



TOWN OF NORWELL
Norwell Town Offices, Room 112
345 Main Street
Norwell, Massachusetts 02061
(781) 659-8000

Norwell Advisory Board Meeting Minutes February 16, 2023

The Advisory Board was called to order by Chair Jesse McSweeney at 7:03 PM. Also present were Town Administrator Darleen Sullivan, Town Accountant Christine McCarthy, and Board Members Mark Cleveland, Bob Perniola, Brian D'Souza, Peter Leppanen, Dane Hutchison, and John LaCara. Unable to attend were Elizabeth Hibbard, and Ed Maguire. Mr. LaCara arrived at 7:10 PM; Mr. Hutchison left early due to technical difficulties.

AGENDA

Motion by Mr. Perniola to approve the agenda as submitted. Seconded by Mr. Leppanen and unanimously voted by roll call: Leppanen aye, Perniola aye, McSweeney aye, Cleveland aye, D'Souza aye, Hutchison abstain.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Minutes

The minutes of the February 9 meeting were distributed and reviewed.

Motion by Mr. Perniola to accept the minutes of the February 9, 2023 meeting as submitted. Seconded by Mr. Leppanen and unanimously voted. Leppanen aye, Perniola aye, McSweeney aye, Cleveland abstain, D'Souza aye, LaCara aye.

Reserve Fund Transfer Requests

None

FY 2024 BUDGET OVERVIEW

Town Administrator Darleen Sullivan gave a brief overview of the following budgetary requests, noting that these were the budgets requested by the department heads and may be subject to adjustments.

Town Clerk

Town Clerk Pat Anderson present.

Board of Registrars

A \$5500 budget is proposed, slightly up from the FY 23 amount of \$5450.

Elections

Budgeted at \$26,084, down from FY 23 but up from FY 22. Election expenses, including printing, security, and setup, fluctuate depending on the year; this year there will be a Town election and presidential primaries. The State Auditor provides reimbursement for certain state election expenses.

Town Clerk

\$216,069.36, up from \$202,111 in FY 23, reflecting contractual salary increases and expenses for office supplies and dues and meetings.

Town Meeting

\$12,000, which includes closed captioning / sound system expenses which will be greater if the Annual Town Meeting runs a second day; also included are payments to General Code to enter updates to the town bylaws.

Mr. Leppanen asked about the possibility of electronic voting at town meetings. Ms. Anderson noted that a system utilizing tablets was tested at the 2019 Town Meeting but was not successful.

Town Report

This line covers the cost to print, copy, and distribute the annual report as per statutory requirements; \$5000 is budgeted compared to \$3500 budgeted in FY 23 and \$6246.75 actually expended in FY 22.

Board and Dept. of Assessors

Principal Assessor Meredith Rafiki present; her proposed budget reflects contractually negotiated salary increases; the salary line is down, as a long-time assistant recently stepped down. Increases in professional services, office supplies, and other lines reflect general cost increases.

Building/ZBA

The FY 24 proposed budget is \$279,626, up from FY 23's final budget of \$245,212, reflecting requested increases in the rates of the Alternate Building Commissioner and On Call Building Inspector, who provide coverage when Building Commissioner Tom Barry is not present; and in the hourly rates for inspections. \$1500 is requested in the Books & Periodicals line for reference materials reflecting updates to the state building code. Ms. Sullivan noted that she may trim down areas of this budget.

Advisory Board

Level-funded at \$2500, which the taking of meeting minutes. Actual expenses recently have run at \$1700 or under.

Treasurer/Collector

Ms. Sullivan noted that Treasurer Mary Beth Carter would be leaving to be Town Administrator in Whitman, and her last day would be tomorrow. The total requested budget of \$486,975 reflects contractual salary increases and a two week vacation buyback. An increase in the Banking Services line reflects the utilization of multiple banks for different purposes, such as online bill payment services. The tax title line reflects the legal costs of foreclosure process; there is a significant financial benefit to pursuing these, but the Town tries to work with residents who fall behind in their payments and a settlement short of foreclosure is reached in most cases.

