

FINANCE COMMITTEE
Minutes
Zoom Number 823 8517 9701

TOWN CLERK
2024 JAN 30 AM 7:57
MILLBURY, MASS.
Time: 6:30 p.m.

Date: January 22, 2024

Present: O'Connell, O'Connor, Pratt, Wells, Kuphal

Absent: Cooper, Cooney

Meeting called to order at 6:33 p.m.

Motioned by Pratt, seconded by Wells to accept the minutes of January 10, 2024 as written.
Unanimous.

Jennifer Barrett, Finance Director and Karyn Clark, Acting Town Manager were present at the meeting.

Chris Naff was present at the meeting.

Jen O'Connell: We are here for our kickoff for the FY2025 budget. We will be meeting at different locations this year. Karyn and Jennifer have put together a detailed presentation for us this evening.

Karyn Clark: We put this together for education purposes for the public. We wanted to outline our approach to this budget. We have noticed some deficiencies in the budget. Our thought is to pool the office supplies into one account, restructuring of the facility maintenance and work on a vehicle fleet maintenance schedule. We have 2 additional buildings to take care of. We are looking at staffing resources for these also. We will be tracking data on where our people (custodial staff) are and which buildings need more attention.

William Pratt: Do we have a vehicle inventory?

Karyn Clark: We brought in a 2nd mechanic to help with smaller preventative maintenance on the vehicles. Both of our mechanics have a tremendous amount of experience. This helps to keep our maintenance in house. There are some jobs that we have no choice but to send out. We are also looking into Blackstone Valley Tech students. We are trying to be creative. We can track things better with the proper software.

Jennifer Barrett: Keith wants software to track each vehicle and to do maintenance as it is needed. This would also help with ordering parts. With the software, we would know ahead of time when something needs to be done.

Russell Wells: Where does vehicle maintenance fall in the budget?

Jennifer Barrett: Each department has their own line item for this.

Russell Wells: Who would be in charge of all of this?

Jennifer Barrett: Keith would be in charge.

William Pratt: Is spending this amount of money on software, reducing our insurance?

Jennifer Barrett: It would record the mileage when the vehicles come in. I am not sure what would happen with the insurance.

Karyn Clark: This is about cost savings and creating efficiencies. On December 4 the discussion was about data and reports. I think this will give us a baseline for the following year. We are also working on succession planning. We need to be competitive to retain who we have. We have lost 6 staff members to Northboro due to not being as competitive as we should be. Before we lose people, we need to show them that we hear them and we are here to support them as best as we can. We have some very dedicated people here. I stopped in on Saturday and found it hard to find a parking space. Some of the department heads were catching up.

Russell Wells/Jen O'Connell: What is causing them to come in on Saturday?

Karyn Clark: There is a lot going on during the work week. Some of the things that they need to do take some uninterrupted time. You could be in the middle of an important grant writing or email and someone from the public comes in and demands to speak to the department head. You have to drop what you are doing and handle the situation.

William Pratt: We still need to be able to stay within the budget. We need to treat this as a business.

Karyn Clark: We want to keep the people we have because the alternative is to replace them and start all over and end up paying the higher cost anyway.

Judith O'Connor: Our benefit package is huge. If we are going to continue to raise salaries, we should look at adjusting the benefit package.

Jennifer Barrett: Most municipal benefit packages are the same.

Karyn Clark: It used to be that the goal was to work for a municipality. In the past this has been the job to get and be secure. Most people now don't have long range plans on employment.

Karyn Clark: Our salary increases are between 1-3% based on merit and/or some partial market rate adjustments. The Police Department contract has been settled and we are now working on the Dispatch, DPW, Custodians and Clerks.

Russell Wells: When is their contract over?

Karyn Clark: That would be June 30th. We are utilizing Mark Hollis for the facilities foreman to preserve what building we have to take care of.

Russell Wells: Who do the custodians report to now?

Karyn Clark: The custodians seem to be assigned to certain buildings. I would like to change that.

Jennifer Barrett: The MS4 Stormwater will not be discussed in length tonight. It is currently operating as a capital improvement fund. It has not been established as an Enterprise Fund yet.

Jennifer Barrett went over the responsibilities of the Finance Committee

Jen O'Connell: I don't want to micromanage the Town.

Karyn Clark: I am a very collaborative person. I am very direct and honest and appreciate all of your feedback.

Jennifer Barrett: I changed the title of the Municipal Office Building (MOB) to Facilities to make it clear what this is used for.

Jen O'Connell: Are we behind the times on some of our software?

Karyn Clark: Yes, we are.

William Pratt: How far behind are we?

Jennifer Barrett: I am not sure about that. We are working to get up to date.

Jennifer Barrett: We have been doing document scanning in every department.

William Pratt: Where are all the soft documents kept?

Jennifer Barrett: They are stored in our office cloud. There will be an article on Town Meeting for the Planning Department and the Police Department so that they can have all of their documents scanned. We are reducing our paper footprint. I took over the server decommissioning in August.

