

Finance Committee

Joint meeting with Select Board

Meeting Minutes

January 17, 2023

5:30 PM

Present: Adam Nolde (Chair), Steve Noone (Vice Chair), Roland Bourdon, Mike Majors, Dave Wellinghoff, Jason Cole, Esha Gangolli, Christi Andersen and Scott Sullivan (Associate Member)

Mr. Nolde called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 5:34 PM.

I. Budget Workshop

Mr. Mangiaratti informed both the Select Board and Finance Committee that budget presentations will follow the current FY24 Budget Book table of contents. Noted a change in budget since last week identified the need of a different calculation and to cut \$238,877 from the FY24 budget.

Council on Aging

Sharon Mercurio, COA Director, reported the FY24 budget request and noted there are 5,500 seniors in Acton and have served over 34% of the population. The COA has offered over 1,800 programs from either a State grant or supplemented by a Friends of Council on Aging group. The Budget has not changed much except an increase in the travel budget, reduced subscription from periodicals as the Friends of the COA group assumed that expense. No further questions.

Finance

Lisa Wojick, Town Accountant and John Mangiaratti introduced the four divisions in the Finance Department: Accounting, Treasurer/Collector and Assessor. The Finance Director budget consists of Principal Assessor, Town Clerk, and Assistant Town Accountant. Assessors Budget includes 3 full-time employees (FTEs) – Assessors assists resident with abatements and exemptions. Budget down 1.5%. Accounting budget has 4 FTEs. Budget up 2% due to COLA

increase and realignments of positions. Mr. Cole questioned about the change of return address on real estate taxes submission, Ms. Wojick will have that addressed with the Town Treasurer. Theresa O'Leary presented the Treasurer budget was down due to some COLA changes. Ms. O'Leary answered Mr. Cole's question explaining the open Clerk's position did not get backfilled and will be continuing due to its cost savings. Sewer payments will continue to be to be mailed to Town Hall. Mr. Snyder-Grant asked to whom questions about tax bill increases should be directed. Ms. O'Leary suggested to send to the Assessor's Office.

Fire

Chief Robert Hart introduced his proposed General Fund, Fire Alarm Network Revolving Fund, Ambulance Enterprise Fund, and the Emergency Management budgets.

Deputy Chief Anita Arnum, Emergency Management Director introduced the FY24 budget highlighting the continued service during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic providing testing, and vaccination clinics, and working alongside the Acton Nursing Services, Board of Health and Acton-Boxborough School Nurses. Ms. Nagireddy questioned about updating equipment that is safer for the firefighters. Deputy Arnum noted that all firefighter gear is made using PFAS but have updated equipment with an extractor and additional materials on the vehicles. Mr. Cole questioned about the increase of the two additional firefighters – Mr. Mangiaratti noted it is for the impact shift, which has not been filled as of the present. The FTE increase was created for the FY23 budget. Mr. Martin asked about logistics of the new building. Chief noted the location is an asset to help reduce the response times in the area.

Human Resources

Marianne Fleckner, Human Resource Director noted the budget is mostly three full-time employees. Ms. Fleckner explained 'the great resignation'. Held 300 interviews and filled 56 positions. Many applicants submit resumes through indeed.com and may not be qualified for a position. Many people are staying in positions much longer than in the past. All collective bargaining agreements are signed. Offer robust programs to keep Acton on the forefront especially the Employee Recognition Committee and the Wellness Initiative Network committees, particularly the annual STAR awards that highlight the years of service and the

Employee Recognition and Development Day. Developed a new WIN program called CLUE (cultural learning understanding and experiencing). There were a few changes in the HR budget with a slight decrease in the senior program budget due to the program stopping during COVID, with slow in-person return since. Decrease in professional services (e.g. purchasing exams for promotions) and medical due to pre-employment physicals, increase in claims for 111F, overall increase by 1.27%. Mr. Snyder-Grant questioned if the loss of the local paper affected the number of applicants. Mr. Noone questioned about succession plans.

