



TOWN OF NORWELL
Norwell Town Offices, Room 112
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Norwell, Massachusetts 02061
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2022 APR -5 AM 11:28

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Norwell Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
March 1, 2022

The Advisory Board was called to order by Chair Jesse McSweeney at 7:00 P.M. Also present were Town Administrator Peter Morin, Finance Director Darleen Sullivan, and Board Members Bob Perniola, Susan Darnell, Mark Cleveland, Peter Leppanen, and Dane Hutchison. Unable to attend were Rick Goulding and Elizabeth Hibbard.

AGENDA

Motion made to approve the agenda as submitted. Seconded and passed 5-0-0.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Minutes

Tabled.

Bills – None

Reserve Fund Transfer Requests – None

Correspondence/Notices – None

Action Items / Discussions – None

FY 2023 BUDGET OVERVIEW

Highways / Trees & Grounds

Highways and Trees & Grounds Commissioner Glenn Ferguson gave a PowerPoint presentation to the Board. The Highway Department takes care of about 80 miles of public roads plus 50 miles of subsurface drains, 1600 catch basins, and 100 culverts. Trees & Grounds maintains the two Town cemeteries off Washington Street and Stetson Meadows, 80 acres of playing fields, and the grounds of all town buildings. Engineering is done in house, which allows projects to quickly be scheduled.

Projects completed over the last year included bar foundations at the Stetson Meadow cemetery, 80 new culverts, paving at the Cole School and Washington Street cemetery, and benches for the Town Pathway. The October storm felled between 500-600 trees on the roads, and also caused significant damage to the Pathway and Washington Street cemetery; post-storm cleanup took over a month. The Main Street sidewalk was expanded eastward from the Town Hall, past Lincoln Street. Working with Recreation, the Department has paved the Gaffield Park lot and walkway to the East Field. To maintain the roads, Mr. Ferguson tries to pave a certain mileage each year. Chapter 90 finding from the State, as well as funding from bond issues, pays for much of this.

Design of the new highway barn has been completed, and the project is going out to bid shortly with a budget of \$5 million. The project has been fully bonded. Mr. Cleveland asked if the increase in building material cost would impact the project cost; to offset the increases, Mr. Ferguson has brought as much site work as possible in house.

All present discussed the impact of an ongoing gas line project on town roads. Eversource reimburses the town when it has to open a road as part of the project; Messrs. Ferguson and Morin may seek an increase in this reimbursement due to damage to Pine and Green streets and traffic impacts, but Mr. Ferguson feels the existing deal is reasonable even considering increased asphalt costs. Mr. Morin added that state law gives the Town little leverage in terms of mitigating impacts, and it is unusual for the Town to receive any reimbursement from a utility. Mr. Ferguson will also try to get Eversource to start on Phase 3 of the project by August so the impacted roads can resettle before having to be repaved.

Mr. McSweeney asked about ongoing drainage issues at Green Street. Mr. Ferguson would like Eversource to pay half the cost of paving the road; he is also hoping to put in some drainage improvements. Mr. Leppanen asked who maintained the highways in Town. Under a long-standing arrangement, Route 53 is state-maintained but Route 123 is town-maintained.

Mr. Ferguson is asking for the addition of one full-time employee to Trees & Grounds; this cost is not currently reflected in the draft budget. Mr. Morin is not opposed to the addition, as it would make up for the recent loss of a FTE. Mr. Perniola met with Mr. Ferguson and feels he has done well getting the maximum use out of his resources and employees he has.

Mr. Hutchison noted that Mr. Ferguson had requested \$45,000 for vehicle maintenance but Mr. Morin is recommending \$25,000. Mr. Ferguson stated that repair costs have been running higher than normal, but Mr. Morin indicated his number was based on average spend. Both will work together to settle on a final number. The Department does not have a mechanic on staff and Mr. Ferguson is not interested in hiring one, as vehicles are getting too complicated to repair in house. He may look at getting rid of older vehicles before they require major repairs. Mr. Hutchison asked if all town vehicles get repaired at one shop; Mr. Morin felt this was impractical due to the different vehicles used by the different departments.

Mr. McSweeney noted the line item for computer maintenance, and would like information on how much each individual department is spending in this area. Mr. Morin indicated that the Department was covered under the Town's IT contract. Mr. McSweeney also asked about a change in cell phone costs; Mr. Morin thinks this may be due to additional employees having phones.

Mr. Leppanen asked about the impact of weather events in recent years on Department resources. Mr. Ferguson feels the additional Trees and Grounds FTE will help them keep pace; his biggest worry from storms is falling trees causing injury. Warming temperatures seem to weaken the trees in town. and Mr. Ferguson tries to stay on top of the imminent hazards and aggressively notifies National Grid regarding hazard trees in their right of way.

Cemetery Administration

The proposed budget is little changed, but an article requests a transfer of funds from the Perpetual Care fund to allow Trees & Grounds do additional work. Cemetery Liaison Denise Nestor interfaces with the public in a professional manner. The construction of a columbarium at the

Washington Street cemetery, for the storage of cremation urns, has provided an additional internment option and revenue stream.

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Recreation Department

Recreation Director George Grey present. Program participation and revenues increased over the last year, especially for the summer recreation program. The Department implemented a new online registration service last fall that eliminated transaction and processing fees for residents; Treasurer/Collector Darleen Sullivan was instrumental in implementing the transition.