We need to look at our hardware end of life cycle. We are coming up on 5 years with what we received in 2020. We will try to stretch out the life and then stagger the replacements.

MS4 Stormwater

Chris Naff: This is a federally charged mandate that is unfunded. We need to manage the road runoff. Our cost for MS4 is higher due to the Blackstone River. In order to fund the Enterprise Fund for this, we would have to increase fees to all properties, separate from Real Estate Taxes. The BOS was not on board with this. The recommendation to the Board was to shift most of the burden to the commercial properties. We need \$1million annually. We will know more tomorrow night. The BOS is not in favor of added fees to all property owners. The feel of the board is to raise it through the general fund, which would impact the budget.

Jen O'Connell: Does the budget that you sent us include this?

Jennifer Barrett: It does include this. I just need to recheck to make sure it is all in there.

Chris Naff: We looked at the fees and residential owners would pay about \$50 per year. The Mall would be between \$50,000-\$100,000 and Felters would be around \$10,000. We have always worked with a single tax rate. We have been fearful of instituting a dual rate. MS4 actually passed in the 70's to the big cities and it has taken until the 20th century to hit the smaller municipalities. We have to comply with this federal law or there will be grants that we would not be able to apply for.

ASA Waters Mansion

Karyn Clark: We do not have an Executive Director right now. We did our 2nd round of interview today. The Interim Director is with us until March. There have been a lot of events scheduled and we have had a lot of help from volunteers, the Task Force, the Women's Club and the Friends.

Jennifer Barrett showed a slide on revenues received by the ASA Waters Mansion.

Russell Wells: There was discussion last year about the tent. Have you had discussions on what to do when we can no longer use the tent?

Chris Naff: We did receive another waiver on this. We now have permission to keep it there until 2026. Every change we make to the property, indoor or outdoor, has to go through the Historical Society, since it is a historic site. We are working on putting a floor in the tent. The tent enables us to have larger gatherings. The outside space is extremely important to keep our revenues up.

It is used to pay for improvements at the Mansion. We are also very optimistic on building a greenhouse on the property. There was a garden there in the past.

Karyn Clark: Kristin's salary was very low. We need to discuss this in order to get someone in that position.

Chris Naff: Kristin left because our pay scale was not where it should have been, but there were other reasons also.

Jen O'Connell: I wish that you had come to the FinCom if it was mostly because of the money.

Chris Naff: I do not know if she would have stayed with the uncertainty of whether the salary would be there on July 1st.

Town Manager/Human Resources/Board of Selectmen/Legal Services

Jennifer Barrett showed slides explaining the responsibilities of the above departments.

Jennifer Barrett showed slides of the staffing of each department.

Karyn Clark: Our former Town Manager was also an attorney, so our legal account had been reduced over the past few years. We will need to increase it now.

Finance Department

Jennifer Barrett oversees Treasurer/Collector, Assessors Department and is also the Technology Liaison

Jennifer Barrett showed slides explaining her staffing pattern.

Jennifer Barrett: The person that I have as the Assistant Town Accountant is a retired person and is working 23 hours a week. She is very knowledgeable in this position. I have an open position for an office assistant. This would be a 19 hour work week. I have a senior worker that comes in 4 hours a week and helps with the filing. The change in my budget is moving from 1 full time position to 2 part time positions. This is also a shift from a salaried position to an hourly position. We are also anticipating an increase in the OPEB Valuation Services.

Technology

Slides shown with core responsibilities.

Jennifer Barrett: I have been working with Worldband Information Technologies. Worldband contacted Verizon to install technology into all of the fire stations. Last year we added a 16 hour position to the Cable Budget. The plan was to cross train this person on the meetings and update the website and boards in Town. Amanda's salary has been moved to the Technology Budget. She has come in on her off hours to help out when we have needed her. She does a lot more than what people think.

Jen O'Connell: I think we should take a look at the Cable Access Salary. I think we need to check around to different municipalities to see how much they are paying. He has had minimal increases over the past few years.

Animal Control

Jennifer Barrett: We have the same staff. We are currently working on outside services for kennel services. We anticipate that this budget will not change.

Veterans Services

Jennifer Barrett: We are in an IMA with Uxbridge and we do not foresee any increases.

Zoning Board of Appeals

Jennifer Barrett: They are very active right now. They may need some funding for internal expenses.

Karyn Clark and Jennifer Barrett went over the different stipends for some of our committees.

Reserve Fund

Jennifer Barrett: The fund is closer to 1% of the Town side budget. We may need to raise it to \$120,000. I did not put that into the budget. The Selectmen will be discussing the Reserve Policy at their meeting tomorrow night. This will be their first look at it. This includes the Stabilization Funds. I would recommend that you meet with them when they schedule a 2nd reading on it. They will have 3 meetings on it before it is voted on.

Karyn Clark: Our plan for tonight was to try to do an overview of the budget process.

Motioned by Wells, seconded by Pratt to adjourn at 9:16 p.m. Unanimous.

Quincy O'Connell
Chair Apr 2.
W.H. Pratt
Samuel Wells
Pratt
Justin O'Connell