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TOWN OF NORTON
FINANCE COMMITTEE

March 22, 2021
7:00 P.M.
MINUTES

I. Call to Order

The March 22, 2021 meeting of the Finance Committee was held via Remote Participation Meeting and was called to order at 7:00 P.M. by Mr. Stephen Evans, Chairman of the Finance Committee.

Finance Committee Members Present: Mr. Peter Carignan, Mr. Richard Dorney, Mr. Michael Fiore, Mr. William Rotondi, Mr. Aaron Smith, Mr. Kevin Snyder, Mr. Zachary Tsilis, Ms. Bonnie Yezukevich.

Absent: Ms. Aimee Sawyer, Ms. Paula Daniels

II. New Business

Mr. Jack Conway, Select Board Chairperson, called to order the Special Meeting with the Select Board at 7:02 PM. Roll Call: Mr. John Conway, Mr. Brad Bramwell, Ms. Rene Deley, Mr. Michael Toole,

Absent: Ms. Megan Artz.

FY 2021 BUDGET

Southeast Regional School

Mr. Mark Morris was introduced and allowed to give presentation for Southeast Regional School Budget. He mentioned in his update that Norton has 110 students enrolled at this time. He also stated that 98% graduate and many go onto get 2 or 4 year degrees. He gave the breakdown showing the total incoming funds from the Federal Government and ESSER II. He then explained Norton's Portion and stated that if Norton chooses to use their portion toward their yearly assessment the cost to Norton would be \$1,505,750 assessments.

Mr. Fiore asked why Stoughton's cost is significantly less than Norton's but the enrollment is different by only 1 student. Mr. Morris replied that they must follow a formula that is based on the Wealth and Property Value of each town.

Mr. Evans asked for the reasons a town would not use the Federal and ESSER II money to reduce the yearly assessment. Mr. Morris stated that the town could decide to leave the money with the school so it could be used for new equipment or other school needs. However, he cannot imagine any town not using this money to reduce their cost.

Mr. Evans asked if there were any savings from the past year due to COVID and if there were would this impact the yearly student cost/assessment. Mr. Morris stated that last year's budget is the same as CY22 because of the savings due to COVID. He also mentioned that the school is mandated to spend a minimum amount on each student. They are at the minimum, but if it went over this would reduce the assessment in the future year.

Mr. Tsilis asked if there are student fees like the ones for Norton Students (bus, athletic, etc.). Mr. Morris stated that the bus is funded through the state so there is no charge to the students and no athletic fees. Mr. Tsilis asked if the construction going on at the school going to impact the budget to each town. Mr. Morris stated that the project is a Performance Arts Center and there is a bond that has been on the books for at least 10 years. The assessment to the town has gone down due to refinancing at a lower rate.

Mr. Dorney stated that his company has engaged with an intern program and they are very happy with the students and their abilities. How do you compensate with the increase in enrollment? Mr. Morris stated that there are no tests to enroll. It is a blind application based on grades, discipline record, and recommendation from prior schools. He also stated that culinary, automotive, carpentry are the most popular this year.

Mr. Toole asked if there is a way to up the enrollment number. Mr. Morris stated that the school is landlocked and cannot expand without going up. They look at other options, like evening classes for the vocational piece. Mr. Toole asked if he has a number of Norton applicants that applied but were not accepted. Mr. Morris will get that number for the committee and email to Mr. Yunits or Mr. Conway.

Mr. Bramwell gave his praises to the Adult Education program as well.

Mr. Tsilis asked what changes have been made to adapt to the economy. New programs he named for a few such as CAD, Legal and Protective, Veterinary Programs.

Bristol County Agricultural School

Mr. Yunits displayed the budget as there was no one in attendance from the school. He stated that the request is larger than last year due to the assessment for their new project. We have 9 students at this school and the new assessment of each student is \$8,396. Mr. Yunits will ask if the school will be getting any Federal Money that can be used toward the assessment.

There was a brief discussion regarding the large difference between the costs per student at both schools and Norton. Mr. Conway gave the total of \$15,681 per Norton Student.

Animal Control

Mr. Yunits stated that this department includes one full time and one part time employee and increases are contractual. He stated that this is the Animal Control Officers 21st year with Norton. Mr. Evans asked why there is such an increase in overtime. Mr. Yunits stated that the increase in overtime is because of the additional calls that come in over the weekends.

American Rescue Plan – Mr. Yunits, Town Accountant, and the School Superintendent will be getting together to see how much and where money can be used toward the budget. \$1.97 M is coming in for the town and school is getting \$1.789M. Hopefully, we can use some of this money toward this budget. This can be used to replace lost income due to the pandemic which is different from funds received previously. We will have a couple of years to spend this. Also, the remainder of the Cares Act Money can be used until December of this year.