Information Technology

Mark Hald, Assistant Town Manager and Chief Information Officer introduced Kristin Alexander, GIS Director, and Matt Frost, Chief Technology Officer. The IT Budget is down by 1%.

Land Use

Tom Moberg, Building Commissioner introduced his budget without any significant changes to note. Only change in budget is a new building code coming out in June which will affect the purchase of new books and continuing education requirements.

Sheryl Ball, Health Director introduced her budget with 4 FTEs and highlighted the responsibilities of the Health Division. Oversees three revolving funds and is maintaining a level-budget.

Kristen Guichard, Planning Director and Zoning Enforcement Officer and Conservation introduced the FTEs. Most of the budget is salary driven. Budget is level-funded with a slight increase in travel due to previous COVID years.

Conservation Agent Mike Gendron explained further several ongoing projects. Noted the merging of building grounds and maintenance into professional services budget line.

Memorial and Citizen's Library

Maria Palacio, Library Director presented the library budgets. Returned to in-person programing and upgrade of audio-visual equipment in the meeting room and added new Zoom meeting technology. Completed filling critical staffing positions. The AML budget increased by \$30,000 to increase services to the public. The West Acton Citizens' Library budget is level-funded and

completed hiring a new branch manager. Mr. Martin questioned if in-person foot traffic is back to pre-pandemic levels – Ms. Palacio noted foot traffic is still not back to pre-pandemic levels. Mr. Noone questioned how many employees are full-time vs. part-time. Ms. Palacio noted most PTE are between 10-18 hours per week. Mr. Nolde questioned about circulated materials amounts at \$450,000 – Ms. Palacio noted that downloaded materials are included in the circulation amounts. Mr. Snyder-Grant questioned the use for Amazon for downloaded materials, Ms. Palacio noted there are specific vendors used for library materials and would use Amazon only in an emergency.

Police

Interim Chief Jim Cogan noted the department has 33 full-time officers, 1 records clerk, and 1 administrative assistant and also funds the dispatch center. Acton Police Department handled 24,322 calls from FY22. There were 111 arrests, motor vehicle stops increased by 40%, citations issued increased to 80%. Motor vehicle crashes increased 80%. New clinical responder is reducing the number of Section 12 incidents, and 500 referrals.

Animal Control – changes in budget due to salaries.

Ms. Nagireddy questioned if there has been a discussion to hire additional clinical responders. Chief Cogan noted the discussion has been brought up with the Town Manager for future budget preparations. Mr. Bourdon asked about the RECC budget and what the cost savings would be with regionalized dispatch. Mr. Mangaratti noted that most of the cost was transferred from the Finance Budget. Mr. Cole had questions regarding the School Resource Officer program, and Kelley's Corner construction with additional Police details overtime. Chief Cogan noted the construction budget is funding the details.

Facilities

Andrea Ristine, Public Facilities Superintendent noted that currently there are four FTEs. Cost of electricity and utilities are increasing. Mr. Nolde questioned about the solar array if the rates fluctuate or a standard rate – Ms. Ristine confirmed it is standard rate. Mr. Martin questioned about the town receiving a weatherization grant. Ms. Ristine noted that the Sustainability Director and Conservation Agent applied for the grant and were recently notified of the grant award geared toward the Public Safety Facility.

Town Manager

Town Manager John S. Mangiaratti discussed the budget changes for FY24. There is a total of nine full-time employees and introduced employees that report to the Town Manager Office. The only changes in the budget is due to collective bargaining and not needing to have as much reserved as we normally would and is level-funded.

Assistant Town Manager Mark Hald noted the Town Meeting budget is level funded.

Community Services Coordinator

Laura Ducharme reported on the services her office has provided during the past year for any resident under the age of 60. Currently does not have a formal budget and most funding come from private donations, churches, non-profits and grants.

Town Clerk

Eva Szkaradek presented the Town Clerk budget, highlighting a change in precincts with an additional one being added, and the hiring of a Deputy Town Clerk. Professional salaries increased due to the addition of a full-time employee, and the Elections budget decreased due to utilizing town staff assisting at elections. Implemented a new public records request procedure, and consolidated polling locations at the RJ Grey Junior High School.

