



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

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Norwell Advisory Board Meeting Minutes 3/12/2020

The Advisory Board was called to order by Chair Peter Smellie at 7:00 P.M. Also present were Town Administrator Peter Morin and Board Members Mark Cleveland, Jesse McSweeney, Karen Reynolds, Julie Sim, and Kate Steele. Unable to attend were Rick Goulding, Harry Solis, and Susan Darnell.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Minutes – None

Bills – None

Reserve Fund Transfer Requests – None

Correspondence/Notices – None

Action Items / Discussions – None

FY 2021 BUDGET REVIEW AND 2020 TOWN MEETING ARTICLES

South Shore Vocational Technical High School

Norwell VoTech liaison Robert Molla present along with SSVT Superintendent Tom Hickey. Mr. Hickey advised that their FY 21 budget proposed an increase of 4.09%, with infrastructure costs being a primary driver. The main building was constructed in 1962, with a second wing added in 1992, and there is a need to upgrade systems.

An engineering firm is assisting them with developing a long-range capital plan, and they recently established a stabilization fund to raise funds for repairs without a large spike in individual town assessments. Capital requests for FY 21 total \$782,414, primarily split between septic repairs, additions to the stabilization fund, and OPM and designer fees for upcoming renovations to the roof and windows of the 1992 wing.

Norwell's projected FY 21 assessment is \$372,091, an increase of \$56,525 over FY 20 driven by the enrollment of two additional Norwell students. The assessment includes a \$21,205 share of the FY 21 capital requests and an offset of \$62,978, representing Norwell's share of non-resident tuition revenue.

Mr. Cleveland noted that the per-student cost was different for each town, and Norwell's cost was second highest of all the towns. Mr. Hickey indicated that about 70% of the assessments were driven by a Chapter 70 formula based on "ability to pay" as determined by average income and

property values. In response to a follow-up from Mr. Smellie, Mr. Hickey indicated that the town's share of the capital expenses is based on headcount.

Ms. Steele asked about enrollment trends; Mr. Hickey has seen increased demand but noted it varies year by year. This September, there will be seven incoming ninth graders from Norwell. The Norwell school system is supportive in referring interested students.

Also discussed was an increase in the Legal line due to projected collective bargaining negotiations. An increase in the Miscellaneous line was due to the relocation of "noninstructional supplies" expenses into that line. Debt service is very low this year, as they were able to pay off the principal of a 10 year note early. Mr. Molla indicated that a jump in the Security line item was due to the hiring of a new school resource officer shared with the Hanover school district.

School Department

Superintendent Matthew Keegan present along with Vice Chair Alison Link of the School Committee. Ms. Link indicated that the School Department was requesting a 3.48% increase for FY 21, in line with recent year requests. The budget process starts in September with the submission and review of individual school requests; the Superintendent creates a draft budget in January, which the School Committee analyzes and adjusts into the budget request before the Board and ultimately Town Meeting. The FY 21 budget includes requests for an additional bus for the Cole School, an additional High School music teacher, and four kindergarten aides.

Mr. Keegan indicated that the Department continued to monitor the cost of out of district Special Education tuitions, which had grown by nearly 50% between FY 16 and FY 19. The Department started a stabilization fund in 2016 to help address these costs, and Town Meeting added \$50K to the fund both in FY 17 and 18. In addition, the Department receives "Circuit Breaker" relief from the state for these costs, a portion of which can be rolled over to the next FY. Reimbursement for transportation costs for these students is increasing, but the exact amount is not known yet. Typically, there are between 25-30 students with out-of-district special education placements. Options for such placements include "collaborative" programs formed by local school districts and state-approved private and/or residential schools.

Cole School Bus

Mr. Keegan indicated that they typically request an additional bus when ridership passes 65 elementary students per bus. The District is required to provide busing for K-6 students; busing for grades 7-12 is provided for an additional fee. About 350 middle and high school students ride the bus.

