

Finance Committee
May 2, 2022
7:00 PM

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I. Call to Order

The May 2, 2022 meeting of the Finance Committee was held via remote participation and was called to order at 7:01 pm by Aimee Sawyer, Chair of the Finance Committee. Finance Committee members present: Kevin Bugaj, Paula Daniels, Stephen Evans, Yelena Gordon, Frank Joe Parker, William Rotondi, Aimee Sawyer, Bonnie Yezukevich, and Zack Tsilis.

Absent: Jeffrey Moynihan

II. New Business

Ms. Sawyer congratulated former Finance Committee member Kevin Snyder on being elected to the Select Board at the April 30th Town Election, creating a vacancy.

Mr. Evans thanked Mr. Michael Fiore for his twenty-five years of contributions to the Finance Committee.

Article 18: Petition to Adopt a Town Motto

Mr. Yunits introduced the petitioner of this article, Norton resident, Dan Pearson to present the petitioned article.

Mr. Pearson reviewed the proposed motto, explained its meaning, suggested where it could be used, and noted the advantages to having a Town motto.

Mr. Rotondi inquired about the cost to implement a Town motto. He commented on the Town's tight budget and stated this would be low priority if the cost would be more than publishing it digitally on the Town website.

Mr. Pearson replied he would be willing to create the graphic for the Town website. He stated he does not feel there would be a high cost to implement a Town motto.

Ms. Daniels asked if it is a common practice for Towns to have a motto and commented the Town's budget this fiscal year is very tight.

Mr. Pearson replied he is aware all states and several cities have mottos. He added even if it gets adopted, it could be added in stages as finances become available.

Ms. Sawyer commented she is supportive of the concept of this article but would like to see a study group of an ad hoc committee to collectively come up with the Town motto.

Ms. Yezukevich stated she also questions the Town's cost to implement a Town motto. She added the question will come up at Town Meeting and the Finance Committee must know the cost before recommending anything to the Town.

Mr. Pearson stated he was not aware a citizen's petition should include a financial analysis and that he needed to present the Article to the Finance Committee until very recently. He commented he consulted the Town Clerk on the procedure for making a citizen's petition and has followed those procedures. He stated he believe adopting a Town motto would have minimal costs, the article is only to adopt a motto, it does not state it has to be placed anywhere.

Ms. Sawyer commented a financial analysis is not necessary for every article but the concern here is the cost to update the granite sign and other like items. She pointed out there are two parts to this article. The first is should the Town adopt a motto. The second is how it will be implemented effectively (and the cost associated with it). She noted the Select Board has not voted on this yet and asked if there were any members present who could speak to this.

Mr. Tsilis commented the Finance Committee makes recommendations to the Town. Citizens of the Town have every right, regardless of the Select Board or Finance Committee, to put an article forward to the voters at Town Meeting.

Mr. Parker agreed citizens have every right to bring forward an article at Town Meeting. He added if the Finance Committee has not recommended the article, they will not make a motion for it, but any citizen is welcome to do so.

Mr. Rotondi expressed Town's counsel should be consulted before adopting a Town motto and noted that alone comes with a cost.

Ms. Sawyer suggested the Finance Committee wait to vote on this article until the Select Board reviews it and provides their recommendation.

Article 16: Petition to Amend Norton Zoning Bylaw, Article III – Zoning Map and Districts in the Town of Norton Zoning Map by Changing Assessors Map 9 Lot 223 from the Residential 60 Zoning District (R-60) to the Village/Commercial Zoning District (VC)

Mr. Jay Duka, co-consultant on the project, spoke on behalf of the petitioners of this article, who are the property owners at 93 Mansfield Ave. He presented the residential development project (between 35 and 103 residential units and commercial space) and its economic benefits to the Town. He emphasized the project will adhere to State and local conservation guidelines.

Mr. Rotondi pointed out the Planning Board and Select Board voted against this article. He added the abutters have voiced concern because of the sewerage connection required to support the project.

Mr. Duka stated there would be approximately seven abutting property owners who would be required to connect to sewer. He stated that the project team is confident that between the developers and Town the costs would be mitigated.

Mr. Rotondi asked about the number of bedrooms in the houses.

Jim Chen of JCPT Architect shared the plans showing the variety of homes that would be built, including 1,500 to 3,000 square foot single family homes to duplexes and town houses.

Mr. Rotondi asked if access to the development would be on Mansfield Avenue or Reservoir Street.

Mr. Duka replied a complete traffic study will be done, if this project is approved for more than the already allowable 35 units. This can be done once the number of dwelling units is known after receiving all the necessary approvals (from the Town and Conservation etc.). He acknowledged the traffic concerns and affirmed they will be addressed.

Civil engineer for the project, Mr. Jim Burke provided additional details on the project and how the concerns for the abutters as well as preserving the wetlands will be part of the final design.

