



TOWN OF NORTON
SELECT BOARD
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Select Board
Meeting Minutes
February 11, 2021

Call to Order by Chair

The February 11, 2021 meeting of the Norton Select Board was held remotely (Web: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6391519600>; Phone: 646-558 8656; Meeting ID: 639 151 9600, and was called to order at 7:02 P.M., by Mr. John Conway, Chair. Member(s) present: Ms. Renee Deley, Mr. Michael Toole, Mr. Bradford K. Bramwell, and Ms. Megan Artz. Also in attendance: Mr. Michael D. Yunits, Town Manager.

1. Review and/or Discuss FY22 Budget.

a.) Highway/Cemetery/Snow Removal

Mr. Yunits gave an overview of the Highway Department's budget. Mr. Toole asked if there were more employees hired to this department. Mr. Yunits said that it has been the same head count for two years and advised that the Highway Superintendent, Mr. Keith Silver, hired two employees two years ago.

Ms. Deley referred to what was spent in previous years, what had been budgeted for this fiscal year, and what has been spent thus far. She pointed out that it is significantly lower than what was budgeted and asked if they could lower these numbers rather than having the extra funds turned over for free cash. Mr. Yunits responded that this is just what department heads have presented and doesn't have any of his feedback or comment yet.

Mr. Silver clarified that in regard to the drug testing budget line item, the company made the mistake in the past where they weren't billing for the services just the tests, so now they will be paying for both and what was \$100 will now be \$200. Mr. Silver emphasized that they don't know when the company is going to come down to the Highway Department to do testing, which is why he budgeted what he did.

Mr. Toole asked Mr. Silver if there was anything that wasn't in his budget that he could see as a priority that he would add as a wish list item. Mr. Silver said he would have to really think about this and get back to him.

Mr. Yunits moved on to review the Snow and Ice account, which Mr. Silver budgeted \$80,000 for. Mr. Conway asked why they always budget \$80,000. Mr. Yunits explained that this is the only budget where they can deficit spend and advised that the Town can always ask for more money, but it doesn't work the other way around; so, if the Town increases this budget to \$90,000, they can never budget below this figure again. Mr. Silver commented that this year the Town has already spent over \$60,000 out of this account.

b.) Library

Mr. Yunits reported that this department requested a 3% increase to last year's budget. He stated that the Library is very fortunate where they have the Balfour fund that they can use the interest from that fund to cover a good portion of the Library's budget. The Town Manager informed the Board that this year the Library is using \$121,850 out of the Balfour Fund to cover part of their expenditures. Ms. Lee Parker, the Director of the Library, mentioned that last year it was \$113,950.

Ms. Parker explained that they are a Town department/building/employees, but also a 501C3 and are a non-profit organization. She stated that the Balfour funded the building of the new library, which is now 30 years-old this year. Ms. Parker advised that there was over \$500,000 leftover from this project fund and has been managed so well that they still have over \$1,000,000. She advised that they drive down, per the IRS requirements, \$65,000 a year now to help with the supplemental budget. The Library Director added that the Library also gets State aid to cover the operations of the Library and the Town pays for salaries, materials, and SAILs memberships, which keeps the Library certified. She continued explaining that the endowment and the supplemental budget pays for the operations and things such as the audit. Mr. Yunits clarified with Ms. Parker that 15% of the budget needs to go into materials, which Ms. Parker confirmed and added that the percentage that needs to be spent on materials is based on the population of the town. She informed the Board that if they don't do this then your State aid is cut and you risk being decertified. Ms. Parker pointed out that Hoopla (a digital streaming service for things such as e-books) increased by 49% and Ancestry went up 144%. Ms. Parker informed the Board that the Library did lose four staff due to COVID-19 because they weren't comfortable returning. Mr. Toole asked what Ms. Parker had for a wish list item for her budget and she answered that she would like to see the Library get back to 50 hours, which is where it was in 2008.

