

Finance Committee Meeting

September 20, 2021

7:00PM

Meeting held via Remote Participation

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Meeting called to order at 7:15pm

Attendance: Aimee Sawyer, Michael Fiore, Paula Daniels, Joe Parker, Kevin Snyder, Stephen Evans, Yelena Gordon, Zach Tsilis, William Rotondi, Bonnie Yezukevich

Updates:

Building Projects (Michael Yunits)

- Norton Town Hall and the Senior Community Center – Both Parcels of land have been purchased, reviewing project managers, building committee received 13 RFQs for Owner's project manager. Narrowed down to 3, last week did interviews with the three companies and completed those interviews on Thursday. Now checking references, expecting to have contract by next week.

School Projects (Joseph Baeta)

- Trane Project - energy conservation project, solar, boilers, water, etc. at the three elementary schools predominately. We have a boiler for Yelle School, three others anticipated in the next week or so. Will continue this process in the spring. Piped in certain portions. Slow process getting the materials and the trucking. Hoping to get a timeline from Trane in the next week-10 days on what they are thinking for the rest of this year until December, and then from January on its going to be slow because the schools will be occupied. Not taking any risks with losing heat in January and February. Anticipating that the solar work and the boiler work will resume in the springtime. Filing all the paperwork as part of the kick backs that are part of the requirement of setting up the payment long term.
- Athletic Project – Ms. Daniels is going to be the representative on this project. Need to make some shifts in the design of the field due to wetlands to the sewer that is underneath that area. Long term is that the bid would go out and close and be opened by March on the athletic complex, potentially breaking ground by May. Figuring out which project will go first will be a determination that needs to be made. Do we (the town) start at the current Adams field and work into the multipurpose field and then the Tennis Courts or do we (the town) start with the Tennis courts and go the other direction. Needs to be figured out, a lot of that has to do with money, building materials expensive. Utilizing Gale Associates. Goal is to potentially have the Adams Field opening sometime in September with games being played. Will have a better timeline once the bids are done, then once that is done hopefully going to continue project. Do not see the project as an "all at the same time" project due to manpower and material/supplies. Most likely a phase in project over that time period going into the spring of 2023.

Questions for Town Projects/School Projects

Zach Tsilis- Are there Gant Charts on any of these projects where someone can anticipate what is supposed to happen by certain dates that is accessible on our website.

Joseph Baeta- School department is prepared to give that.

Michael Yunits- We will have that once we have our OPM on board. Once the OPM is on board we will work with them to develop our RFQ for our architects, we will go out to bid and expect to have an architect on board by the end of the calendar year. Plan on 12 months of design work by architects, so realistically looking at groundbreaking in the spring of 2023 for the building projects. Building Committee looking at occupancy in 2025 right now. Once the OPM is on, a schedule will be developed. Did go out to borrow and got a good rate, 1.47 is the true interest rate. Norton reaffirmed at AA+, upgrade Norton from adequate to strong.

Financial update (Michael Yunits)

- Free cash has been certified, this year our free cash was \$4,238,298. Two large items that make some of that up, \$1,000,000 in tax payments that should have been before June 30th but came in after June 30th, so they were certified as free cash in last fiscal year. Insurance holiday was almost \$1,000,000.
- Enterprise fund retained \$2,179,601
- Top category (local receipts) is Motor vehicle excise, collected 115.16%. Exceeded anticipated receipts.
- Second item is "other excise", also exceeded what was anticipated.
- Third item is penalty interest on taxes, 121.54%.
- Payments in lieu of taxes were slightly under what was anticipated
- Our departmental revenue was under what was anticipated
- Overall, did well in what we had anticipated for receipts. Total for the year for the town was about \$1.2 million above what was anticipated, so that became free cash.
- We collected \$333,000 less than previous year, one of the reasons for that is that the previous year the last bill went out in April, last year it went out in June, that money did not come in for the fiscal year.
- Licenses and permits were lower than the previous year by \$204,000, but well within what we anticipated.
- Overall, if you look at the town receipts it was about \$767,000 less than the previous year
- Next thing that makes up local receipts are "turn backs" (money that wasn't used by departments). Function one is the general government. The main item in there \$89,000 was the FinCom reserve that was not used, and Tax Title \$23,000 that was not used. Municipal building \$15,000 that was not used.
- Number two is public safety, \$146,000 of that is due to grant funds, did not have to make the total payment on the assessment because of the grants received. Police/Fire total turn back of around \$300,000 for the two departments
- Number three is school, there was \$80,131.78 turned back. \$51,000 of that was from Southeastern Regional, \$26,000 from Norton Public schools, \$2,400 from agricultural school.
- Human services- veterans' services accounted for \$73,000. Some of that was the part-time position that was not filled but the bulk of it was benefits that they did not have to pay out.

