



**TOWN OF NORWELL**  
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**TOWN OF NORWELL**  
**TOWN CLERK**

2021 APR -6 P 12: 24

**Norwell Advisory Board Meeting Minutes**  
**March 23, 2021**

**RECEIVED**

The Advisory Board was called to order by Chair Peter Smellie at 7:00 P.M. Also present were Town Administrator Peter Morin, Town Accountant Donna Mangan, and Board Members Mark Cleveland, Bob Perniola, Rick Goulding, Jesse McSweeney, Andrew Reardon, Julie Sim, and Kate Steele. Unable to attend was Susan Darnell.

**ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

**Minutes** – The minutes of the March 16 meeting were distributed and reviewed.

*Motion made to accept the Minutes of the March 16, 2021 meeting as printed. Seconded and passed 8-0-0 by roll call.*

**Bills** – None

**Reserve Fund Transfer Requests** – None

**Correspondence/Notices** – None

**Action Items / Discussions** – None

**FY 2022 BUDGET OVERVIEW**

**South Shore Vo-Tech**

Norwell VoTech liaison Robert Molla present along with SSVT Superintendent Tom Hickey. Norwell's projected FY 22 assessment is \$420,095, an increase of \$48,004 or 12.9% over FY 21, reflecting the enrollment of three additional students, bringing Norwell's total enrollment up to 23 students. Potential Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief II (ESSER II) funding could reduce the Town's assessment by up to \$8998.

The FY 22 budget includes no debt service, as a 2010 roof project was paid off in FY 21. The Town's share of the FY 22 capital requests is \$27,953. About 70% of the Town's assessment is driven by a Chapter 70 formula based on "ability to pay" as determined by average income and property values; the Town's share of the capital expenses is based on headcount. Mr. Reardon thanked Mr. Hickey for the opportunities SSVT provides to students in town.

*Motion made to recommend the FY 22 South Shore Votech budget in the amount of \$420,095. Seconded and passed 8-0-0 by roll call.*

## **School Department**

Superintendent Matthew Keegan present along with School Committee Chair Kiersten Warendorf. Ms. Warendorf commented briefly on the challenges presented by the pandemic to the system, starting with the switch to online learning last spring. Previous upgrades to the ventilation system and support staff efforts helped get students back in the building by September, when hybrid online-in-person schooling was implemented with schedules based on age. The District is going back to full in-person learning on March 30th.

Ms. Warendorf noted that there was a social media post soliciting resident questions to ask at this meeting, and pointed out that the School Committee had increased meeting frequency over the past year. They have seen increased parent attendance and comment in this period, and all meetings include two periods for public comment. Committee member Mary Lou O'Leary also noted the public comment periods at meetings and read a statement that it was Committee policy not to communicate over social media. Mr. Smellie noted for the record that he made the post to help him come up with questions, as his kids aren't in the school system yet, and clearly stated that the questions could not be answered in the thread due to the open meeting laws.

Mr. Keegan opened with a brief discussion of the annual budgeting process, which 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 22 budget is based off the original proposed budget sent to the Board last year, prior to post-Covid adjustments, and includes the addition of two elementary school teachers (one for each school), four Kindergarten aides originally proposed last year (two for each school), and an additional bus for the Cole school. They would like to hire an additional high school musical teacher, as also requested last year, but have removed the request at this time. The school bus cost is somewhat offset by a favorable contract with the service provider.

Mr. Keegan indicated that the Department continued to monitor the cost of out of district Special Education tuitions, but these costs were difficult to estimate or control. 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. These funds have not been needed for FY 21 so far, but an increase in costs is anticipated for FY 22.

The Department also receives "Circuit Breaker extraordinary relief" from the state for Special Education expenses, a portion of which can be rolled over to the next FY. They are hoping to increase the amount of CBER rollover going forward, but the ability to do this is uncertain. Options for out of district placements include "collaborative" programs formed by local school districts and state-approved private and/or residential schools.

Mr. Smellie asked if the Town could work with other area towns to address these costs; Mr. Keegan noted that the collaboratives essentially served this purpose, but they couldn't address the needs of every student, some of which, Mr. Keegan noted, were significant.

The Department's strategic plan has been paused in some respects in order to focus on Covid, but network and technology upgrades were undertaken to facilitate online learning, including a big ramp-up in the use of learning management systems and the loaning of technology and technical assistance to all students who needed it.