Economic Development

Mr. Mangiaratti introduced Economic Development Director Julie Pierce.

Sustainability

Sustainability Director Andrea Becerra reported that the office is tasked to push forward actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enhance natural resources and improve resilience against climate change. The office published its first Climate Action Plan. Secured \$350,000 in funding, including the Climate Action Plan, and EZ fast charger installations; received a grant to fund increasing bike parking, energy efficiency upgrades to the PSF, 468 Main Street, and Memorial Library; partnered with Abode Energy Services to assist residents' transition to clean energy.

Transportation Budget

Austin Cyganiewicz indicated that transportation is still being impacted by the pandemic. Ridership has increased since the pandemic, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Brought back curb-to-curb service, fixed route service, partnered with the Commission on Disabilities for rides to the Registry of Motor Vehicles. Special shuttles were secured for transport to the 9/11 Memorial Service at the Public Safety Facility, collaborated with the Economic Development Director, and scheduled special trips to the Acton Asian Market. Mr. Bourdon questioned about the Rail Trail shuttle, Mr. Cyganiewicz noted it has not operated since March 2020. The CAT still services the commuter parking lot. Mr. Martin questioned about partnering with ride-hail services, Mr. Cyganiewicz worked with local taxi services in partnership with MAPC. Mr. Snyder-Grant questioned about a partnership with Uber or Lyft.

Diversity Equity and Inclusion Director

Mr. Mangiaratti introduced the new DEI Director Wanjiku Gachugi who recently began her role the previous week.

Veterans Services

Veterans Service Officer James MacRae for both Acton and Boxborough introduced the Veterans Service budget. The only increase is to salaries and veterans' benefits. Budget is level-funded.

Recreation

Melissa Settipani-Rufo, Recreation Director reported the Recreation Division has three full-time employees and is self-supporting through a Section 53D revolving fund, and also supported through the general fund for salary purposes with no changes from the previous year.

Nursing Services

Nursing Director Heather York reported that Acton Nursing Services offers home care nursing services, 80% of their budget is staffing for direct patient care, and public health nursing is operating as two distinct budgets, professional salaries are down 7% with elimination of the per-diem nursing position. Contractual services are down \$10,000 which are contractual services with the VNA.

Public Works

DPW Director Corey York introduced his FY24 budget, which includes the DPW Main Office, Highway Division, Public Facilities Division, Trees/Grounds Division, Engineering Division, and Cemetery Division. Only changes are in salaries. Engineering had a position control adjustment, but the budget remains the same. Continuing to move the fleet towards hybrid vehicles with the cost of fuel on the rise.

Cemetery Commissioners agreed to funding to improve the roads at the town cemeteries. Working with the Finance Department on the sewer rehab project and the loan payments. Mr. Cole commented on coordinating with utility companies and mentioned the tearing up of Nashoba Road two years after it was paved to install a new gas line and questioned if the utility company was going to fix the asphalt. Mr. York noted it happened right when the gas utility company discovered level 3 leaks and are currently working with the utility company. Mr. Nolde questioned about the salaries listed in the DPW and Cemetery budget not enough for 41 FTEs. Mr. Mangiaratti noted that the budget funding is coming from other budget items. Mr. Charter noted that the Cemetery salaries are covered from the Cemetery Commission Trust Funds in perpetuity.

Mr. Bourdon questioned about the upkeep of sidewalks that are in bad shape and looking for repairs – Mr. York is planning on the repair of Acton Center, Main and Hayward, and completed a sidewalk assessment of current sidewalks.

Mr. Majors asked about an update on the sewer installation at the Main Street campus for the dog park – Mr. York noted a MassWorks Grant has been awarded for the senior housing project.

Mr. Sullivan moved, seconded by Mr. Noone to adjourn and approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:20 PM

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Agenda, January 7, 2022
- Finance Committee Question and Answer Spreadsheet
- Revised Town Manager Budget