

Brimfield Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: March 26, 2024

Location: Hitchcock Academy

Committee Members Present: Joe Ballou: Chair, Mike Moloney, Denise DuPont (Via Phone), Nancy Waugh, Ted Steensen, Patrick Kubala

Committee Members Absent: Billie Jean Rubio

Town Staff Present: Marie Arsenault (Accountant), Don Contois (Fire Chief), Michele Metcalf (Admin -Board of Health), Dick Costa (Chairman, Board of Health), Eva Pittsinger (Senior Center Director / Outreach) Patricia Plasse (Finance Committee Clerk)

Other Attendees: Deb Gran, (First Congregational Church)

Called to order: 6:30 p.m.

January 30 & March 27, 2024, Minutes

MOTION: Ted Steensen made a motion to approve the minutes from January 30th and March 27th, 2024.

SECOND: Patrick Kubala

VOTE: All

Conflict of Interest and Open Meeting Law Acknowledgement

Joe Ballou asked Committee members if they completed the Conflict-of-Interest training and if so, to forward the certificates to the Finance Clerk.

Classification and Compensation Report, Market Salary Survey

Joe Ballou asked if everyone had reviewed the survey. He stated he sent questions and said the Market and the Benchmark had certain things that didn't seem to make sense.

Council on Aging Budget

Joe Ballou asked if the lease for the Senior Center has been separated from the expense account. Eva Pittsinger said that there has been an increase of \$600.00 from last year. She stated there was no control over the increase in the cost of the lease or snow removal. She said there was no increase for the van and there were only 2 changes in the budget which was the lease and the snow removal. The representative from the church, Deb Gran, explained that the mission of the church is to have the Senior Center as community. She said they calculated the number of hours the Senior Center used the space, and the Church hours, the Boy Scouts, the bells, and other church use. She stated the Senior Center's use is 50% of the time. She went on to say they looked at shared expenses and improvements and decided the Town had to carry their share. She stated they don't look to make money from the town. She said the painting of the church was all done from money raised from endowments. She said if the Town has some cost-saving ideas they would welcome them. She said the rent had to be increased to cover the costs.

Ted Steensen asked if the solar on the church has helped with utility costs. Deb said it helped some. The system they installed isn't meant to cover all energy costs and the energy cost has gone up. Ted asked if there was a summary of the costs and Deb said she could get it to them. Mike Moloney stated that sharing

the cost is reasonable. He said that getting the cost summary would give the Town a basis for the future.

There was the question of whether the lease was capped, and the answer was no, but the church would have to give the Town a 90-day notice if the rent were to be increased. Joe Ballou asked if the lease could be for three years instead of five. The Committee decided they would discuss this at the next meeting. Eva stated the lease was given its own line item and asked if the Finance Committee was ok with that. Joe said they were but they must present the budget to the Select Board for approval.

Board of Health Budget

Dick Costa explained he would like to increase the salary for the Administrator Assistant for the Board of Health. He explained she has been in the position for nine (9) years and has only ever received a cost of living raise and never received a step grade increase. He gave an account of her responsibilities which included her responsibilities, her interfacing with the public, and how she oversees the landfill, plumbing inspections, well, septic and food permits. He asked for a 23% increase in the position's salary.

Denise Dupont asked if the Finance Committee was using the Benchmark study for everyone. Joe Ballou said they were not using the study for anyone at this time, since there were questions regarding it. Dick Costa said that the Benchmark had the Board of Health Administrator listed as a clerk and she has been an administrator since the beginning. Marie Arsenault stated the current salary rate was \$24.37.

Dick Costa reiterated that Michele Metcalf (Board of Health Administrator) had been in the position for nine years. Patrick Kubala said he was concerned that if we approved this increase, others would be asking for the same. There was a discussion surrounding the Longevity Award and how it helped reward a long-time employee. Marie Arsenault said that it was a one-time payment. Joe Ballou thought that \$28.00 an hour was appropriate. He asked for a motion to approve this amount. There was no motion, and it was decided it would continue to the next meeting.

Trash Contract

Michelle Metcalf discussed the Trash Contract. She said the bids would close on 04/08/2024. She said they asked if the bags could still be used as the revenue from them offsets the contract. She said most trash companies don't want to use bags. She said most would include 1 roll-off bin for trash and 1 for recycling. She said if residents wanted additional bins, they would have to purchase them. She stated the maintenance of the bins would be included in the contract. She stated the previous budget was \$250,000 but she could not provide the new contract amount until the bids were closed and a new contract signed.

Fire Department

Don Contois (Fire Chief) explained the line item for radios. He said some radios are 20 years old and there was potential for failures. He said certain equipment has a ten-year life and it is better to replace the radios over time instead of waiting for them to break and incurring higher costs. He said the Fire Department would replace three radios a year. He said portable radios cost \$1,500 and mobile radios cost \$1,200. He went on to say that they use grant money when they have it, but it is not always guaranteed. Don stated that everything else in the budget was level set. Joe Ballou asked if Don passed on the percentage recommended for the cost of living to his employees. Don said he did.

The discussion continued into the Flea Market Detail issue. Joe Ballou asked if everyone saw Billie Jean Rubio's questions in an email she sent. Patrick Kubala said he saw her question and asked if it cost more for out-of-town people to fill those positions during the flea market.