Mr. Smellie asked about adding civics, typing, or cursive classes back into the curriculum. Mr. Keegan noted that curriculum review is an ongoing cycle and the District was currently finishing up its review of the social studies curriculum, which would include civics. Some elements of typing and cursive writing are still taught but are not part of the state standards testing.

The Department received \$183,922 in CARES Act funding to upgrade facilities and ventilation/HVAC, and \$121,393 in grant funding to facilitate remote learning. Capital requests from the Department included funding for Vinal fire paneling, Cole school repaving, lead abatement and a generator for the Sparrell building, HVAC repairs at the Vinal library, and purchases of cameras and a pickup truck. They withdrew requests for middle school kitchen equipment and fire paneling. Mr. Morin indicated that everything on the list had been funded through the Capital budget or other sources.

Ms. Sim thanked the Department for not trying to simultaneously teach students in person and remotely. Mr. Perniola also thanked the special educators at the Vinal school, noting that students in the program were able to receive in-person learning four days a week despite the hybrid learning model. Mr. Morin commented on the good communication between him and Mr. Keegan, and the positive relationship between the schools and the Town.

*Motion made to recommend the FY 22 School Department budget in the amount of \$30,087,326. Seconded and passed 8-0-0 by roll call.*

#### **Highways/Trees and Grounds Correction and Revote**

Mr. Morin requested a re-vote to the Highways and Trees and Grounds budgets to reflect a collective bargaining agreement recently reached with the AFSCME that includes cost of living adjustments and changes to longevity pay.

*Motion made to reconsider the FY 22 Highways budget. Seconded and passed 7-0-1 by roll call, Member Reardon having abstained.*

*Motion made to recommend the FY 22 Highways budget in the amount of \$1,240,736. Seconded and passed 7-0-1 by roll call, Member Reardon having abstained.*

*Motion made to reconsider the FY 22 Trees & Grounds budget. Seconded and passed 7-0-1 by roll call, Member Reardon having abstained.*

*Motion made to recommend the FY 22 Trees & Grounds budget in the amount of \$593,034. Seconded and passed 7-0-1 by roll call, Member Reardon having abstained.*

#### **MAY 2021 TOWN MEETING ARTICLES**

##### **Vo-Tech Debt Authorization**

The article would authorize SSVT to incur debt of up to \$18.9 million, through the issuance of 20 year bonds and bond anticipation notes, to fund various large capital projects over period FY 23 through FY 28. Norwell's share of the debt incurred would be 3.12%; all eight member towns must approve similar authorization articles for SSVT to proceed.

Mr. Hickey noted that the school was well-maintained but aging, with building wings constructed in 1962, 1978, and 1992, and in need of several larger capital projects that they are looking to phase in over fiscal years 23 through 28; the article will have no effect on FY 22. A facilities

master plan in 2018 included 48 maintenance recommendations, including roof and window replacement in the 1992 wing and electrical, ventilation, and fire suppression upgrades. Students can assist with some of the work.

Mr. Morin expressed concern at the open-endedness of the debt authorization request, noting that he prefers a more incremental approach. Although the Town can service its small share of the proposed debt, he cautioned that the current article language seemed to give SSVT leeway to repurpose instead of return leftover funds. Mr. Hickey acknowledged Mr. Morin's comments as valid, and advised they were in the process of adding language that will address the disposition of leftover funds. Mr. Morin believes his concerns will ultimately be addressed and acknowledged that having to obtain approval from eight different towns may require a different bonding strategy.

In response to a query from Mr. Cleveland, Mr. Hickey advised that none of the eight towns so far had approved the debt authorization; town meetings were spread out through April and May. Mr. Morin requested that the Board defer from voting pending receipt of updated language and additional information.

#### **Snow and Ice**

This article allocates \$200,000 to cover the deficit incurred by snow and ice removal. The Town deliberately under-budgets for this expense, as it is one of the few areas in which municipalities can deficit-spend.

*Motion made to recommend the Snow and Ice articles, as printed, in the amount of \$200,000. Seconded and passed 7-0-1 by roll call, Member Reardon having abstained.*

#### **FUTURE MEETINGS**

3/25/21, 3/30/21, 4/1/21

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

*There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn at 8:52 P.M. Seconded and passed 8-0-0 by roll call.*

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Peter Smellie, Chair