Fixed and Shared

Mr. Yunits reviewed the items on debt, long term debt, notes, employee benefits, health insurance, Medicare Insurance, unemployment (he needs to review this again – it may change), fuel expenses, charges and expenditures.

Mr. Evans asked about the status for fraudulent unemployment claims. Mr. Yunits stated that Ms. Van Dyne has been diligent in resolving these and researching each one.

Mr. Conway asked if the dispatchers been able to get their unemployment claims? Mr. Yunits said that all but two have gotten jobs and he will check on the others.

Finance Committee

Mr. Yunits gave the budget amount.

Zoning Board

Mr. Yunits gave the budget amount.

Tree Warden

Mr. Yunits gave the budget amount.

Memorial and Veteran's Day

Mr. Yunits gave the budget amount.

Capital Plan

Mr. Yunits stated that Water and Sewer Department reduced one of their items. He also reviewed the Capital items requested for each department. He also showed the breakdown of where some of these expenses are reduced from Ambulance, Water and Sewer and gave the total to be requested at the town meeting.

Mr. Evans asked what the status is regarding a reimbursement due to asbestos remediation and the window project at the Yelle School. Mr. Yunits will check and get back to the committee.

III. Old Business

Follow up items from this meeting:

1. Mr. Toole asked Mr. Morris from Southeastern Regional if he has a number of Norton applicants that applied but were not accepted. Mr. Morris will get that number for the committee and email to Mr. Yunits or Mr. Conway.
2. Mr. Yunits will ask if the Bristol Agricultural school will be getting any Federal Money that can be used toward the assessment.
3. Mr. Conway asked if the dispatchers been able to get their unemployment claims? Mr. Yunits said that all but two have gotten jobs and he will check on the others.
4. Mr. Evans asked what the status is regarding a reimbursement due to asbestos remediation and the window project at the Yelle School. Mr. Yunits will check and get back to the committee.

Follow up items from previous meetings answered at this meeting:

1. The expected operating costs for the New Town Hall and Community Center.

Mr. Yunits had a spreadsheet showing the current and future costs of Cleaning and Maintenance, Natural Gas, and Electricity for the old versus New Town Hall and Senior Centers.

Follow up items from previous meetings unanswered:

1. Cost estimate if the Town Hall is condemned and the offices had to move into trailers.
2. The voting schedule for future budget meetings.
3. The financial numbers for all open TIFs.
4. Mr. Carignan asked if Mr. Yunits will provide a breakdown of the IP upgrade and the costs of the laptops.
5. Mr. Tsillis asked what the Total Debt of the town is. Ms. Van Dyne will send that out to the committee.
6. Mr. Tsillis asked for a breakdown of cell phone costs from each department.
7. Mr. Dorney asked if there is a breakdown showing the number of permits per electrical, plumbing, etc. And how much money the town receives through this process.
8. Ms. Sawyer asked if he has a number of houses on the Sewer system. He will get it to the Finance Committee next week.
9. Mr. Rotondi asked for a breakdown between the Town Salary and HR departments in the survey.
10. Mr. Tsillis asked if we can get a simple one page spreadsheet showing where the savings are for this year from last year in the different departments (lights, Insurance, SEMRECC, etc.).

IV. Open session for topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance

Mr. Yunits gave an update on the coming meetings and what to expect. Mr. Evans requested projections used to justify the TIF being presented.

Mr. Yunits will also give the spreadsheet showing projected shortfalls in the budget. He will also be ready to make some recommendations.

Mr. Evans went through the next steps for the new members of the Finance Committee. Mr. Yunits will go through his recommendations and the Select Board will give their input. Mr. Yunits will incorporate them. His steps include looking at the revenue, review the biggest budgets (School, Fire and Police) and ask these departments what can be put off until October to reduce amounts. The smaller budgets make little change to the entire budget. Last resort is to reduce staff, he also looks at unemployment and where that can be cut back. Mr. Evans said next we review the articles. Mr. Tsilis asked why departments cannot share some budget items such as mowing, other maintenance items, and duplicate positions.

Mr. Conway would like to have a joint pre-town meeting to go over the articles.

Mr. Yunits stated that the Special Town Meeting has been opened for May 8th at 1:15 P.M.

V. Minutes

3/8 minutes – Mr. Tsilis made a motion to approve as written. Mr. Smith seconded. Vote - Unanimous

VI. Adjournment

Mr. Conway entertained a motion to adjourn at 8:20 P.M. Ms. Deley made the motion. Mr. Toole Seconded. Vote – Unanimous

Mr. Evans entertained a motion at 8:37 P.M. to adjourn this meeting. Mr. Tsilis moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Snyder seconded. Vote – Unanimous

Respectfully submitted by

Patricia Tarantino, Recording Secretary

Minutes approved by Committee on:

Signature:



Stephen Evans, Finance Committee Chair

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(sgolfaddict@comcast.net) from jreid@nortonmaus.com
IP: 173.162.149.1



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