- Employee benefits- \$1million, the bulk of that was the health insurance holiday, health holiday was one month, due to lack of use because of COVID. People were putting off certain things that they would have normally done (elective surgeries)
- Going to recommend putting some money into reserve account.
- Concern for revenue side this year is the motor vehicle excise due to shortage of vehicles and whether people are going to buy new vehicles or not with the cost that they are all at right now.

Leonard street project-

- Pulled the permits for the Home Depot and Yale. The next phase of development, across the street, met with state last week and they are getting ready to auction that property off. Encouraging them to keep moving forward with that, will give us (the town) more industrial area.

Development on Mansfield Ave-

- A lot of development that has been permitted and is being talked about on Mansfield Ave. Two 40Bs that will be constructed. One next to McDonalds, and another one next to Albertos. A lot of vacant land along that strip that right now people are doing due diligence on to look at development.
- 40B projects are new and put the town up over 11% so we (the town) have hit our 10%. Any 40B projects after that would have to be a friendly 40B that the town would agree to, cannot just come in and do it now without that.

Free cash history-

- Division of local services always recommends that the free cash be a minimum of 5% of whatever your budget is. That's the target. Have had significant free cash in the last few years, hopefully with all the development it will continue that way.

State Budget-

- There have not been any major changes.
- Local aid varied from the Governor's estimate of \$16,538,975, went down to \$16,504,745. Final outcome was \$16,517,646.
- When the budget was made \$839,403 was used from free cash. The Hicks fund \$200,000. Ambulance receipts \$700,000. Dog fund \$10,000. Septic \$35,000. Wetland's protection \$3,000. Debt exclusion program \$13,646. Indirect reimbursement for cost attributed services the town provides to the water/sewer department. Sewer \$112,325. Water \$533,254.
- Offsets \$300,000 remains for the reserve.
- Pass through, state aid that comes for the library, \$36,154 goes directly to library. The \$966,791 goes to school department.

State Assessments-

- Transportation authority, MBTA
- Charter school tuition assessments
- School choice tuition assessments

Fixed and shared expenses-

- \$15,486,082
- Southeastern Regional \$1,505,760
- Bristol Aggie \$75,570. Large expense with this is the building project they have that we (the town) are now required to make payments on.

Budgets-

- General Government \$13,767,362
- Schools \$31,812,760

Stabilization Fund (James Puello)

- Norton's balance in the stabilization fund \$2,164,579.
- Hoping to put more money in there to bring that back up.
- Rating agencies like to see a percentage of funds in reserve.
- Goal is to have 10% of budget.
- \$439,500 removed from stabilization fund last year to fund budget during times of uncertainty regarding COVID.

Capital-

- Balance in capital \$283,696.45.
- Next meeting will give an update on federal funds that were received FEMA, CARES, AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN.
- Goal to get \$200,000 into OPEB each year. Once we get to the year 2035, the retirement fund should be fully funded. Once that happens, it will free up money to use in other places.
- Goal is to have enough money in the OPEB fund that we could take money out of the fund in the future to fund the retirement portion of the health insurance expense every year.
- Big picture..increase the amount put into OPEB each year, replenish stabilization funds, put substantial money in our capital. Hold on to free cash and keep it as free cash just in case there is a need for it.
- Been using free cash every year to fund budgets.
- Set aside between \$600,000-\$800,000 for next year's budget.