All parties discussed whether staggering elementary school start times would eliminate the need for the additional bus. Mr. Keegan indicated this had been done in the past but presented challenges, as all schools go to the same after-school activities. Ms. Link added that keeping the elementary schools on the same schedule allowed for greater sharing of resources.

Music Teacher

Mr. Keegan indicated that this would allow them to restore music theory and appreciation courses, as well as add a music technology course, which is increasingly looked for at the college level. It would also allow them to enhance the choral program and possibly add a musical theater component, in which there has been significant interest. They have budgeted the position at a Step 5, but the salary may be more or less depending on the candidate.

Kindergarten Aides

Mr. Keegan noted that most area districts have an aide for each kindergarten classroom, and parent availability to volunteer in class has decreased. Half this cost can be paid for with full-day kindergarten tuition funds, and they hope to hire four additional aides in FY 22.

Mr. Keegan added that the Student Opportunities Act passed in November required school districts to target Chapter 70 state funds for certain objectives set forth in guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Schools. The additional music teacher corresponds to DESE's objective of "increased staffing to expand student access to the arts" and the additional aides correspond to the objective of "increased personnel and services to support holistic student needs."

Facilities Maintenance

Mr. Keegan noted that the staff had been proactive in keeping all buildings clean and in good repair. They recently purchased electrostatic sprayers that will save the Department significant money on deep cleaning. Repeaters for public safety communication have been installed in all schools. A septic replacement project is on the horizon, as well as possible lead/asbestos remediation in the Sparrell building.

Notable individual line items include a 24% decrease in the Tech Infrastructure line due to the completion of a wi-fi upgrade project. Employee separations expenses are up, but Mr. Keegan noted these are hard to predict. The Department has filed a CPC grant application for restrooms at the Clipper Community Complex.

The Board thanked Mr. Keegan and Ms. Link for their detailed presentation. In response to a query from Mr. McSweeney, Mr. Keegan indicated that since FY 2016, the Department has been rolling over any leftover funds into the special education stabilization fund, but noted that they do return funds to the Town through an annual Medicaid reimbursement Town Meeting article, and make unused solar credits available to the Town. Mr. Cleveland asked how the Department would pay for an unexpected bump in special education students; Mr. Keegan indicated they would first cover the additional tuition expense through circuit breaker funds; they would then ask for a reserve transfer and, if necessary, would seek funding through a Town Meeting article. There is currently about \$50,000 in the stabilization fund, but Mr. Morin noted that the Department also has some flexibility in their budget.

Mr. Smellie requested that Board members let him know if they had any additional questions; he will call back Mr. Keegan and/or Ms. Link for next Thursday if needed.

2020 TOWN MEETING ARTICLES

Board of Health

Smoking in Public Places/Workplaces

This article proposes to remove the town bylaw regarding smoking in public places and workplaces, as it is duplicative of newly enacted state regulations.

Motion made to recommend the article titled Smoking in Public Places/Workplaces as written. Seconded and passed 6-0-0.

Sale of Tobacco Products

This article proposes to remove the town bylaw regarding the sale of tobacco products, as it is duplicative of newly enacted state regulations.

Motion made to recommend the article titled Sale of Tobacco Products as written. Seconded and passed 6-0-0.

MISCELLANEOUS

The Board will vote on FY 2021 proposed budgets on Thursday. Mr. Morin requested that Board members email him any questions they may have prior to the meeting. Mr. McSweeney would like to see any changes to the school budget made at the School Committee's budget meeting. Mr. Morin indicated it was unlikely there would be any changes to the proposed budget or his recommendations.

Personnel Board reclassifications and appendix article review is on the agenda for Tuesday, March 17. Mr. Morin may add to this agenda so the Board can finish its work early. The Governor has waived provisions of the Open Meeting law so that members can attend remotely provided that one member is physically present.

FUTURE MEETINGS

March 17, 19, 24, 26, and 31; April 2.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn at 9:03 P.M. Seconded and passed 6-0-0.

Peter Smellie, Chair