Denise Dupont asked where that money would come from. Don said it was moved to the Fire Department budget. He said Martin Kelly (Select Board Chair) asked if the Fire Department detail was committed just to the Flea Market and Don told him if there was a fire, the detail Fire Department Members would respond to the fire. Mr. Kelly said that meant it wasn't dedicated so it cannot come out of the Flea Market Fund. Don said that the fire fighters take vacation so they can work the flea market detail to get paid from the flea market fund. Patrick asked what would happen if they couldn't find five fire fighters to take a vacation to do the details.

Ted Steensen asked if there were no flea market, would there be anyone at the fire station. Don said no. Ted made a statement that because the answer is no, the flea market forces the fire station to be manned and they must spend money to pay those manning the station, but they can't pay for that out of the flea market fund. Don said they have to man the fire station during the flea market because the fire fighters cannot get across town to get to the station if there is a fire. He said if they need to get across town when there is a fire, it's difficult even with the fire trucks and sirens going.

There was a question of where the flea market fees go. Marie Arsenault said they go into a revolving fund account and only fire is not paid from this fund any longer. She stated any left-over funds go into the General Fund. Don discussed the staffing for the flea market and is anticipating a short fall. He said they could cover the May show. Joe asked Don to resubmit the numbers with a revision. Mike Moloney asked Don if he keeps a running total for the fire fighter's pay. Ted told Don to estimate at his best guess.

Mike said to tell taxpayers the Fire Department's detail at the flea market is not being subsidized by the flea market fund. Patrick Kubala asked about having an ambulance at the flea market. Don said this was included in the Ambulance contract and Francesco's restaurant lets them set up there.

MOTION: Mike Maloney made a motion to approve the Fire Department budget.

SECOND: Parick Kubala

VOTE: All

Assessor Budget

Joe Ballou said the Assessor Budget was within the 5% target increase. There was a discussion regarding the Patriot Property (software vendor) increase.

MOTION: Parick Kubala made a motion to approve the Assessor budget as requested.

SECOND: Nancy Waugh

VOTE: All

Library Budget

MOTION: Parick Kubala made a motion to approve the library budget as requested.

SECOND: Nancy Waugh

VOTE: All

Treasurer/Collector

Mike Moloney asked what the increase in the budget was for. Marie stated that there were software costs for new licenses and longevity awards. She said that the Treasurer would like to see the license costs be absorbed by each department that requires a license. She said they are all under the Treasurer/Collector

budget currently. Denise Dupont said she has no objection to paying for licenses or longevity awards.

MOTION: Parick Kubala made a motion to approve the Treasurer/Collector budget as requested.

SECOND: Denise Dupont

VOTE: All

Treasurer Benefits Budget

Mike Moloney said he added all the corrections that Marie Arsenault sent. Marie explained the treasury payment. She said approximately 3 employees go through Mass Health for their health insurance. She said it cost less than what the town pays for health insurance for employees. She said the town has been paying the Department of Revenue for years. She said there was also an increase from last year since the split was 50/50 and now it is 60/40 with the town's contribution to health insurance increasing from 50% to 60%.

MOTION: Mike Maloney made a motion to approve the Treasurer Benefits budget as requested.

SECOND: Patrick Kubala

VOTE: All

Building Department Budget

There was discussion regarding the Building Department clerk's salary. The Building Department requested a salary increase from \$18.36 to \$21.06. The Finance Committee said they would hold off on this for now. Patrick Kubala said there should be merit increases and the department heads should set the rates, not the Finance Committee.

Accountant Budget

Marie Arsenault stated she level funded her budget, but she wanted to keep the line item for additional work in case it's needed. She stated there are 3,000 vendors and she needs to work on the w9's because we don't have a lot of them. She needs to follow up to obtain the missing ones. She said the Town gets fined if they don't have them and there is an audit. She will send letters to the vendors who have not sent theirs in. She said she won't need the additional line item once these are caught up.

MOTION: Patrick Kubala made a motion to approve the accountant budget as requested.

SECOND: Patrick Kubala

VOTE: All

Police Budget

MOTION: Patrick Kubala made a motion to approve the Police budget as requested.

SECOND: Nancy Waugh

VOTE: All

Historical Budget

MOTION: Patrick Kubala made a motion to approve the Historical budget as requested.

SECOND: Mike Moloney

VOTE: All

Finance Budget

MOTION: Patrick Kubala made a motion to approve the Finance budget as requested.

SECOND: Mike Moloney

VOTE: All

Joe Ballou said the Appropriations balance looked good. Marie said she would have a more current one soon. Joe asked if there were any Capital Articles. There are not any yet.

Mike Moloney said that they should hold off voting for the school budget. He said they have the total but want the breakdown of the budget. He said they can't control the costs at a 4.3% increase. He stated the overall operation costs are 3% so enrollment must have gone up.

Marie Arsenault said they increase the amount for the overlay. She said the excess is growing and an article is needed to use it. She explained the need to raise it every year and this money goes for exemptions, abatements, and the Senior Work-off program. She said whatever is left over remains in the account. She said she could send a list to the Committee to show the excess amount for each year.

Joe Ballou discussed the Building Project and said there were meetings to attend to hear about the options.

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

SECOND: Denise Dupont

VOTE: All

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

The next meeting is April 02, 2024, at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Patricia A. Plasse, Clerk