Mr. Rotondi asked if the article includes rezoning all the parcels on Reservoir Street to Village/Commercial and, if so, the reasoning since this is a residential development.

Mr. Burke confirmed the article would rezone all parcels to Reservoir Street to Village/Commercial and explained the reason is to provide the necessary density to support the sewer extension. He shared the details for the proposed sewer system for the project. He emphasized rezoning to Village/Commercial would provide additional economic potential for the Town.

Mr. Rotondi commented although building a large residential development would provide additional tax revenue for the Town, it could likely have the opposite impact on the school budget.

Ms. Sawyer reminded the Finance Committee that if the parcels are rezoned to Village/Commercial anything can be built on them and that the Planning Board voted against this article.

Mr. Parker commented a special permit for cluster development can be granted on R40 and R60 zoned parcels and asked why that was not considered.

Mr. Burke responded he will be looking into that but there are lot size limitations on R60 zoned parcels that would impact the project.

Ms. Sawyer shared last week the Finance Committee voted to not recommend this article, but any resident can move the article at Town Meeting. She asked the Finance Committee if they would like to reconsider the article and re-vote after hearing the information tonight.

The Finance Committee did not motion to reconsider the article.

Annual Town Meeting Article 3

Mr. Yunits presented Annual Town Meeting Article 3: Tree Services, which provides the Highway Department funds to hire outside companies for tree services. He shared the Select Board recommended this article, which authorizes \$31,000 from Free Cash for this service.

Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to recommend Annual Town Meeting Article 3 for a total of \$31,000 from Free Cash on certain tree services. Seconded by Ms. Yezukevich. Vote: Yes -9. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Annual Town Meeting Article 7

Mr. Yunits presented Annual Town Meeting Article 7: Capital Improvements Appropriation. He recommended that no money be put into Capital Improvements at this time.

Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to take no action on Annual Town Meeting Article 7: Capital Improvements Appropriation. Seconded by Ms. Yezukevich. Vote: Yes -9. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Annual Town Meeting Article 19

Mr. Yunits presented Annual Town Meeting Article 19: Collection and Disposal of Discarded Items Abandoned Along Roadways and Throughout Town that Require Special Handling, which provides the Highway Department funds for this service. He shared Select Board recommended this article, which authorizes \$3,000 from Free Cash for this service.

Mr. Tsilis asked why this item (and tree services) is separate from the Highway Department's operating budget.

Mr. Yunits explained it is separate because is extra and something they hope will not be needed at some point. He shared the Highway Department now offers drop-off service for residents to dispose of items for a minimal fee.

Mr. Evans asked if the Highway Department has the capacity to handle disposing the items addressed in this article and if so, could this service become part of the Highway Department's operating budget.

Mr. Yunits replied there is enough capacity but there is a cost that is paid to an outside vendor to dispose of items the Highway Department collects. This article pays the fees for items that have not been properly disposed, which helps keep fees low for residents disposing their items properly.

Ms. Daniels asked how much the Highway Department spent on this last year.

Mr. Yunits replied he believes the Highway Department spent the entire amount last year.

Mr. Bugaj asked if the Highway Department and Police Department have collaborated at all to address this issue.

Mr. Yunits confirmed they do work together on this issue to reduce costs to the Town.

Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to recommend Annual Town Meeting Article 19: Collection and Disposal of Discarded Items Abandoned Along Roadways and Throughout Town that Require Special Handling for a total of \$3,000 from Free Cash. Seconded by Mr. Bugaj. Vote: Yes -9. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Annual Town Meeting Article 20

Mr. Yunits recommended the Finance Committee take no action at this time on Annual Town Meeting Article 20: OPEB Funding.

Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to take no action on Annual Town Meeting Article 20: OBEP Funding. Seconded by Ms. Yezukevich. Vote: Yes -9. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Annual Town Meeting Article 21

Mr. Yunits recommended the Finance Committee take no action at this time on Annual Town Meeting Article 21: Stabilization Fund.

Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to take no action on Annual Town Meeting Article 21: Stabilization Fund. Seconded by Ms. Yezukevich. Vote: Yes -9. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

FY2023 Estimated Operating Revenues and Expenditures

Mr. Yunits presented the FY23 Estimated Operating Revenues and Expenditures. He highlighted the following items:

- All department budgets have been submitted
- The budget is short \$1,704,805
- To balance the budget, two percent has been modeled and will require
 - \$372,648.28 cut from the general government budget
 - \$915,514.32 cut from the school department budget
 - With those cuts, the overall budget will still be short \$208,704
- The model includes an increase from Free Cash to \$700,000 (previously \$600,000)
- Revenue and the Hicks Fund will also be evaluated to help balance the budget

Mr. Parker asked for the rationale used for increasing Free Cash from \$600,000 to \$700,000.

Mr. Yunits stated two percent alone is difficult enough and cutting more would be tough. The increase in Free Cash is trying to avoid more devastating budget cuts.