Mr. Toole asked when the Select Board starts talking about priorities in the Town and the budget. Mr. Bramwell replied that these are the initial figures submitted by the department heads that usually include their wish list items and advised that this year they appear to be more lenient, then the Town Manager reviews the budgets and makes the cuts/adjustments as necessary, and then presents what he proposes with the reductions to come into a balanced budget for the Town. Mr. Bramwell emphasized that this is really something the Town Manager does and that the Select Board is really doing [the budget process] early on in the process. Mr. Toole said one of the things he has heard since coming on the Select Board is that the Finance Committee is looking for the Select Board's recommendations for direction when they are reviewing the budget. Mr. Toole said it is something them as a group need to wrap their heads around and feel they need to go in that direction. The Board discussed the importance of giving direction to the committees/boards that are asking for it, such as the Finance Committee.

Mr. Bramwell stated that the view of the Finance Committee has evolved over the years where historically, the Finance Committee didn't look for recommendations from other Boards because they were more interested in the fiscal health of the Town and would only ask for a recommendation if they were stuck in a difficult circumstance.

Mr. Conway asked what is causing the increase from \$501,000 to \$517,000. Ms. Parker said that this was because of salary increases from contracts and costs for materials. She also

pointed out the Library does their own payroll and is overall about a 5% increase. Mr. Conway asked why the Library does their own payroll and Ms. Parker said it has been this way since she has started working there. Mr. Conway asked Mr. Yunits to look into having the Town do the payroll, which Mr. Yunits agreed to and said it could be because of the 501C3. Ms. Parker pointed out that because the Library does its own payroll, they have to do an annual audit, which costs \$10,500.

c.) Town Clerk

Mr. Yunits reported that the Fiscal Year '22 Personnel Services went up to \$122,188; Charges & Expenditures: \$8,650; and Elections \$19,400. Mr. Yunits advised that there is a large reduction in election expenses because they don't have the primary or the presidential this year coming up.

Mr. Toole expressed a concern that they may be underestimating for the cost of postage and elections. Mr. Yunits said that they can't predict future legislation that could be passed that they need to budget for. Mr. Toole expressed his opinion that he doesn't think mail-in ballots are going away.

Ms. Lucia Longhurst, the Town Clerk, agreed that she didn't see mail-in ballots going away either. Mr. Yunits posed the question of if mail-in ballots do become a mandate for elections why it wouldn't be considered an unfunded State mandate and therefore the State should cover it. Ms. Longhurst said the only election that is coming up in Fiscal Year '22 is the Town election. Ms. Longhurst informed the Board that State elections are only on even years.

Mr. Toole asked Ms. Longhurst what her wish list item would be and she advised that she would like to have another person working in her office part-time and it is inevitable that it will happen because they need more help. Ms. Deley asked what Ms. Longhurst did this year with all of the elections in regard to staffing. The Town Clerk said that she got help from election workers, residents, and a prior employee that worked in that office who was excellent. Mr. Toole asked what the wage was for that position and Ms. Longhurst said \$18.95/hour at 18 hours per week. Ms. Longhurst emphasized to the Board that she thinks her office will be fine with the next budget because there aren't more State elections, but when it comes to the mail-in ballots she may need to pull a couple of election workers in to assist.

d.) Data Processing

Mr. Yunits advised that the part-time wages is \$29,741, Purchases for Services is the same, the RMS software is reduced from \$32,000 to \$3,000 because SEMRECC has taken over the police portion of that; and \$3,000 of that is for the Fire Department to maintain their record system. The Town Manager explained that RMS software licensing is for programs (old and new) such as Zoom. Mr. Yunits mentioned that the Telephone Communications line item went up largely because they went from basic internet and upgraded to high-speed. Ms. Deley asked about the protection against cyber-attack and if this could be covered under the Cares Act. Mr. Yunits said he couldn't recall if the cyber-attack was prior to the Cares Act, but they didn't have to pay anything.

Ms. Charlene Fisk, the Information Technology/Data Processing Coordinator, said that she would really like to get the web design upgraded this year and that it would only cost \$2,000,

which would be spread out over three years. She advised that they haven't upgraded since they got the original website. Mr. Toole asked if this would be her wish list item and she said it would and pointed out that this would be something that would benefit all departments. Ms. Deley agreed that this is a priority especially since the Town Hall has been closed to the public due to COVID-19. Ms. Deley emphasized that the website is the main avenue to try and get information needed and the current one is not user-friendly.

