

Brimfield Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: February 27, 2024

Location: Hitchcock Academy

Committee Members Present: Joe Ballou; Chair, Mike Moloney, Denise DuPont, Nancy Waugh, Ted Steensen, Patrick Kubala, Billie Jean Rubio

Staff: Patricia Plasse (Finance Committee Clerk)

Town Staff Present: Marie Arsenault (Accountant), Joseph Venezia (Conservation, Co-Chair)

Called to order: 6:35: p.m.

January 30, 2024, Minutes

Joe Ballou stated the minutes from January 30, 2024, should be tabled as there is a question regarding a vote on the Retirement Fund Transfer. The meeting video has not been posted. The Clerk will follow up with Public Access to notify her once it is posted so it can be reviewed.

Conflict of Interest and Open Meeting Law Acknowledgement

Joe Ballou asked Committee members to complete the Conflict-of-Interest training, and the Open Meeting Law Acknowledgement. He asked that anyone who completes it should notify the Finance Committee clerk.

Reserve Fund Transfer Request

Joe Ballou asked the Finance Committee members if they reviewed the Reserve Fund Transfer request. Marie Arsenault (Town Accountant) explained the funds were for the licenses for Financial Software for new users. She said there were funds in the Treasurer/Collector budget for a license for the Treasurer/Collector and the Assistant. Billie Jean Rubio asked if it was brand new software. Marie said it was not and it has been used previously. She stated that there are some new users. She indicated the Assessor, the Accountant, and the Accountant Assistant, the Treasurer, the Treasurer/Collector, and assistant all require a license. She explained the software was cloud based so it could be accessed anywhere. The Transfer request is for two licenses, one for the Treasurer/Collector and one for the Assistant Treasurer-Collector. She informed the Committee that the cost is \$870.00 per license but it has been pro-rated for the year. The cost for one license pro-rated is \$704.58 and the other is \$370.83 for a total request for a fund transfer in the amount of \$1075.41.

Joe Ballou asked for a motion to approve the Reserve Fund Transfer in the amount of \$1075.41 for two user licenses for the Financial Software required.

MOTION: Mike Maloney stated, "So Moved,"

SECOND: Nancy Waugh

VOTE: All

Joe Ballou signed the Reserve Fund Transfer paperwork.

Capital Planning

Joe Ballou stated the Town received a grant to develop a Capital Plan. He explained there was no time or date for the project to be completed and it will not be during this budget cycle. He asked Billie Jean Rubio

and Patrick Kubala if they would meet with Department Heads to discuss a Capital Plan and to present it at the next meeting.

Budget planning for FY 2025, Benchmark Study

Joe Ballou informed the Committee members that the Benchmark Study has not been received yet. He is hoping it will be ready soon.

Review completed department budget requests

Conservation Clerk/Expense Budget

Joe Ballou stated he has received three budgets so far. They were the Board of Health, Conservation, and the Planning Board. Joe Ballou asked Joe Venezia to introduce himself. Joe Venezia informed the Committee Members that he was the Conservation Commission Co-Chair and was at the meeting to support the request for more hours for the Conservation Commission Clerk. He explained there was work that needed to be caught up because they did not have a clerk for a while before the current clerk was hired. He went on to say that some of the hours could be pulled from the Wetland Fund as it can be used for this purpose to cover some of the hours required. The clerk explained that the budget calculated would only cover ten hours per week and was hired for 10-15 hours per week, but it usually was at least 15 hours. This was discussed and the Finance Committee suggested a budget for 15 hours per week and if 3 extra hours were required in the short term, which would come out of the Wetland Fund since that is what is for.

MOTION: Patrick Kubala made a motion to approve the Conservation Clerk salary for \$14,890 for 15 hours per week and to level fund for the Conservation Expense Account.

SECOND: Billie Jean Rubio

VOTE: All

Planning Board Budget

Joe Ballou stated the Planning Board Budget submission requested an increase of \$300 in their expense budget due to the increase in advertising costs. He said they were fine with the 4% increase in payrate for 2024. Joe Ballou asked if he could get a motion to increase the Planning Board expense budget by \$300 and increase the Clerk salary by 4%.

MOTION: Mike Maloney said, "So Moved,"

SECOND: Billie Jean Rubio

VOTE: All

Board of Health Trash Contract

Joe Ballou said the Trash Contract was up for renewal and bids were sent out. He stated there was discussion regarding using bags or bins. He said most of the trash companies do not want to use bags anymore but want to use the bins so the robotic arms on the trucks can be used. He said there will be an upfront cost if the bins are used. He went on to say the trash bag fees coming in was approximately \$80,000 a year and if the bags were eliminated, the revenue from those bags would not be coming in. He said that the money from the sale of the bags did not go into the Board of Health budget, it went into the General Fund.

