



## SELECT BOARD BUDGET WORKSHOP

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, January 10, 2024

6:00 PM

Acton Town Hall, Room 204 and Virtual

**Select Board Members Present:** Jim Snyder-Grant, Fran Arsenault, Dean Charter, David Martin, Alissa Nicol

**Finance Committee Members Present:** Christie Andersen, Adam Nolde, Stephen Noone, Roland Bourdon, Christine Russell, Scott Sullivan; Dave Wellinghoff

**Absent:** Vladimir Kan

**Remote:** Jason Cole

Mr. Snyder-Grant called the Select Board meeting to order at 6:00 PM. Ms. Andersen called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:03 PM. This was a joint meeting with the Finance Committee.

### I. Budget Workshop

Mr. Mangiaratti informed both the Select Board and Finance Committee that budget presentations will follow the current FY25 Budget Book table of contents.

#### 1. Administration and Finance

Marianne Fleckner, Administration and Finance Director, introduced the Human Resources and Finance staff. Ms. Fleckner outlined specific budget line items that have increased significantly with explanation. The Finance Director budget consists of the Principal Assessor, Town Clerk, and Assistant Town Accountant. Principal Assessor CJ Carroll reviewed the Assessors Budget, which includes 3 FTE. This budget has increased 9.22% with explanation. Town Accountant Joanne Norton, explained her office includes 3 FTE and discussed the responsibilities of the department. Their budget has increased by 5.37%, Ms. Norton gave further explanation as to why. Town Treasurer/Collector Theresa O'Leary introduced the department of 3.5 FTE and responsibilities of the department. This budget increased by 39.7%, to which Ms. O'Leary provided additional information on the driving reasons why. Ms. Fleckner encouraged the Boards to continue support for allowing professional development training for town staff.

Christine Russell – questioned how much the town has in tax title – Ms. O'Leary noted very few parcels and the total is approximately \$1 million.

Christie Andersen – how benefits costs have changed over time – Ms. Fleckner explained the health insurance and fixed costs to OPEB and Middlesex retirement but other benefits such as dental, vision, etc. are paid by the employee, and the Town needs to keep these items competitive to recruit quality employees. Additionally, the Health Savings Account (HSA) is paid for in half by the town and half by employee. Ms. Andersen questioned on employee retention – Ms. Fleckner explained the key is career development, training, motivational pieces not necessarily cost wise, but also



have succession plans to offer to current employees when a position is about to be open due to retirement. Mr. Mangiaratti also added that interviewees ask about remote work, and highlighted recent CBA adjustments to attract public safety personnel.

Steve Noone – questioned about restaurants closing and the impact on the commercial property taxes and remaining businesses in town as a result – Mr. Carroll noted an increase in commercial property values, but also dip in parcel count in 2021 due to closures, but that trend did not continue and have seen an increase in property value post-COVID

Ms. Andersen – questioned about how people can apply for abatements and exemptions – Mr. Carroll explained that people can attest their property bill and apply for both abatements and exemptions through the Assessor's Office or on the Assessor's town website page.

Alissa Nicol – asked what Acton's contesting taxes vs. other communities. Mr. Carroll noted it was comparable to other communities.

Jason Cole – questioned about how many positions in Finance are open and for how long they have been vacant -Ms. Fleckner indicated the Finance Director position (1 year) and 1 part-time non-benefitted positions (3 months).

Jim Snyder-Grant – happy to see 90% increase in abatements due to taxes increasing and what were the factors for the increase. Mr. Carroll noted this increase is due to an increase in communication and outreach aimed at educating the public of the programs by the Assessors Office.

Ms. Russell – if the budget increased by 3% every year would it sustain the department – Ms. Fleckner affirmed due to fixed costs.

Ms. Andersen – questioned about the current vacant positions – Mr. Mangiaratti noted 21 FTE vacant positions across all departments and the total amount is \$1.21 million.

Ms. Nicol – questioned about an examination of staffing needs in view of declining metrics and if this process has been done with this budget, including programs not relevant to services presently – Mr. Mangiaratti commented that assessing staff levels is constant and commented on staffing levels in his opening remarks, which has resulted in restructuring organizational charts for efficiencies and that the Town is not in the position of discontinuing programs without direction for the Select Board.

