



TOWN OF NORWELL
Norwell Town Offices, Room 112
345 Main Street
Norwell, Massachusetts 02061
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Norwell Advisory Board Meeting Minutes February 28, 2023

The Advisory Board was called to order by Chair Jesse McSweeney at 7:00 P.M. Also present were Town Administrator Darleen Sullivan, Town Accountant Christine McCarthy, and Board Members Bob Perniola, Brian D'Souza, Elizabeth Hibbard, Peter Leppanen, John LaCara, and Dane Hutchison. Unable to attend was Ed Maguire. Mark Cleveland arrived at 7:09 PM.

AGENDA

Motion by Ms. Hibbard to approve the agenda as submitted. Seconded by Mr. Perniola and unanimously voted.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Minutes

The minutes of the February 13 meeting were distributed and reviewed.

Motion by Mr. Perniola to accept the Minutes of the February 13, 2023 meeting as edited. Seconded by Mr. Leppanen and approved 5-0-2, Members Hutchinson and Hibbard having abstained.

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 are the "department request" budgets that may be trimmed back. She and Town Accountant Christine McCarthy have received preliminary local aid, health insurance, and VoTech assessment figures and are working them into the budget.

Planning

Director of Planning and Community Development Ilana Quirk present. Her FY 24 budget is mostly level-funded except for negotiated staff salary increases. An increase in administrator hours covers Admin Krisin Ford's work for the Complete Streets Committee. Professional Services is slightly increased, and dues and meetings is slightly reduced. Mr. Hutchison asked about the Planner's salary increase; this reflects her individually negotiated contract with the Town.

Ms. Quirk advised that the Planning Board is sponsoring eight warrant articles, including several revisions to the Zoning bylaw. They have revised an article allowing for an associate Planning Board member to involve the Select Board in the appointment process.

Recreation

Recreation Commissioner George Grey present. His proposed budget reflects contractual salary increases and vacation buybacks for himself and staff. It also requests \$5000 to transition to the CivicRec registration/scheduling system, which will save residents significant processing fees.

An increase in the repair/maintenance line is due to the purchase of engineered wood fiber to replenish the playgrounds. Twice a year, a contractor inspects the playgrounds and equipment to identify maintenance needs; the wood fill is a large expense, but the engineered fibers are more durable and “worth the investment.”

The Department processes \$500K–\$600K in fee revenues; these are held in a revolving fund which reverts to the Town at the end of the fiscal year; Ms. Sullivan leaves in sufficient funds to start the summer programs.

Ms. Hibbard asked for an update on a feasibility study for a Recreation Center/Council on Aging. Mr. Grey indicated that the RFP was nearly ready to issue, but they were waiting on the final disposition of the St. Helens property; assuming St. Helens is not available, the study will consider the current Town Hall site and the Trees and Grounds site next to the library as possible locations, and will proceed in FY 24 with Ms. Sullivan’s assistance.

Cushing Center

The FY 24 budget of \$46,184 reflects a contractual salary increase & longevity for two staffers. General expenses come in the same as the ‘23 original budget with slightly more allocated for office supplies and less for advertising.

Ms. Hibbard asked that staff review its fee schedule to ensure it reflected current market rates. Norwell residents can rent the hall at a discounted rate.

Health Department

Health Agent Ben Margro present. The Department-proposed FY 24 budget of \$1,421,781.16, up from 1,395,956.00 in FY 23, reflects contractual salary increases as well as their request to add a 16 hour administrator position. Mr. Margro explained they have seen an increase in complaints and other lower-level service demands that take away from the completion of required administrative tasks. They utilize Senior Work Program volunteers and are open to other ideas for help. Mr. Margro would be willing to consider a cut in travel expenses to help fund the new position.

The Recycling Center receives between \$70K–80K in revenues per year, which are put into a revolving fund. The Center is staffed by Trees & Grounds employees. Negotiations are in process for a new three-year contract for trash and recycling collection; this will be ongoing, with Town Counsel and Ms. Sullivan’s involvement, over the next two months. The solid waste disposal and SEMASS lines are level-funded for now, but may increase depending on the outcome of the negotiations.

The Public Health Services line includes funds for a public health nurse to assist with disease tracking and other duties. Advertising provides funding for any needed legal notices. Professional Services includes food inspection assistance, and Environmental Consulting funds assistance with perc testing.

Mr. Hutchison asked whether the Department has considered switching from curbside trash pickup to transfer station. This has been looked at several times; although the cost of services is “usually around the same,” there are greater liability and employee expenses with a transfer station; a suitable site is also needed in town, and permitting is more strict than for a recycling center.

Mr. Perniola asked whether the Town will be required to take on trash pickup for any pending 40B developments. The Town can require large developments to engage a private service. Mr. Margro noted that the Town is actually not obligated to provide trash pickup services, but this can lead to chaotic pickup schedules from private vendors.

Ms. Hibbard asked about the issuance of fines for violations; Mr. Margro doesn’t like to fine residents for trash or recycling issues, as educating residents yields better results, but he does levy fines on businesses for violations such as underage tobacco sales. He is also in the process of looking at all Departmental fees.

Mooring Administrator/Harbormaster

A level-funded budget of \$12,500 is proposed which includes Mooring Compliance Officer Jeff Fitzgerald’s salary, fuel, and general expenses. FY 22 actual expenditures totaled \$10,419.21.

Veterans Officer

The FY 24 budget includes an increase in the Veterans Service Officer stipend but is otherwise level-funded. VSO Dave Osborne helps veterans apply for Federal and state-level (Chapter 115) benefits; these benefits provide food, shelter, clothing, and medical care assistance to veterans below a certain income, and are 75% reimbursed by the State. Mr. Osborne provides other services including decorating veteran graves, organizing the Memorial and Veterans Day ceremonies, and hosting an annual veterans’ luncheon completely supported by donations.

Ms. Hibbard asked if he was working with an assistant to provide some continuity to the role when he eventually steps down; a veteran from the Council on Aging was providing assistance and would be a logical choice for a successor.

MISCELLANEOUS

Ms. Sullivan advised she has been encouraging department heads to review their fees to ensure they are in line with those of other towns. Chair McSweeney would prefer a regular schedule of gradual increases to a large spike every few years.

All discussed what information they would like to see from the School Department presentation, including a building plan, enrollment trends, special education enrollment, and Covid remediation efforts.

FUTURE MEETINGS

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 Ms. Hibbard to adjourn at 8:51 PM.
Seconded by Mr. Perniola and unanimously voted.*

Jesse McSweeney, Chair