Mr. Toole asked about Ms. Fisk's hours with COVID-19. Mr. Yunits said the overage of her hours because of all the virtual meetings is being paid for by the Cares Act, but once things go back to normal, she will be at 906 hours a year. Mr. Toole pointed out that Mr. Yunits asked the department heads to give real time budgets rather than anticipated budgets. Mr. Yunits explained that expenses that could be covered under the Cares Act can't be budgeted for because otherwise they can't use Cares Act funds. Mr. Conway asked if some of these budgets have Cares Act funds being factored into them, which Mr. Yunits confirmed. Mr. Conway asked for those to be broken out and color-coded to make things clearer. Mr. Yunits clarified that he thinks that this would be the only department that would have that. Ms. Deley asked if the boards/committees are running their own meetings or if Ms. Fisk is setting up and running them all and Mr. Yunits answered that Ms. Fisk is doing them all. Ms. Deley suggested trying to get boards/committees to start doing so in case Ms. Fisk happens to not be available.

e.) Communications

Mr. Yunits said that one of the questions at the Finance Committee meeting on Monday was the cost-savings/benefits of switching to SEMRECC. Mr. Yunits emphasized that the main reason for going to SEMRECC was the state-of-the-art facility, but the cost savings overall was \$399,335.

f.) Fire

Mr. Yunits reported that Personnel Services increased from \$4,018,243 to \$4,155,649. The Town Manager gave an overview of the increases and mentioned that part of this is because of a dive training program they have to go through. Mr. Yunits said that Chief Simmons also put in for reopening Station 1. He said the goal is to have the staff so that the station could be open by next year. Mr. Yunits said that if they do have an issue finding paramedics to fill the positions, then they will look into hiring someone that is an EMT pay them to get their paramedic certification and training.

Mr. Toole asked how Chief Simmons calculates overtime when preparing his budget because that is a large part of it. Chief Simmons said that it is actually went down just over \$4,000 from last year. Chief Simmons explained that he calculates 100% what it would cost to fill person for person, factor in vacation time/time-off, if there is a fire and they have to call personnel back in, and then deduct from that based on having extra people on duty that they can drop down by. Chief Simmons stated that when they fill those four positions, that will help offset overtime expenses, but realistically they probably won't be able to fill those positions until December.

g.) Emergency Medical

Mr. Yunits explained that the main item that changed here is the training and some of the equipment. Chief Simmons, pointed out that in the training figure is money set aside to send two people to paramedic school if they do have the issue of filling the openings within the department.

h.) Emergency Planning

Mr. Yunits said there was an increase of \$300 in this budget. Mr. Toole asked if there was something that Chief Simmons would like to add to his budget as a wish-list item. Chief Simmons mentioned that the ladder-truck is due in 2025 to be replaced or be refurbished. He advised that the cost to refurbish the truck would be \$450,000 and the cost of a new truck would be about \$1.2 million. Chief Simmons informed the Board that the Fire Department's air packs are due to be replaced, but they are applying for a grant for that next year and if they don't get it, they can apply for it next year. Chief Simmons mentioned that their portable radios are also due for replacement, so they applied for a grant today for that and the cost for those is close to \$400,000. He advised that there is usually a 10% contribution expected from the municipality, but SEMREC said they would cover that.

i.) Recreation

Mr. Yunits said that Personnel Services has a 5% increase and charges and expenditures are level-funded. Ms. Deley said that she thought that this was one of the positions when they were comparing across the State that it was extremely low comparatively. Mr. Yunits said that was from looking at the SENA-A contract and the position they were discussing at the time being underpaid was the Council on Aging/Human Services Director and that they just wanted to do the comparative study, which Ms. Deley recalled and confirmed.

Mr. Toole pointed out the additional salary being requested by the Recreation Coordinator that she proposed being paid out of the revolving account and asked if other departments have revolving accounts they get paid out of. Mr. Yunits answered that the lifeguards get paid of this account. Ms. Rice said that this is not something that the Town has done to her recollection, but other towns do it. Mr. Toole said that this is a circumstance where he doesn't think this should start with the Finance Committee, specifically referring to the Recreation Coordinator looking for a substantial raise and Mr. Toole expressed his opinion that this should come before the Select Board first. Mr. Toole commented that the Finance Committee is looking at the expenditures not necessarily approving raises.

