



# Town of Bellingham

## BOARD OF SELECTMEN

10 Mechanic Street

Bellingham, Massachusetts 02019

Tel: 508-657-2800 \* 508-966-4425

February 22, 2020

The regular meeting of the Board of Selectmen was called to order by Chairman Daniel Spencer with all members in attendance. Mr. Spencer stated this meeting was scheduled as a budget workshop and the Board will receive an update on Town Finances and will hear from various departments relative to their FY21 budget request. He reminded the audience members that this was not a public hearing and asked that they keep questions and comments to themselves for the time being.

Mr. Peter Marano, Superintendent, and Mr. Mike Reed, School Committee Chairman, presented the School Department budget update which included two scenarios. The first scenario level funded their FY21 budget plus added a \$1M increase in additional funds. This scenario would level fund all budgets from last year, prepay the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter special education tuitions and result in staffing reductions of 10 to 12 positions. Classroom sizes would increase, and current and newly proposed programs would be significantly impacted. The second scenario level funded their FY21 budget and added the \$1M increase in additional funds as well, but in addition, a request was added for \$1.5M of additional funds to be generated by a proposition 2 1/2 override. This scenario would allow for a new math program in grades 6-8, prepay the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter special education tuitions and add some key new positions in fine arts, 2 ILA's in the elementary level, an additional special education teacher in the high school and a foreign language teacher in the memorial school. Even with this scenario there is a possibility that there would still be a staff reduction of approximately 4 positions. Mr. Marano and Mr. Reed responded to various questions from the Board regarding special education, foreign language and the math programs as well as the charter school tuition and school choice tuition. The Board agreed an override on the May Town Election ballot would be necessary to meet the needs of the school department for FY21. It was determined after discussion with Mary MacKinnon, CFO, that a set amount to be requested warranted a vote at this meeting in order to be a ballot question but the amount could be changed by another vote of the Board at a future meeting. On a Martinis/Biagi motion, the Board voted 4 in favor 0 opposing, Mr. Connor abstaining at the recommendation of the Ethics committee, to recommend that the Town vote by way of ballot at the May Town Election for a proposition 2 1/2 override.

CFO Mary McKinnon presented an overview of the Town's finances. She stated the Town's total budget for FY21 is \$72.1M which is an increase of 3.97% from last year. She explained Town reserves had been relied upon for the past several years to balance the budget but this year they achieved their goal of not using reserves. She stated new growth is once again strong and will enable the Town to maintain services despite decreasing State Aid. Mrs. MacKinnon explained that 21% of our revenue rely's on state aid and this has decreased 4 of the last 5 years. Mrs. McNulty asked why the State Aid continues to decrease. Mrs. MacKinnon explained an increase in any one of the following: property wealth, income reported to the DOR or the municipal revenue

growth factor (MRGF) causes state aid to decrease. In other words what Bellingham can and should be able to afford. Mrs. MacKinnon explained this year's tax levy increased by 4.11% which includes the cap of 2 1/2 percent plus our new growth resulting in a \$185 tax increase on an average home valued at \$324,325. Moving forward with a proposition 2 1/2 override of \$1.5M would result in the average homeowner paying an additional \$165. This would bring the average tax bill from \$4,612 to \$4,962. Still well below the statewide average of \$6,500.

Library Director, Bernadette Rivard, presented the Library Budget. Bernadette stated her department was requesting a 3.7% increase for FY21 mostly as a result of a position upgrade. The teen librarian would split her duties between teen work and administration work.

Chief Daigle and Lt. Russell appeared before the Board to discuss their FY21 budget. Chief Daigle explained the bulk of any increases to his budget are the direct result of contractual adjustments. Chief Daigle stated he funded a new dispatcher position from his overtime budget and was able to make things work with a lot of juggling. He stated his department is down several (5) officers but he believes the Department will be able to maintain level services. Mr. Connor expressed his concern that the Town may be compromising public safety and asked why we aren't being proactive and sending candidates to the academy. Mr. Fraine stated it's not in the budget to be able to do that right now. They do have an officer retiring in December and because that position is already budgeted, they will be able to replace it. But the Chief did say he is roughly \$320,000 short on his ideal budget.

Fire Chief Steve Gentile and Deputy Chief Mark Poirier appeared before the Board to present the Fire Department's FY21 budget and stated any increases to their budget were also contractual and that they had level funded expenses. Chief Gentile stated his department can no longer handle all the calls they are receiving for service. He stated his department can't keep operating with the lack of manpower. He is down 5 men that are out with an injury however all these positions are funded in the FY21 Budget. He explained every time a call comes in for an ambulance he must send out his engine to allow for all available personnel to participate at a medical scene. He has two ambulances but only has the staffing for one engine. He explained that his department is constantly depending on Medway for calls to North Bellingham and Woonsocket for calls to South Bellingham. He explained that this is no longer mutual aid but considers it using the taxpayer's dollars from these surrounding towns. Mr. Martinis asked him to explain his budgeting needs and the Chief estimated his ideal budget is short by \$675,000. After a lengthy discussion about the mechanics of the department the Board agreed that something needs to be done to address their needs.

Mr. Fraine wanted to recognize the Fire Department for doing a great job keeping Station 1 up and running and thanked the firemen for picking up the slack on this. Mrs.

McNulty acknowledged their dedication as well but pointed out the likelihood of injury if that station continued to be powered by firemen working on overtime.

Mr. DiMartino, DPW Director, appeared before the Board to present his department's FY21 budget. He provided the Board with a breakdown of each of his budget lines. He stated Snow & Ice was level funded at \$260,000 and right now Snow and Ice has expended \$340,000 even with the mild winter. He stated there is a gas tank at the DPW that will need to be removed in the next few years and the cost to do so will be roughly \$300,000 and that hasn't been budgeted yet. Mr. DiMartino stated the Highway budget had included a need for two additional positions, but this has been cut out as a result of budget reductions. He further explained these two new staff members would have returned the DPW staffing levels from 5 years ago. Mr. DiMartino stated general fund capital needs would include roadway repairs totaling \$25-\$35M based on the 2017 study. Upgrades to the DPW facility are in dire need including a new roof for \$211,000. Full upgrades to the facility to bring it up and running to full speed would be in the cost of \$6-\$10M. Mr. DiMartino stated the largest budget he manages is the water budget. The budget increased from FY20 to FY21 by \$56,773. Something they may have to look to fund is the water main upgrades on Mechanic Street. They are hoping to do this in coordination with the proposed road work related to the warehouse project. The cost would be roughly \$300,000. Future expenses in the sewer budget will be things like generators that are in need of replacement particularly the one on North Street. Finally Mr. DiMartino touched upon the Stormwater budget and the work needed to be done to comply with the Municipal Separate Storm Sewers Systems (MS4) Permit requirements mandated by the State. He stated a meeting was scheduled with the engineers to discuss the base billing unit for the stormwater utility fund that was passed at the Fall Town Meeting.

After a general discussion with the CFO, the Board agreed to transmit the FY21 Budget to the Finance Committee and on a McNulty/Martinis motion unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 12:45PM.

Respectfully Submitted,



Hilarie J Allie  
Administrative Assistant