Select Board/Town Administrator

This line item includes the Town Administrator, Human Resource Manager, two clerical salaries which are set by contract, consultant fees, a travel stipend, and supplies. The proposed FY 24 budget of \$633,711.13 reflects contractual increases to the clerical salaries and an increase to the HR Manager salary; Ms. Sullivan's salary is currently being negotiated. The \$135,000 in the TA Salary line reflects the salary of the Assistant Town Administrator the Select Board wants Ms.

Sullivan to hire; she wishes to better define the role and research average salaries before hiring. She has budgeted \$35,000 in the Temporary Wages line to hire consultants, including former Town Administrator Peter Morin, as needed; this line may be cut, and any unused funds will be turned back to the General Fund.

Finance Director/Accounting

Town Accountant Christine McCarthy's budget reflects contractual salary increases and a buyback for vacation time last year she was unable to use. An increase in the Professional Services line reflects an anticipated increase in audit services, as the provider's contract is up for renewal.

Streetlights

The FY 24 budget allocates \$73,000 up from \$60,000, reflecting rate increases. Leftover solar credits purchased by the School Department are given to the Town and applied to the lighting bills from National Grid. The Town is looking at looping Police, Fire, and the Library into the credit scheme.

Legal Expenses

Budgeted at \$100,000, up from \$55,000 budgeted in FY 23. These funds are paid to Town Counsel Bob Galvin, as well as KP Law and other firms for certain cases. Ms. Sullivan noted that she will have to consult Town Counsel more often than Mr. Morin, who is an attorney. Mr. McSweeney expressed frustration at frivolous lawsuits against the Town that added to these costs.

IT Services

An increase in the Professional Services line to \$190,000 from \$95,000 reflects the full-year use of an outside vendor. The Town outsourced IT services to this vendor last April in order to update security systems and transition from server-based to cloud-based e-mail. Previously, the School Department's IT employees provided support to Town Hall.

Ms. Sullivan indicated that the quality of the service, which includes regular security updates, was well worth the increased cost and she feels better about the security of the Town's systems. Mr. McSweeney inquired about extending the vendor's coverage to Police and Fire, but Ms. Sullivan is satisfied with their existing providers.

The Town purchases and replaces computer hardware according to a specific schedule kept by Ms. Sullivan's office.

MISCELLANEOUS

An application has been submitted for the next opening on the Board.

Fire Department Compressor Status

As agreed at the previous meeting, Chief Kean inspected the SCBA compressor used to refill firefighters' air tanks and characterized its condition as okay but gradually worsening: "No worse than 1 month ago, worse than 1 year ago." His preference is to purchase the replacement through the capital purchasing process, but Ms. Sullivan indicated she is willing to approve the purchase earlier if needed.

Mr. Cleveland, who works with compressors in his profession, suggested that any failure of the machine would likely be catastrophic and he would feel better replacing it ASAP. A majority of

the Board members concurred, with Mr. Leppanen noting that the expense is going to be incurred anyways.

After a brief discussion of funding options including free cash, reserve fund transfer, or possible ARPA reimbursement, Chief Kean suggested that he take the compressor out of service and order the new one, which will take 12-14 weeks to be delivered. In the meantime, the Department will refill the air tanks at neighboring towns. If the compressor arrives and payment is due before the Annual Town Meeting, Ms. Sullivan will secure the needed funds from free cash, the Reserve Fund, etc.; otherwise, it will be approved through the capital purchase process.

FUTURE MEETINGS

2/28, 3/2 3/7, 3/9, 3/14, 3/16, 3/21, 3/23

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Perniola to adjourn at 8:47 PM. Seconded by Mr. Leppanen and unanimously voted. Leppanen aye, Perniola aye, McSweeney aye, Cleveland aye, D'Souza aye, LaCara aye.

Jesse McSweeney, Chair