



Town of Bellingham

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

10 Mechanic Street

Bellingham, Massachusetts 02019

Tel: 508-966-5800 * Fax: 508-966-4425

Budget Workshop

February 26, 2022

The Selectboard meeting was called to order at 9:00AM by Chairwoman Cindy McNulty. All Board members were in attendance and participating in the Arcand Meeting Room. Also participating in the meeting was Town Administrator Denis Fraine and CFO Mary MacKinnon. The meeting was available to the public using the Zoom online option as well. Mrs. McNulty 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 FY23 budget requests.

CFO Mary MacKinnon presented a general overview of the Town's finances. She stated the Town's total budget for FY23 is just over \$77M which is an increase of 3.16% from last year. She explained that what is being presented to the Board is a balanced budget that protects all core services with no reduction in staffing or services that are provided to the community. She further explained no reserves were used in balancing this budget. The overall budget has five (5) budgeted funds. Four (4) enterprise funds and a general fund. Each fund has their own budget. The general fund represents an overall increase of 3.32% and this includes a 2.86% increase in operating expenses. The overall budget presented today is funded by the tax levy which increased by 4.05% (this includes proposition 2 1/2 percent, new growth of 1.13% and .42% of excess levy). The overall budget is also funded by state aid and local receipts. Mrs. MacKinnon stated that once again this year our state aid has declined. In the last 3-4 years the Town has had a reduction in over \$1M. All this equates to an annual increase of roughly \$200 to the average single family residential tax bill. Mrs. MacKinnon pointed out that once again out of the 28 communities in Norfolk County Bellingham is still the lowest tax burden community for single family homes.

Mr. Martinis stated he would like to see how the new development in town will reflect in new revenue and perhaps earmark some of that for additional staffing in safety and other projects that need priority. Mrs. MacKinnon stated we need to keep in mind that expenses have also been increasing and this new growth won't be completely all new revenue.

Mr. Connor stated he would like to vote down the increase in the BVT budget. Mrs. MacKinnon stated this increase is a reflection of an increase in student enrollment as well as the state's minimum contribution requirement which was increased this year.

Mr. Connor asked about the school's transportation budget but Mrs. MacKinnon stated it would be premature to comment on that as the school budget has not been set as of right now. The school department will come before the Selectboard once it has been voted on.

Library Director, Bernadette Rivard, and Library Trustee, Sue Garten, appeared before the Board to present the FY23 Library Budget. Ms. Rivard stated this year she is asking the Town to fund the library budget to meet the municipal requirement that is set by the state. She stated the last 2 years the library has not met the state municipal requirement and had to apply for a waiver to receive state aid. The library is requesting \$602,000 which is slightly higher than the state minimum requirement of \$597,848. She said one of the highlights in this year's budget is an increase in the salary of the in-service librarian

position. Another highlight is her request for the Town to fund 60% of the part time staff line. Doing so will meet the state municipal requirement and the 40% remaining will be paid out of state aid for meeting the minimum state requirements. Ms. Rivard stated the line for books and periodicals also increased. She said 15% of the budget must be spent on books and materials so as the budget increases that line item will always go up. The total increase in the budget is \$36,047 which is a 5.9% increase from last year.

Mrs. McNulty asked Ms. Rivard if things were getting back to normal. And she said in the past two weeks they are seeing an uptake in patrons, circulations of library materials are at 85% pre-pandemic and most programs are starting to come back.

Mr. Martinis asked if part of the increase is to have more of the part time staff in the library. Ms. Rivard stated that the state requires the library be open 50 hours and their plan is to be open 51 hours so yes, the more hours they are open and the more programs they are offering the more part time staff they need.

Mr. Connor asked how the 15% on library materials has changed if more people are choosing digital options. Ms. Rivard stated digital materials cost more than paper materials.

Fire Chief Steve Gentile and Deputy Chief Chris Milot appeared before the Board to present the Fire Department's FY23 budget and stated for the most part the budget is level funded. The Chief pointed out there are a few increases in line items. One being in vehicle maintenance as the repair shop they used previously closed down and now they have to send the vehicles to the dealership which is more expensive. The other line item that increased is overtime. He stated he used the average of the last 5-6 years to come up with this number as it is so unpredictable.

Mrs. McNulty asked about the maintenance of the vehicles and asked about the state of the current fleet. Chief Gentile stated they will be putting in for another ambulance to replace rescue 1 and the remaining will stay but will require the maintenance he has requested.

Mr. Martinis asked if the ladder truck will be tall enough for the new Curtis Pond apartments and the Deputy confirmed it is and is all part of the planning.