## 2. Operations

Mark Hald, Director of Operations/Chief Information Officer introduced Kristin Alexander, GIS Officer, and Matt Frost, Chief Technology Officer, and introduced the Departmental budget.

Mr. Frost introduced the Public Facilities budget – highlighting increases in equipment repair, water services due to additional buildings, trash removal costs, and a \$70,000 increase in building improvements.

Adam Nolde - questioned about trash removal – Mr. Frost indicated there has been an increase per ton of waste disposal



Mr. Noone – questioned if this is a merger of the IT and Public Facilities departments.

Roland Bourdon - questioned if the Department was doing more cloud base for cost savings – Mr. Hald noted the only cost is staff maintaining cloud-based programs but saves internally from year to year.

No further questions.

### 3. Land Use

Ed Mullen, Building Commissioner introduced his budget and Department consisting of 2 full time, 4 part time employees and 1 employee funded through an intermunicipal agreement with Littleton. Noted the Open Gov online permitting system reduced permit reviews in half and helped expedite the issuance of permits within 14 business days. 29.73% increase in clerical services due to reorganization of staff, and he is currently working with the Town Manager to not fill the current vacancy of clerical staff. Building inspectors are currently using hybrid vehicles to further reduce carbon footprint of his department

Fran Arsenault question about building stretch codes – Mr. Mullen will be adding it to the building page soon, but the information is on the Sustainability page on the town website.

Dean Charter – questioned with the new changes to the building code, will there be an impact on rate of new construction in town, construction costs and impact on future years. Mr. Mullen conversed with the 9 other communities using the new code and believe there will be a decrease due to learning curve of contractors and staff

No further questions

### 4. Memorial and Citizen's Library

Maria Palacio, Library Director and Assistant Director Kerry Darcy presented the library budgets which consist of a total of 18 FTE.

Ms. Andersen – questioned the cost of electronic books – Ms. Darcy noted that publishers found a way around copywrite laws and have increased the cost per circulation.

Ms. Russell - questioned if audio books cost more, Ms. Darcy noted that audiobooks do cost more due to publishers charging more.

Ms. Nicol – questioned what number Acton is in the commonwealth in regards to circulation numbers, Ms. Darcy noted pre-COVID Acton was in the top 5 in relation to the size of the community, post COVID Acton is outside the top 5.

Ms. Russell – questioned if visitor attendance has increased since the Citizens Library is under the Direction of the Library Director, Ms. Palacio confirmed an uptick of visitors has occurred with new offerings and additional programs aheld at Citizens.

### 5. Health and Family Services

Matt Dow, Interim Health Director – discussed their budget which consists of 3 FTE and utilizes grants for public programs, noted the number of permits have decreased.



Ms. Andersen – question why septic numbers are down – Mr. Dow explained it was due to less sales of homes, which require inspections

Mr. Bourdon – questioned about septage fees

No further questions.

Heather York, Nursing Director – discussed her departments budgets, explaining both budgets are level funded without changes, except an increase in salary for 4 FTE and 2 PTE associated with normal step changes. Additionally, an increase has been incorporated into her budget due to software changes in FY24, which will continue in FY25. She would like to increase contractual services by 4.38%.

Mr. Bourdon questioned about billing supply -Ms. York noted they order specific supplies for patients who have specific needs.

Mr. Noone – questioned about the turnback's, Ms. York noted that was due to staff shortages, additionally as a result of COVID there have been less home visits. Mr. Noone questioned why hold the open positions if they cannot be filled, Mr.

Mangiaratti noted they are only 4-5 hour per-diem positions, and the amount for the open positions totals \$59,000 and covered overflow visits and also home visits during the weekends.

Ms. Andersen – questioned about the cost of the programs vs utilizing outside agencies and was met with responses of the value and quality of the Nursing program currently offers, Ms. Andersen questioned if patients from other towns are charged a different rate – Ms. York noted the Nursing services does not take out of town patients that do not have health insurance, utilizes a medical software program that bills directly to insurance companies.

