allow the members of the Finance Committee adequate time to review the draft minutes.

IV. REPORT ON MEETINGS ATTENDED REPRESENTING FINANCE

DC and BP reported on their attendance at the recent School Budget meeting. Highlights included:

- Concern that the budget includes using ESSER funding for programs, because ESSER funding will go away next year.
- The town's assessment may decrease.
- A discussion ensued on the technical school, enrollment, school budgets, and the marked difference in salaries — and raises — for teachers versus the administration. Teachers will only see a two-percent raise each year for the next three years. Administration raises are higher.
- The budget has not decreased as much as expected with Warwick leaving the school district.
- The budget shows a request for major capital improvements, but the town also has major capital needs. Does the administration understand this?
- A discussion ensued on the school's capital needs assessment and using ESSER funding. Boards Clerk Wendy M. Levy noted all ESSER funding, as per federal guidance, must be spent by September, 2024.

TM reported on his attendance at last week's CPC meeting. Highlights included:

- It's proposal season! The CPC received three proposals. One — for the fire place — is incomplete, but the CPC will discuss it at their next meeting.
- The two other proposals were approved: a shed and grill for the Senior Center, and a new sign for the Field Library.

V. TOWN ADMINISTRATOR UPDATES

Ms. Llamas presented her updates. Highlights included:

- Assessments are coming in.
- She is starting work on the capital needs budget.
- She is waiting to hear about the Fire Department grant.
- She is working on the draft Annual Town Meeting warrant.
- A Special Town Meeting will be held on April 19th, and the warrant will come soon.
- Prior to the Special Town Meeting, there will be an information session on the EMS building, with information on the bid.
- The general Annual Town Meeting warrant closes on March 30, and the Selectboard signs it on April 4.

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

There were none.

VII. NEXT MEETING

Ms. Llamas reviewed the rest of the budget-season schedule. There is no meeting on February 20 because it is a federal holiday. The next meeting is February 27.

VIII. ADJOURN

MOTION BY TM TO ADJOURN. BP SECONDED.

VOTE:

DC YEA

BP YEA

TM YEA

SK YEA

DM YEA

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40pm.

Documents presented:

- "Fire Department FY2024 Budget."
- "Highway Department FY2024 Budget."
- "Highway Department Payroll FY2024."
- "Library FY2024 Budget."
- "Town Clerk FY2024 Budget."
- "Budget Workbook FY2024."

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