Public Safety (Chief Brian Clark)

- Slide show presentation to go over Norton PD/updates.
- Police Reform Legislation-Police officer standard and training commission (POST), all complaints and investigations have to go through POST since beginning employment.
- Public records have increased and are time consuming.
- Training, huge commitment/cost. Increasing in amount of training, increasing the hours of training.
- Staffing- 3 officers on the road.
- Hoping to hire 2 officers.
- Every officer must have some level of training.
- Cruisers hard to replace, update Tasers, body cameras.

- Talk about back fills, time off, amount of time before new hire is ready, how many hires are needed, over time hours increase.

Fire (Chief Shawn Simmons)

- Mandates discussion.
- Collective Bargaining agreement-time off, working hours, over time, etc.
- National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) regulates a lot of what we do. Certain things required.
- These are the best practices that are nationally accepted.
- Talk about how often equipment needs to be tested, the need for new equipment in the next few years, hiring a few more people, training, education, standard operating guidelines, Mass Department of labor standards.
- Civil service dictates procedures for hiring/promotions. Makes it difficult to hire people and can get expensive.
- Hoping to get grant for new uniforms and respirators in the next couple of years.

Ambulance/EMS Mandates (Michael Wilson)

- Every ambulance is mandated by certain specifications – Ground Vehicle Standards for Ambulance (GVSA)
- Taking about a year to get chassis.
- Yearly contracts for preventative maintenance for ambulances.
- Paramedics/EMTs have to recertify every two years. Need continued education, about 2754 hours every two years for the continued education/certifications/licenses that are necessary.
- Medical director can enforce additional training.
- Required to have quality assurance program. Review/critique every call with documentation.
- Communication equipment is a necessity and is mandated.
- Mandated medications (epi-pens).
- Average turn around time is 45 minutes, varies depending on what the call is and what hospital is the best option for that particular call.
- Prices vary for ambulance rides depending on length of ride, insurance of the patient, etc.
- Payment plans sometimes available to Norton residents depending on situation

Article 1: Prior year bill (Michael Yunits)

- \$1,935.01- two bills from boiler equipment for the Police Department

Chairman calls for motion

Aimee- I move that we recommend Article 1 in the amount of \$1,935.01

Kevin- Second the motion

No further conversation

Call for vote: Yes – 10 No – 0 Unanimous.

Petition Article (William Francis)

- Propose to extend the mandatory time to connect to the common sewer from 5 years to 10 years.
- Mainly want to do this because the law was passed before COVID hit, cut very deeply into the time frame.
- Don't think it will have much impact on revenue from the connection fees. Will give homeowners more time to save up the money, especially if they are not eligible for the 20-year low interest loan.
- Help avoid the \$100/day fine that's imposed if you do not sign up within the 5 years.

Petition Article (David Wluka)

- Seeking to add two more "all alcohol licenses", this is for all alcohol beverages not to be drunk on the premises. Liquor Store
- S&H Development, has a lease with Condyne for the front of the project that is going to be a series of retail establishments.
- Lease in place subject to petition.
- Ten taxpayers petition, has been certified with the town clerk.
- High end package store.
- Lots of discussion on how these licenses could impact a license for a marijuana establishment, the location of this potential liquor store and how it could impact existing businesses, and the process that was taken to get here.

Reorganization

- Aimee Sawyer- nominated for Chairperson of the Finance Committee
Aimee Sawyer- I would be happy to accept
Seconded
No further discussion
Call for vote:
All parties vote yes
- Bonnie Yezukevich- nominated for the Vice Chairperson of the Finance Committee
Bonnie Yezukevich- I accept
Seconded
No further discussion
Call for vote:
All parties vote yes
- Zach Tsilis- nominated for representative to the capital committee
Zach Tsilis- I accept
Seconded
No further discussion
Call for vote:

All parties vote yes

Upcoming meetings:

- 9/27/2021
- 10/4/2021
- 10/6/2021
- 10/13/2021


Respectfully submitted by

Rachel Medas, FinCom Secretary

Minutes Approved by Committee on:

6/6/2022

Signature:


Aimee Sawyer, Finance Committee Chair