

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
Thursday, February 17, 2022
Held virtually over Zoom

Present:

Finance Committee

Roll Call 13 in attendance:

Mark Trudell

Kathleen Foley Greulich

Josette Burke

Jean Kenney

Allyson Hamilton

Douglas Shea

Brian Bain

Mark Sullivan

Steve Hendricks

Lisa Van der Linden

Susan Lawson

Lawrence Pitman

Jeff Fisher

Absent: Lucy Romanowiz, Dennis Crowley

Additional attendees:

Jim Johnson, Patrick Shield, Rich Kelleher, Tim Bailey, Lisa Sinkus, Jodi Cuneo, Carl Balduf, Rick Mattson, Justin Monta, Drew Hand, Don Anderson, Jim Crowley

The meeting was called to order by Mark Trudell at 7:05pm.

General Government Budget Review

Building Maintenance- Ms. Burke asked about the status of the Marathon House, and Town Administrator Jim Johnson stated that there are currently no plans for it. Mr. Bain asked why there is such great disparity in the heating budgets for different buildings. Building Superintendent Don Anderson explain that heat consumption will vary heavily depending on type of usage and number of occupants. Mr. Anderson also described the types maintenance issues concerning the fire station, library, Blackburn Auditorium, Jarvis Farm pools, and DPW Facilities.

Motion by Josette Burke and seconded by Douglas Shea for **favorable action on the Building Maintenance budget in the amount of \$2,400,421.**

The motion passed 13-0-0.

Public Works Budget Review

DPW: Engineering- Ms. Burke asked about the amount allotted for personnel. Mr. Johnson stated that the department decided to merge an assistant position with a permit reviewer position that was budgeted for but never hired. DPW Director Rick Mattson explained that the annual stipend line item is given to the administrative assistant who runs the GIS mapping system for the whole department. Town Engineer Carl Balduf stated that the DPW's staff is actually much smaller than other comparable towns. Mr. Shea asked for an update on the Elm Street traffic study, and Mr. Johnson stated that rough cost estimates recently came in at \$2 million and they are moving forward with the next phase.

DPW: Administration- Mr. Shea questioned the Dues & Memberships and Meetings & Conferences budgets. Mr. Mattson stated that there were no duplicates and each line item was necessary for the departments. Mr. Pittman asked why the budget for equipment maintenance is \$0, and Mr. Mattson stated that for DPW Administration there isn't any equipment to maintain that isn't already taken care of by the other DPW departments.

DPW: Highway- Mr. Shea asked about the increase in the amount budgeted for salaries and emergency overtime. Finance Director Jodi Cuneo stated that she would find out and update the Committee later.

DPW: Snow & Ice- Mr. Trudell stated that the Town cannot lower the Snow & Ice budget or they will lose the opportunity to receive financial aid from the state during weather emergencies. Mr. Mattson stated that hiring snow plow operators has been difficult this year and they are looking into increasing incentives to attract more people.

DPW: Traffic Control- Mr. Shea asked why the Electricity budget is lower than last year, and Mr. Johnson said he reduced it from what Mr. Mattson requested to help balance the budget.

DPW: Cemetery- Mr. Sullivan asked how many funerals occur per year, and Superintendent of Parks, Cemeteries, & Forestry Justin Monta estimated about 20 full burials and 10 cremations.

Motion by Josette Burke and seconded by Susan Lawson for **favorable action on the DPW budget in the amount of \$5,789,965.**

The motion passed 13-0-0.

Public Safety Budget Review

Police Department- Mr. Pitman asked why overtime has increased, and Police Chief Rich Kelleher explained that they have hired more personnel and therefore there are more people utilizing vacation and sick time. Chief Kelleher stated that the stipend budget has increased because of collective bargaining in the staff's contracts. Ms. Burke asked about retirements, and Chief Kelleher listed one recent and one upcoming retiring staff. Mr. Shea asked why there are two education incentives budgeted, and Chief Kelleher stated that one was for him and one was for the Deputy Chief who has not yet been hired. Mr. Sullivan asked why the crossing guard budget has increased, and Chief Kelleher stated that the department requested to add one crossing guard to the intersection of High Plain and Washington Street. Ms. Hamilton asked about the increase in the sick pay budget, and Chief Kelleher stated that an officer who is retiring in April 2023 will be paid for his accumulated sick time.

Animal Control- Mr. Fisher questioned the Animal Control Officer positions. Mr. Johnson stated that Walpole shares with Norwood, and that Norwood takes care of all fringe benefits so that Walpole only needs to pay a flat annual fee. He added that it is a good deal because the department was having difficulties filling the position on its own. Mr. Fisher and Mr. Bain felt that the cost was still too high compared to how much other towns pay for animal control services.

Motion by Larry Pitman and seconded by Brian Bain for **favorable action on the Police budget in the amount of \$6,881,203.**

The motion passed 13-0-0.

Motion by Josette Burke and seconded by Allyson Hamilton for **favorable action on the Animal Control budget in the amount of \$130,875.**

The motion passed 7-6-0.

Yes: Allyson Hamilton, Steve Hendricks, Susan Lawson, Kathleen Greulich, Jean Kenney, Mark Sullivan, and Lisa Van der Linden

No: Josette Burke, Brian Bain, Jeff Fisher, Douglas Shea, Larry Pitman, and Mark Trudell

DPW: Parks- Mr. Trudell asked why the water budget increased more than usual. Mr. Johnson stated that cost of watering the new fields is contributing to this high increase. Ms. Greulich asked where revenue earned from parks goes, and Mr. Johnson explained that it goes to the Recreation Department as a revolving account.

Motion by Josette Burke and seconded by Allyson Hamilton for **favorable action on the Parks budget in the amount of \$944,880.**

The motion passed 13-0-0.

Fire Department- Mr. Bain asked about the Overtime Training budget. Fire Chief Tim Bailey stated that each staff member receives 48 hours of training and that comes out of the overtime budget. Mr. Pitman asked why the Firefighters budget has increased so much over the years. Chief Bailey stated that staffing has increased to 44 from 40 back in 2019. Ms. Hamilton asked for an update on the SAFER Grant. Chief Bailey stated that they have applied for funding for four personnel and are waiting to hear back. Ms. Burke asked about retirements, and Chief Bailey said he was not aware of any upcoming retirements.

Motion by Josette Burke and seconded by Allyson Hamilton for **favorable action on the Fire Department budget in the amount of \$5,425,952.**

The motion passed 13-0-0.

Building Inspection Services- Mr. Shea asked why there are two deputy electrical inspectors budgeted. Building Commissioner Jim Crowley assured that there is enough demand to justify both positions. Mr. Bain asked why there's an increase in Training & Development. Mr. Crowley stated that the number was lower in the previous few years because some trainings were put on hold because of COVID, but now they are going forward with all necessary training programs.

Motion by Brian Bain and seconded by Douglas Shea for **favorable action on the Inspectional Services.**

The motion passed 12-0-1 (Jeff Fisher abstained).

Motion by Brian Bain and seconded by Douglas Shea for **favorable action on the Weights & Measures and Emergency Management budgets.**

The motion passed 13-0-0.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Jeff Fisher requested to defer voting on meeting minutes until the next meeting on 2/28/22.

Adjournment

Motion by Josette Burke and seconded by Susan Lawson to adjourn.
The motion passed 13-0-0.

The Finance Committee adjourned at 8:30pm.