Ms. Rice pointed out a conversation that Mr. Yunits had with another Town Manager/Administrator who said that any percentage paid out of the revolving account to cover this that same percentage would also have to be taken out to cover any potential benefits. The Board members asked what was approved at town meeting for the salary range for this position and Mr. Yunits answered \$20.29 – \$22.37 an hour. Mr. Yunits said historically the Recreation Department was responsible for keeping the pool open and the revolving account was to keep it running. Mr. Yunits further explained that ever since 2008 they started having just volunteers and have slowly started building the program back up as of a few years ago, which is the same for the Council on Aging.

Mr. Toole said he doesn't like the revolving account aspect of the budget, but expressed that it does look like the position is underpaid. Mr. Yunits clarified later that the salary range is actually \$19.14 – \$22.50. Mr. Conway said that this needs to be looked at and a livable wage needs to be done and further stated that he believed an increase in hours was needed too. Mr. Conway suggested \$22.50 for 28 hours, which would be (roughly) \$18,000 more.

Mr. Bramwell said that he has no problem with the higher range of \$22.50, or increasing the hours, or the revolving account, but what he does have a problem with is that it didn't come through the Select Board and the Select Board wasn't in the loop of this proposal. Ms. Deley agreed with Mr. Bramwell and added that she felt more comfortable with funding with the operating budget than using with the revolving account. Mr. Toole asked if they could adjust the salary range that they recently approved at a town meeting, and Mr. Yunits said that they can do it at a future town meeting. Mr. Conway suggested doing so as part of the special town meeting. Ms. Deley asked how much time they have to do this and prepare a fair comparison chart. Mr. Yunits said he didn't think they would have enough time to do this because with doing a comparison for this position he would think they would want to hire a company to look into it because each town may have a Recreation Director, but the responsibilities that fall under this job title vary greatly. Mr. Toole suggested doing the \$22.50 and increasing the hours to 28 hours. Mr. Conway said with the restraints they have that he agreed and suggested making a bigger move with the comparative study.

Mr. Bramwell said that while they want to make the change and think it is needed, to make a unilateral decision, it is not fair to the remainder of the group that they negotiated this contract with. Ms. Deley said it is also dependent on what they have available for funds within the budget. Mr. Bramwell said that he agreed and commented that they are putting the cart before the horse because they might not be able to do it anyways, so they need to see what money they have to play with first. Mr. Conway clarified that Ms. Rice's position is not in a union, which Ms. Rice confirmed. Mr. Yunits advised that her position is in the Wage and Salary Plan and clarified that the salary range was an article approved at town meeting.

Next Meeting: February 18, 2021 – The Permanent Building Committee (PBC) will be doing a presentation on the proposal for the new Town Hall, Senior/Community Center, and the Athletic Complex. The Water/Sewer Superintendent will also be there to provide an update on the new Water Treatment Facility and Water Department projects. Lastly, there will be a small budget section for presentations by department heads.

2. Adjournment

MOTION was made by Mr. Toole to adjourn at 9:43 P.M. Seconded by Ms. Artz. Vote: Ms. Artz – Yes; Mr. Toole – Yes; Mr. Bramwell – Yes; Ms. Deley – Yes; and Mr. Conway – Yes. MOTION CARRIES.

URL Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLXdoPXgmg>

Respectfully Submitted by:



Jennifer Reid, Office Administrator

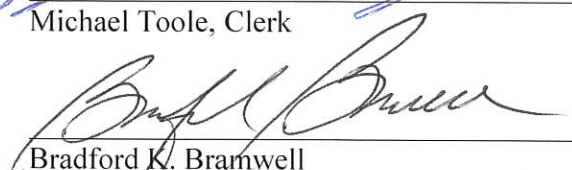
**SELECT BOARD
MINUTES OF MEETING
FEBRUARY 11, 2021**

John Conway, Chair

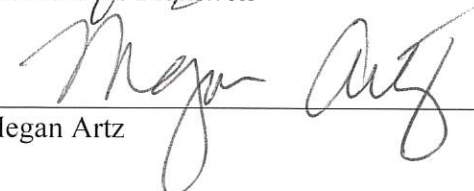
Renee Deley, Vice-Chair



Michael Toole, Clerk



Bradford K. Bramwell



Megan Artz

Minutes Approved by Board on: March 4, 2021