

The Select Board met on Tuesday, January 18, 2022 remotely via ZOOM at 7:00pm. Board member Mackenzie was absent. The following Board members were present:

Mark Gallivan, Chair
Benjamin Barrett, Vice Chair
Glenn Maffei, Clerk
James O'Neil

Also participating
James Johnson, Town Administrator
Patrick Shield, Assistant Town Administrator
Jodi Cuneo, Finance Director
Lisa Sinkus, Treasurer/Collector
Dr. Bridget Gough, Superintendent Walpole Public Schools
Michael Friscia, School Business Administrator
Aoife Kelly, Executive Assistant

Finance Committee Members: Mark Trudell (Chair) and Josette Burke

School Committee Members: William J. Buckley, Jr. (Chairman), Nancy Gallivan and Kristen Syrek

Capital Budget Committee Members: Edward Forsberg (Chair)

Remote Participation

Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, this meeting will be conducted via remote means. Chair to announce that all members will be participating remotely during the meeting. Every vote taken will be taken by roll call vote.

Appointments

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Gallivan called the meeting to order at 7pm followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Discussion on FY23 Town Budget and Vote request for extension from February 7 to no later than the end of February to deliver the budget and budget message

Jim Johnson provided a comprehensive summary of the FY23 budget expenses and highlighted increases in the Police and Fire Department budgets, which included adding personnel in both departments. Jim touched on the increase in expenses in the School Department budget of currently 4.07%. Jim informed the Board that he is still waiting on the Governor's budget and the final health insurance numbers in order to complete the budget.

Jim outline the revenue projections for FY23; this included increasing new growth significantly with a budgeted amount of \$950,000. Jim also discussed the following line item increases – motor vehicle excise, license & permits and the ambulance receipts. Jim requested permission from the Select Board to deliver the budget message and a balanced budget no later than the end of February, a similar request to last year.

The Select Board agreed with Jim in terms of delaying the delivery of the budget and budget message. The Board were pleased with the increase in the Fire and Police Department personnel numbers. The Board agreed that additional details were required in terms of the School Department budget but acknowledged that more services were necessary to meet the needs of children in particular those that were adversely effective by remote learning. The Board thanked Jim, the finance team and department heads for working hard on this task over the past number of weeks.

School Committee Chairman Buckley provided comment on the school department budget, the needs of students both long and short term and the collaborative effort that is involved in creating this budget.

On motion of Chair Gallivan, seconded by Board member O'Neil voted to approve request of the Town Administrator for an extension of no later than the end of February to deliver the budget and budge message. On roll call vote of the Board, Motion Passed (4-0-0).

Continued Discussion on American Rescue Plan Act Funding and possible vote

Jim Johnson stated that Walpole is set to receive \$4.7 million from Norfolk County, \$1.186 million of which is available now. Since usage of these funds are only subject to approval from the Select Board, he asked the Board to consider authorizing projects, including the Winter Street sewer expansion (\$450,000), the East/Elm bridge rehabilitation (\$500,000), Walpole high school HVAC improvements (\$150,000), June Street drainage repair (\$280,000), South Walpole Community Athletic Complex bathroom facilities (\$775,000). The total cost of these five projects is an estimated \$2,155,000, but it is anticipated that the cost of some of the projects will come in lower than expected.

The Board discussed the list of projects and the Town Meeting funding that was already appropriated for the June Street repairs. Jim informed the Board that the June Street drainage project and the partial funding of the bridge repair are eligible for reimbursement, so if ARPA funding is allocated towards them, the Town Meeting money can be re-appropriated elsewhere.

Comment was provided by School Committee Chair Buckley and Finance Committee Chair Mark Trudell. On motion of Chair Gallivan, seconded by Board member O'Neil voted to authorize the Town Administrator to submit the first round of projects as discussed tonight to Norfolk County for consideration. On roll call vote of the Board, Motion Passed (4-0-0).

Jim informed the Board that he, Finance Director Jodi Cuneo, and Treasure/Collector Lisa Sinkus had a call about the \$54 million borrowing that went well and that they would know the Town's rating by Monday. Borrowing this early appears to be the right move because rates are projected to increase significantly in the next year. Jim also informed the Board that he has been researching a Means-Tested Residential Exemption, a program which would allow certain older residents to receive a property tax reduction. They would need to be over 60, live in the community for over 10 years, and own less than a specified amount in assets. The cost of the benefit would be redistributed among all other residents of the Town. Jim stated that he would continue looking into the matter and provide the Select Board with a more detailed report in the near future.

On motion of Chair Gallivan, seconded by Board member O'Neil voted to adjourn the meeting and the meeting was adjourned accordingly at 7:56pm. On roll call vote of the Board, Motion Passed (4-0-0).