Mr. Connor asked about the part time cadet and chaplain line item. The Chief explained the part time cadets are the men they are in the process of hiring and it pays for their training. He further explained the chaplain does his first 100 hours as part of the senior work off program but then is paid as part of the budget. Mr. Connor asked if it was necessary to have this and the Chief stated it was and he has been running this debriefing program for years.

Mr. Connor asked about the overtime expense of \$3,500 for the fireworks and asked Mr. Fraine why the celebration account isn't paying for this. He suggested that the Town needs to look into not having fireworks anymore for the aggravation and money that it costs. Mr. Fraine stated by moving it to August like they did last year the expense is much less than having them on the 4th of July and he will definitely look into paying this expense through the celebration account.

Mr. Connor asked how many men on average, excluding retirements, does the department lose in a year. The Chief stated as soon as he knows if a firefighter is leaving he starts the hiring process. He further explained that men leaving in any given year is not the issue. The issue is he needs more men to get his department to where it meets the

standards. The fire department has 4 shifts a day with 5 firefighters on each shift. Ideally he would like to hire 8 new firefighters to put 2 additional firefighters on each shift. He further stated he can't cover the Town as it is right now (never mind all the new growth) and is relying too often on mutual aid.

Mr. Martinis stated the Board needs to workshop on how to come up with the solution of the lack in manpower.

Mr. Connor stated the solution is a Proposition 2 1/2 override to reset public safety to where it should be. Mrs. MacKinnon will crunch some numbers and the Board will discuss and figure out an action at a future meeting.

Mr. DiMartino, DPW Director, appeared before the Board to present his department's FY23 budget. He provided the Board with a breakdown of each of his budget lines. Snow and Ice were level funded as were Cemetery and the Tree budget. He stated the gas budget increased by \$30,000 and that is based on \$3.50 a gallon. This will be revisited before Town Meeting and will most likely be changed at the Fall Town Meeting. Mr. Connor asked if that included taxes and Mrs. MacKinnon stated the Town pays federal taxes but not state taxes. Mr. DiMartino stated he is looking for 2 additional workers (but not listed in the budget) and will mention it in the Highway budget as they will help with small paving projects in house but most likely the funding source will be stormwater. There are also some increases due to expenses related to the purchase of 215 Depot Street. He stated always in this budget is the funds for contracted highway construction which is a total of \$367,000. Mrs. MacKinnon pointed out the annual allocation for Chapter 90 money is just under \$600,000 but with the governor signing the supplemental budget bill the Town will receive \$900,000 in the FY23 budget. Mr. DiMartino stated the parks department lost the parks supervisor this year and Jesse Riedel took over the reins. Jesse did a detailed analysis of who was doing what in which department and because of that the parks budget shows an increase in labor costs. Mr. DiMartino stated there is an increase in the telephone line item in the sewer budget and that is due to the door swipe entry system at all the sewer stations that was approved at the Fall Town Meeting. He stated there was also an increase in the CRPCD rates of the sewer treatment plant in Medway. He pointed out that sewer rates seem sufficient and have not been increased since 2016. He said the most expensive expense in this budget is generator repairs. Mr. DiMartino stated the biggest budget he deals with is water at \$3.6M. He requested a \$60,000 increase in professional services that will be used to dispose of sludge from backwash at the Hartford Ave plant. The previous system broke down so that needs to be cleaned up and a new system needs to be put in place. Mr. DiMartino stated the Stormwater budget which is still very new is right where it should be in order to build some retained earnings to look at future projects. Mr. DiMartino stated he did put in for a new position in this budget which would be a Stormwater Manager/GIS coordinator. This person will also work on tasks with the assessor's office.

Mr. DiMartino asked the Board if they had any questions and they did not and thanked him for always doing such a thorough job with his budget.

Senior Center Director, Josie Dutil, appeared before the Board to present the Senior Center FY23 Budget. She stated this year she is only asking for one additional thing, a part time social worker. There is a program at the Senior Center known as the elder mental health outreach team. This social worker is a team of one and she services 6 towns including Bellingham. She services elders whose health insurance does not cover mental health services provided in their homes. This is a state funded grant that Bellingham manages. Mental health is a hot topic since covid hit and what it did to seniors in isolation. This social worker serviced 15 residents last year and has 17 elders currently on the waiting list. This increase would allow her to service these seniors on the wait list and get them help sooner rather than later. The Board was unanimously in favor of adding this social worker to the payroll budget.

After a general discussion of questions and answers with the CFO and Mr. Fraine of the overall budget and a possible need for a proposition 2.5%, Mr. Fraine requested an executive session to discuss contract negotiations. All members of the Board were polled with all voting in the affirmative. On a Grant/Connor motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to adjourn the budget meeting at 11:50 AM with no further business to be discussed at the conclusion of the executive session.

Respectfully Submitted,

Hilarie J Allie
Administrative Assistant