Ms. Sawyer asked what kind of cuts are going to be made in this scenario.

Mr. Yunits stated on the Town side most of department budgets were reduced by small amounts. Some of the larger cuts are:

- Reduction to Human Resources position/consultant
- Reduction to consulting services for assistance with grants
- Reduction to overtime in the Police department (\$444,500 requested to \$378,500)
- Removed the Fire Department request for \$77,000 for the grant positions (grant ends 2024 and positions will need to be fully funded)
- Reduction to overtime in the Fire department (\$617,919 requested to \$517,919. Last year's appropriation was \$575,000)
- Eliminated new position requested in the Highway Department (\$52,938)
- Reductions to request made for funds to the Veterans Department, Library, and increased staff requested by Council on Aging

Mr. Evans asked what the increase cost was for the Chartley Fire Station.

Mr. Yunits stated he will get that information for the Finance Committee.

Ms. Yezukevich asked how many positions the grant covers, if it is renewable, and what the \$77,000 covers.

Mr. Yunits replied the grant covers four positions, it is not renewable, the grant specifies those four people cannot be laid off, and the \$77,000 covers 1/3 of the salary of the four positions.

Ms. Daniels referred to funds from a CPE grant or ambulance funds Chief Simmons referenced that could help cover these positions.

Mr. Yunits stated they are looking at budgeting for the future to continually run two ambulances during the day with the current staff levels.

Mr. Bugaj asked how many man hours to which the reduction in overtime equates.

Mr. Yunits stated he can get that information from the Chief and provide it to the Finance Committee.

Mr. Rotondi asked if the Finance Committee will hear from Dr. Baeta about cuts to the School Department's budget.

Mr. Yunits stated Dr. Baeta is currently working on the School budget and will be providing an update to the Finance Committee. The School department is scheduled to come to the Select Board meeting on May 11th.

Mr. Tsilis asked what impact rising interest rates will have on the Town budget and the debt exclusion borrowings.

Mr. Yunits stated for debt exclusion borrowings rising interest rates directly impacts the tax payers. On all other borrowings (non-debt exclusion) rising interest rates affect the Fixed and Shared portion of the Town budget.

Mr. Tsilis asked if the Town has the quarter of a million dollars in Free Cash the Schools are requesting this fiscal year.

Mr. Yunits reviewed the current draft for Free Cash Funding, listing the following items:

- Starting balance \$1,995,995
- Snow and Ice \$137,010
- FY23 Operating Budget \$700,000
- Tree Services \$31,000
- Collection and Disposal of Discarded Items \$3,000
- Still waiting on final amount for sewer line at Yelle School/High School
- Prior Year Bills \$2,347.92
- Separation Expenses \$262,094
- FY22 Operating Budget Supplement \$428,600

Mr. Yunits emphasized these amounts have not been finalized and the School Department is still reviewing their budget supplement requests. With the amounts currently proposed, the balance in Free Cash will be \$431,943.08. He reviewed the current draft of FY22 Operating Budget Supplements, listing the following items:

- Norton Public Schools
 - Staffing costs \$395,000
 - COVID Sick Leave TBD
 - Weston & Sampson Rain Water Study \$30,000
 - Remediation if Necessary TBD
- Bristol County Agricultural School Tuition Assessment \$3,600
- Snow Removal \$137,010
- Employee Benefits/Medicare TBD
- Miscellaneous/Gas/Fuel/Oil/Diesel (all departments) \$40,000

Mr. Rotondi commented on the current state of the budget and the known factors that will increase such as interest rates, salaries, and fuel. He stated when considering the Town budget, it is important to include future projections to see the big picture and plan ahead. He asked if that is being done yet.

Mr. Yunits replied a five-year plan was created and can be reviewed and updated again.

The Finance Committee discussed the state of the budget, how costs are rising at a much higher rate than the two and half percent rate set 30 years ago, and how it exponentially affects the Town budget each year until that is changed.

III. Old Business

There was no old business discussed.

IV. Review/Approve Minutes

There were no minutes reviewed at this meeting.

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

Mr. Parker reported that a resident asked him why the Town does not replace Police and Fire vehicles with electric vehicles as they do with other Town departments.

Mr. Yunits replied the Police Chief is in the process of looking at hybrid vehicles to replace one of the next cruisers.

Ms. Sawyer congratulated former Finance Committee member Kevin Snyder on his recent election to the Select Board. She commended and thanked him for his two years of service on the Finance Committee and wished him luck in his role on the Select Board.

VI. Adjournment

Motion was made by Ms. Yezukevich to adjourn the meeting at 8:41 pm. Seconded by Mr. Parker. Vote: Yes – 9. Unanimous. Motion carries.

The meeting is adjourned at 8:42 pm.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWAVfHxOI_I

4/25 meeting

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEndnliunds>

Respectfully submitted by:

Anne Simpson

Minutes Approved by Committee on:

9/25/2023

Signature:

Paula Davis