

**Town of Norwell
Select Board
Open Meeting
3/20/24**

Present: Jason Brown, Bruce Graham, Brian Greenberg, Andy Reardon, Darleen Sullivan, Kim Roy

Vice Chair Andy Reardon called the meeting to order at 7:00pm. All rose to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Agenda

Motion; made by Bruce Graham, seconded by Brian Greenberg, to approve the agenda as written. Unanimously voted

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Motion; made by Bruce Graham, seconded by Andy Reardon, to approve the minutes of the 3/13/24 Open Meeting. Unanimously voted

Select Board Reports - None

Town Administrator Report - None

Citizen Comments

Discussion/Action Items

- a) Ms. Sullivan introduced Lane Partridge as the Town's new Assessor. Mr. Partridge was the Assessor for the towns of Barnstable. His impressive background in assessing will be a great asset for the department and the Town. He serves as the president of the State Assessors Association and also teaches all levels of classes.

The board noted that this period will be a department rebuilding process in Mr. Partridge's capable hands. His start date is 4/1/24. Welcome, Lane!

- b) Prudent Investment Rule – Pam Adduci, Brian Callow, Rockland Trust
Ms. Sullivan summarized this amendment to M.G.L. Chapter 203, which will allow the Treasurer to invest these trust funds in a broader range of instruments while still being very conservative. This Article would pool only the Town's assets (not across municipalities) and provide a framework for the Town to adopt or not. (Many of the funds are small.) All trust funds are now managed by Rockland Trust.

Brian Callow, Rockland Trust, was present to comment on this new investment option, which would allow more diversification and broader scope of choice for a total of about \$3M. Questions were asked and answered about fund balance investment diversification percentages.

A future meeting will be scheduled with the OPEB Trust Committee, with a Select Board update to follow.

Motion; made by Brian Greenberg, seconded by Jason Brown, to reopen the 2024 ATM warrant to include the Prudent Investment Article. Unanimously voted

Motion; made by Brian Greenberg, seconded by Jason Brown, to close the 2024 ATM Warrant. Unanimously voted

- c) Personnel Bylaw Warrant Article: Rich Massina - Clifford, Kenny LLC
Atty. Massina was present to explain the update to this cumbersome old bylaw. The proposed update would allow the Select Board the authority to make necessary personnel changes with more speed and flexibility throughout the year instead of waiting for a Town Meeting vote. It is important for Town residents to understand when moving from this old model bylaw that the Select Board, as the Town's elected representatives, have the scope and flexibility to act in their executive branch capacity to make these changes, which are more operational than legislative.

Questions were asked and answered about various sections of the proposed bylaw. Per Atty. Massina, there will be 2 Articles, the proposed bylaw and the new personnel plan.

While there is currently no Personnel Board, the one remaining member is in full support of these changes. Atty. Massina is asking for a Select Board vote of support for these Town Meeting Articles.

Motion; made by Brian Greenberg, seconded by Jason Brown, to support these 2 Warrant Articles with Personnel bylaw and plan updates. Unanimously voted

- d) FY25 Budget Overview by Darleen Sullivan
Ms. Sullivan met with the Advisory Board to review all of the FY25 budget categories. She reviewed the whole process and timeline that drive the budget. A copy of Ms. Sullivan's power point presentation is available in the Town Administrator's office.

Highlights of the presentation included the following points:

- The FY 2025 gross proposed budget of \$67,529,389 (includes Water and CPA) is a level services budget with no cuts
- The budget complies with the Town's financial policies
- The Town maintained their AAA bond rating and received a 2023 award from the GFOA
- Ms. Sullivan will use some overlay surplus (\$425K) to augment revenue, noting the probable need for an override next year. Overlay surplus now totals about \$1.2M
- Will use Free Cash to fund the capital requests
- Total tax levy components: net local aid, local receipts, overlay surplus, other (Discussion ensued about new tax revenue/new growth potential and the MBTA Warrant Article cost impact. Ms. Sullivan will follow up with more specific numbers; her initial look was not that much revenue from the state. A few new developments will provide additional tax revenue.)
- Major expense categories; education, fixed costs (60% is schools), general government
- Under levy debt components; Town probably has a larger share than Schools due to new highway barn and Town Hall purchase. The hope is to keep levy debt under \$2M.
- Schools and Town both carry out-of-town school expenses

Overview of net changes for FY25:

- FY25 challenges: Limited revenue sources, local aid, rising costs, fixed costs
- Summary of potential override components for the next fiscal year:
 - 1) Trash and recycling costs are increasing rapidly, prompting the Town to consider changing the service model. Per the board, it is the one service that almost every resident uses. Maybe take a closer look at both trash and recycling details.
 - 2) Budget increase focus areas; group insurance, facilities, trash/recycling, PCR Pension-includes teacher retirement as well as health insurance
- Article 3 – capital budget total is about \$2M
- Animal Control Officer is now in house, no more Cohasset job share – level funded right now, only cost is a new vehicle
- Outside funding sources; free cash, ARPA funds, other grant funds, overlay surplus, water revenues, CPC
- Override discussion:
 1. Maybe consider more frequent operational overrides. Larger interval leads to more discretionary spending without “paying the piper”. “Nice to have” choices like sidewalks, buildings, etc. are made, but then higher taxes hit without a timely correlation between earlier spending and the tax impact
 2. Maybe not the way to go, forces tighter budgeting
 3. Consideration that more frequent overrides would force more prudent decisions for purchases. The Town needs to understand “level service budget”, which includes the school department. The board is very concerned about FY26, as residents are really up against it. All need to seriously review spending. Maintenance has never been accurately predicted, so operating costs have risen steeply, which in turn drives capital spending.

e) Warrant Articles Overview

Ms. Sullivan reviewed the list of Articles for the Special and Annual Town Meeting Warrant.

1. School SPED Article – should be an operating cost. Partially caused by no state support, maybe try to incorporate into future school budgets, not a one-time cost. Will be put back in budget as forecasting takes place.

f) Committee reappointment policy – Brian Greenberg

Mr. Greenberg updated the board on his edits for the reappointment policy. The board will vote when they have reviewed the whole revised committee handbook.

Future Meeting Dates; April 10th, April 24th

Adjournment

Motion; made by Brian Greenberg, seconded by Jason Brown, to adjourn at 9:10 pm. Unanimously voted