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Ms. Darnell asked about a new \$10K line item for postage. Mr. Grey indicated this included printing and mailing of the program brochure four times a year to residents. In the past, this was paid for out of the Department's revolving fund, but he is now asking that it be considered a general expense for the Department. Mr. Morin felt this request was reasonable and would not create a hardship for the Town. Mr. Grey feels the mailing is essential for notifying residents, especially newcomers, of upcoming programs.

Mr. Hutchison asked about how many households take advantage of Rec programs relative to the 4000 brochures mailed out. They have not specifically studied household uptake, but he would like to utilize the new registration service to survey participants; he will provide the number of sign-ups in the new system to Mr. Morin. Mr. Hutchison also asked if he would be retaining the paper registration option given the high uptake of the online system; Mr. Grey felt there would always be a need for a paper option to accommodate walk-ins and late registrations.

Mr. McSweeney asked what the revolving fund would be used for if postage is now covered in the budget. The fund pays for direct program expenses as well as the salary for Program Coordinator Judy Volpe and other assisting staff. Excess funds at the end of the year are applied to startup expenses the following year, and cannot be redirected to other Departmental projects; Mr. Grey noted that the amount of excess funds fluctuates significantly from year to year. Mr. Morin indicated that revolving funds were also in use at the Council on Aging and for trash/recycling services; the Accounting Department monitors all such funds. Mr. Grey noted that a lot of the sports programs require initial expenditures for equipment and court maintenance before the fee revenues come in.

Facilities Department

Facilities Director Ted Nichols noted his department was responsible for all Town buildings except for the schools. Construction of the new library is finishing up and renovation of the Town Hall is starting soon; additional work is planned for the Jacobs Farmhouse and Police/Fire station. The Department works closely with the School Department as well as DPW.

Mr. Cleveland asked whether the projected utility costs in the TA-recommended budget were accurate in light of world events. Mr. Morin noted that cost fluctuations had been discussed in forming the budget, but the figures were subject to change; he will provide additional funds if needed. The Town is looking to purchase additional solar credits which will offset part of the Town's electricity cost. Mr. Nichols based his budget figures on the year to date increases. If the Town does not utilize the third floor of Town Hall this year, that will reduce the cost.

Ms. Darnell asked about an increase in the Building Maintenance line in the TA-recommended budget beyond what the Department requested. Mr. Morin thinks the Department request is low relative to expenses in recent years. The Department is trying to get by with the existing

infrastructure in Town Hall as much as possible until renovations begin, but some repairs may be needed if renovations are delayed. Mr. Nichols noted the TA-recommended figure is not unrealistic given the age of some of the systems.

Mr. Leppanen asked about Mr. Morin's adjustments to the Salary line item; these reflect Mr. Nichols' contract being up for renewal and are subject to adjustment depending on whether he utilizes a town vehicle or needs reimbursement for his own fuel and mileage; Mr. Morin believes he can get Mr. Nichols a vehicle from Highways. Mr. Morin also adjusted the salary for the Town Hall custodian so it is competitive with the custodian for the Police/Fire station.

Mr. McSweeney asks what comprises the Professional Services line. This includes cleaning services to cover absences, asbestos remediation services, and fire alarm services.

MISCELLANEOUS

Mr. Morin will provide additional revenue projection figures for the Board to discuss. Mr. McSweeney would like to have this information as soon as possible in future seasons. Mr. Morin takes a conservative approach to estimating revenues as a rule, but the projections this year as to local tax receipts and state aid are looking very positive. Mr. Hutchison would like the Town to also take into account the potential impact of inflation or future crises; Mr. Morin tries to ensure that any new expenses the Town incurs are sustainable for a number of years, and the solid residential tax base acts as a bulwark against outside disruptions.

Mr. McSweeney advised that Rick Goulding has decided to step down from the Board effective immediately. The AB Nominating Committee has appointed Brian D'Souza to replace Rob Galibois; Mr. D'Souza has been sworn in and will hopefully joining the Board on Thursday. The Board discussed whether to proceed with eight members or ask ABNC to appoint another member to finish Mr. Goulding's term, which runs out this year.

Mr. Cleveland notes that ABNC had chosen an alternate member in case Mr. D'Souza turned down the offer to join, and suggests that this alternate be offered the seat but that the ABNC not restart a search if the alternate isn't interested; Ms. Darnell agrees, as the Board is currently short-staffed and a brief stint may help the alternate decide whether to seek the position next year. Mr. Cleveland will ask the ABNC to contact the alternate about finishing Mr. Goulding's term.

Mr. McSweeney asks Board members to contact Ellen McKenna directly, cc'ing him, if they are going to miss a meeting. The Zoom link will be active for any members who can't attend in person.

The Select Board will be discussing possible changes to the Advisory Board charter to (1) change the quorum requirement from 5 members specifically to a "majority of active members" or (2) allow for associate members to cover when there are quorum issues. Mr. Cleveland isn't sure many residents would be interested in being an associate member who would only participate in limited situations.

FUTURE MEETINGS

March 3, 8, 10, 15, 22, 24, 29, 31

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn at 8:46 P.M. Seconded and passed 5-0-0.

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Jesse McSweeney, Chair