Ms. Russell – questioned the number of patients utilizing in-home services per month – Ms. York noted approximately 6+ nursing visits daily, home health aid 5-6/day 4-5 days a week, physical/occupational visits at 6-8 visits/day.

Ms. Andersen – questioned the difference between Acton Nursing Services and other private home care services during a time of financial adversity,

Mr. Charter noted the value of the local nursing service and the quality of the program vs. cost.

Mr. Cole – questioned what the current revenue is and what the break-even number is to determine if the service is viable and when the town would never need a subsidy, or would it perpetually require a subsidy. Mr. Mangiaratti will look at what the numbers would be for visits per day.

David Martin – questioned about the public health nursing position management during COVID – Ms. York noted the position was a 19 hour/week/7 days a week up until the employees retirement.

Mr. Bourdon – questioned about out of town patients if the service breaks even, Ms. York noted the billing is different with HMO and PPO with contractual service with health insurance providers on a per-visit service. Mr. Bourdon expressed concern about servicing out of town patients and losing money in billing.

Laura Ducharme, Community Service Coordinator – highlighted the services provided by her department for residents, and relies on donations for its operations, noting the only cost to taxpayers is due to salary.



James MacRae, Veterans' Service Officer – assists veterans and surviving spouses providing state and federal benefits.

Sharon Mercurio, Council on Aging Director – provides services for residents 60 and up. Town census has 5640 residents that meet this age, and the Council on Aging serviced 2165 in FY23. Majority of budget consists of salaries and her proposal is for a level service budget.

Ms. Russell - questioned how many additional staff would be needed to support the programs and services, Ms. Mercurio noted they could utilize additional front desk staff, full time social worker, and full time kitchen supervisor.

#### **6. Police**

Chief Jim Cogan and Deputy Chief Doug Sturniolo presented the Police budget. Chief Cogan noted the Acton Police Department is entering its 100<sup>th</sup> year of service. The majority of the budget is personnel cost with 42 police officers, 1 FT clinical responder, K9 Officer Zane, 8 special police officers, 10 traffic attendants, 1 business manager and 1 records clerk. The Police Department oversees the Dispatch Center and Animal Control Officer, which has an increase of 71.43% due to not having a salary increase in 7 years. He did note that this budget is relatively small so this increase seems very large percentage-wise.

Ms. Andersen – questioned about the RECC grant paying for an e911 upgrade and now the RECC is abandoned where the money is coming from – Mr. Mangiaratti noted that the upgrade is paid out of a Community Compact grant the town was awarded to upgrade the CAD system and base radio system will be upgraded from funds from the Avalon mitigation.

Mr. Cole – questioned the number of FT Clinical Responder listed as 2 are shown in the budget and questioned if it should be 3 or 4. Chief Cogan noted that it was for 2 but are currently having trouble attracting applicants. Mr. Cole questioned if the Police vehicle replacement program would cause harm to the town if it was extended a year or two – Chief Cogan noted that the average vehicle has 80,000 miles due to the daily heavy use and puts the operator and citizenry at risk and would be safer to replace. Mr. Cole requested hard data to back up the request.

Mr. Bourdon – requests replacing the F150 with a hybrid model

Ms. Russell – any change in younger officers completing expanded training to handle mental health issues – Chief Cogan confirmed the advanced training available

Ms. Nicol – questioned the additional clinical responder position was funded through a grant and why there is an added general fund position – Mr. Mangiaratti noted that there were originally 33 patrol positions but shifting 1 vacancy to fund the clinical responder position. Ms. Nicol questioned if there was any change cost in advertising for open positions using social media and attracting a more diverse pool of candidates – Chief Cogan commented that this seems to be the trend.

Mr. Sullivan moved, seconded by Mr. Noone to adjourn the Finance Committee and approved unanimously 8-0 via roll call vote.



Ms. Nicol moved, seconded by Mr. Martin to adjourn the Select Board and approved unanimously 5-0. Meeting adjourned at 9:20 PM

**Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting**

- Agenda, January 10, 2024
- Finance Committee Question and Answer Spreadsheet
- Town Manager Budget