Marie Arsenault stated that the actual cost of the bags comes out of the revolving account for the trash bags fees. Joe said since the Board of Health has sent out bids, this item would be placed on hold until bids have been received and a decision has been made and the contract expires on July 01, 2024, it may not get decided before the Town Meeting. Joe asked if they should table this item until the bids come back and a

decision is made. Ted Steensen gave an example of a town that he knew and how the cost of trash removal is going up and the estimate might be conservative.

School Budget

Joe Ballou asked Mike Moloney to talk about the school budget. He stated it was a 7.2% increase from last year. He said they did not have the Tantasqua school budget yet. Patrick Kubala asked if the increase was because of the Special Education budget. Mike said the special education budget was from elementary school to age 26 and included Brimfield students only.

Joe Ballou asked where the funds for this would come from. Marie Arsenault stated that it is difficult to determine what the increase could be since there are so many variables. She went over the past budget increases which were more than the increase for this year. She talked about the entire operating budget and how they increased yearly, and they will still be able to balance the budget, but they should watch the trends. She explained if receipts went up it can offset the increase. Mike Moloney stated that we would be over the levy limit and Marie stated they have always been over the levy. She stated the free cash should be ok this year, but it may affect future years.

Joe Ballou stated he would start to chase down budgets the Finance Committee has not received yet. He stated he saw that the Fire Chief submitted his budget. He said he is looking for a line item for radios for \$5,000 per year to continually replace radios. Denise Dupont asked if there were grants for this, but the answer was that there are not any for that area, although he has received grants for other equipment. He stated that the Fire Chief could not come to this meeting, that there is the issue with the Flea Market detail, and he is still trying to get more accurate numbers so he might be at the next meeting.

Joe said he was hoping to see Eva Pitsinger last night to discuss the Senior Center Budget, but she could not make it. He said this budget will be coming soon and they will discuss the new rental contract.

Building Committee update

Joe discussed the Building Committee and the three options they sent to the Select Board for review. He talked about the three options and how the Building Committee will present the options to the Town in several meetings and a Special Town Meeting would be held on May 08, 2024, to vote on the options. He explained that the Building Inspector said the Town Hall cannot be open this Spring due to issues with the windows collapsing.

Joe said if the Town votes for any one option, the next steps would be to commit another \$350,000 to create engineering plans and price lists for materials. Marie Arsenault asked if this cost of \$350,000 would be voted on or just the options to be voted on. The video clerk stated she goes to all the meetings and said they would vote on the options which would have the cost next to each one.

Denise Dupont asked if they voted for an option to just build a new annex building, could the Town Hall be put under historical preservation and obtain grants for that. Joe Ballou stated that would be the cheapest, and the OPM stated there could be grants for handicapped access and other items. Joe Venezia stated that the Hazard Mitigation project could have potential grants as well, since the Town Hall is the place where people can go for safety. Denise Dupont asked if there was a grant where they would get reimbursed after they paid the money up front and they would have be aware of that.

Town Clerk Budget

Joe asked if everyone had the Town Clerk budget. He said the question came up at the last meeting as to

why she needed to reduce the budget for her assistant. Joe Ballou said that the Town Clerk realized with her increased hours that she no longer required an assistant. He said that previously, when she requested an assistant, the requests for Public Records were high, and now it has settled down and the Town Clerk has learned her job better and does not need assistance. He said the Town Clerk said if she needs an assistant for a short time, she will hire an election worker. Joe stated that currently she has been receiving mail in ballots so that she may need an assistant to process those. Denise Dupont asked if there was money taken from the Building Maintenance Fund to pay for voting booths. She said it was not reflected in the Town Clerk expenses and asked if there are any other requirements for the elections. Joe stated she has the booths and said she did not need anything more for the elections.

MOTION: Billie Jean made a motion to approve the Town Clerk budget as submitted.

SECOND: Denise Dupont

VOTE: All

Joe discussed the time for the next meeting and asked if they should wait for more budgets to come in. Mike Moloney asked if there was a draft for warrant articles since that needs to be put into the budget as well. It was decided the meeting would be on March 26, 2024.

Joe Ballou asked Billie Jean Rubio and Patrick Kubala to meet with the Department Heads before the March 26th meeting to discuss the Capital Planning Budget to know what purchases need to be made. Bille Jean said they would if the department heads had time.

Joe Ballou stated he would chase down the Fire Chief's budget and Reserve Fund Transfer request for the Flea Market Detail. He said he would also work to obtain the Police Chief's budget as well.

MOTION: Patrick Kubala made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

SECOND: Billie Jean Rubio

VOTE: All

The next meeting is March 26, 2024, at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Patricia A. Plasse, Clerk