



TOWN OF NORWELL
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TOWN OF NORWELL
TOWN CLERK

2022 APR -5 AM 11:26

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Norwell Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
March 8, 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 Mark Cleveland, Bob Perniola, Susan Darnell, Brian D'Souza, Elizabeth Hibbard, Peter Leppanen, and Dane Hutchison.

AGENDA

Motion made to approve the agenda as submitted/amended. Duly seconded and unanimously voted.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Minutes – Tabled

Bills – None

Reserve Fund Transfer Requests – None

Correspondence/Notices – None

Action Items / Discussions – None

FY 2023 BUDGET OVERVIEW

Harbormaster

Harbormaster James “Jef” Fitzgerald present. No changes are proposed to the budget. Mr. Fitzgerald’s duties include licensing moorings in the North River, ensuring they are used appropriately and are in the right locations, and conducting outreach regarding traffic safety and navigation. There are currently about 117 berthing permits (80 of which are moorings) in the Norwell stretch of the river, and there is a wait list of about 20 names. Residents must prove they have proper frontage to access a mooring; the mooring fees are comparable to those in other towns.

Veterans Services

The FY 23 budget includes an increase in Veterans Service Officer stipend. VSO Dave Osborne helps veterans apply for Federal and state-level (Chapter 115) benefits and provides other informal assistance. The Chapter 115 benefits, which provide food, shelter, clothing, and medical care assistance to veterans below a certain income, are 75% reimbursed by the State. The budget also funds veterans’ grave decorations, and Veterans and Memorial Day observances. Mr. Osborne arranges an annual veterans’ lunch completely supported by donations.

Ms. Hibbard noted that the FY 22 budget exceeded its \$15K allocation and asked if the FY 23 budget should be increased. Mr. Morin would prefer to keep the budget as proposed and do a

reserve fund transfer if necessary. Members Hibbard and Darnell suggested there may be opportunities for synergies with the Community Housing Trust's small grants program and Council on Aging programs, respectively. Mr. Osborne indicated he was aware of these programs and was in constant touch with COA director Sue Curtin.

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Animal Control

The Town shares an Animal Control Officer with Cohasset, and reimburses Cohasset for about 40% of the ACO's salary. The proposed FY 23 budget is increased to fund additional needed hours. The ACO addresses various animal-related issues including livestock, pets, strays, and roadkill.

Beautification Committee

The funds in this budget go to beautify traffic circles and other areas of town, and the Committee provides recognition to town residents and organizations. Mr. Morin is recommending a \$500 increase to the budget as more land, including a memorial flower field to former Conservation Agent Hemingway, is coming under their purview.

2022 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING ARTICLE OVERVIEW

Revolving Funds

This annual article authorizes the maintenance of revolving funds for the Stetson Ford House, funded by rental fees, with expenditure limit of \$25,000; the Recycling Center, funded by "pay as you throw" bag fees, with expenditure limit of \$80,000; and the Council on Aging, funded by programming fees, with expenditure limit of \$5000. Revolving funds run by Recreation and Water do not require authorization.

Medicaid Reimbursement

This annual article authorizes funds for an outside vendor to file for the town to receive reimbursement from Medicaid for certain special needs services provided by the schools. The Town pays North River Collaborative to handle the paperwork for a fee of about \$3000, and generally receives \$5K-\$15K from Medicaid in return. Mr. McSweeney asked why this cost wasn't part of the school budget; Ms. Sullivan indicated this was because the reimbursement is retained by the town.

Assistant Town Administrator

Article 10 of the Annual Town Meeting proposes to amend Chapter 7, Section 3 of the Town bylaws to allow the Finance Director to be appointed "Assistant Town Administrator" and perform additional duties accordingly. Mr. Morin noted that until recently, he had relied on interns and consultants to perform such duties, but the Select Board recently tasked him with creating a succession plan. Although Town Counsel advised he is allowed to reorganize departments as he sees fit, he would prefer to formally create the position through this process. Mr. Morin believes an Assistant Town Administrator should have strong financial background, as "the budget is foundation of all municipal government." The position will promote better continuity of government and avoid the need for an "acting Town Administrator," at higher cost, when he retires.

Ms. Hibbard pointed out that the article language references "Board of Selectmen"; this will be updated to "Select Board." Ms. Darnell asked about a proposed three-year term; this is typical for administrator-level positions. Ms. Hibbard inquired if upper-level contracts could be staggered so they weren't all up at once; Mr. Morin stated it wouldn't matter, as these individuals could leave their jobs at any time like other town employees.

Mr. Morin indicated to Mr. Hutchison that he could delegate certain of his duties without a Charter update, but preferred to create the "Assistant" position this way so the process and duties were clearer. Mr. Perniola asked whether creating the position would alleviate needs in other departments; Mr. Morin indicated it in fact would create the need for someone to assume the Treasurer/Collector position Ms. Sullivan currently occupies, and he has added \$107K to the Treasurer/Collector's Office budget to fill the position if this article is approved.

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Mr. Periniola also asked if being an attorney was necessary for a Town Administrator; Mr. Morin noted that most TAs came from a financial or public administration background, and these were as much of an advantage. Mr. Leppanen asked if personnel from other positions might be qualified to move into an ATA role; Mr. Morin felt this was possible for certain positions such as Planning Director, but preferred that candidates have a strong financial background based on the importance of the budget and on what he has seen work in other towns.

Ms. Hibbard made a motion to recommend the article as a proactive way to address succession planning, but withdrew the motion to allow more time for review.

Motion made to withdraw the motion recommending the Assistant Town Administrator article. Duly seconded and unanimously voted.

MISCELLANEOUS

Mr. McSweeney advised the Board that if there is a close or evenly split vote, a member will speak regarding the majority and minority positions at the Town Meeting.

Mr. McSweeney asked about the impact of the increase in gas prices on budget lines. Mr. Morin noted that gas expenses primarily appear in the Highways/Trees & Grounds budget, and he will adjust as needed. Police and Fire vehicles also refuel in the Highway yard.

A formal vote to appoint a new Vice Chair will be added to the agenda for Thursday.

FUTURE MEETINGS

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

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn at 8:16 P.M. Duly seconded and unanimously voted.

Jesse McSweeney, Chair