



TOWN OF NORTON
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Select Board
Meeting Minutes
March 15, 2021

1. Call to Order by Chair

The March 15, 2021 joint meeting of the Norton Select Board and Finance Committee was held remotely (Web: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6391519600>; Phone: 646-558-8656; Meeting ID: 639 151 9600, and the Finance Committee meeting was called to order at 7:01 P.M., by Mr. Stephen Evans, Chair of the Finance Committee. Finance Committee member(s) present: Ms. Aimee Sawyer, Mr. Peter Carignan, Ms. Paula Daniels, Mr. Richard Dorney, Mr. William Rotondi, Mr. Aaron Smith, Mr. Zack Tsilis, and Ms. Bonnie Yezukevich. Mr. Kevin Snyder joined the meeting at 7:04 P.M. The Select Board meeting was called to order by Mr. John Conway, Chair of the Select Board at 7:02 P.M. Members Present: Ms. Renee Deley, Mr. Michael Toole, and Ms. Megan Artz. Also in attendance: Mr. Michael D. Yunits, Town Manager.

2. Joint Meeting with the Finance Committee to Review and/or Discuss FY22 Budget.

Ms. Sawyer gave a summary of the outstanding items the Finance Committee was waiting on answers on as follows:

- Cost estimate if the Town Hall were to be condemned and if the Town had to move to trailers;
- Voting schedule for future budget meetings;
- Financial numbers for all of the open TIFs the Town has.
- Expected operating costs for the new Town Hall and the Senior and Community Resource Center
- Full savings impact for the SEMRECC transition (not just salary savings)
- Additional plans for the expanded Parks & Recreation hours
- Breakdown for the legal services expense line.

The Town Manager started with the savings impact for the SEMRECC transition. He pointed out that with the FY22 budget, in Communications the cost for Repair/Maintenance of Equipment remains and the Police/Fire software SEMRECC took over most of that and the small amount that is left being covered by the Town is to be able to access old records. Mr. Yunits advised that Telephone Communications and Office Supplies remain, but Seminars/Conferences, Trainings, and Educational Assistance are no longer in the budget. He lastly stated that Additional Equipment will remain in the budget. Mr. Yunits pointed out that a lot of these expenses fell under "Communications" at the time because that is where the IT person was, but the IT person is no longer serving as the Communications Director. The Town Manager explained that by comparing the FY20 budget to the proposed FY22 budget, you can see the savings in the amount of \$306,729. Mr. Yunits advised that the Police Chief provided him with information that he shared that just in salaries in FY18 the cost was \$1,091,665.88

when the Town had a full compliment over there; so, this shows a significantly higher savings than what FY20 is showing.

Mr. Toole asked if these numbers for expenses could come in even lower because the Town of Easton might be joining SEMRECC. Mr. Yunits answered that the Town of Easton has already joined, but that there are two other towns that have expressed an interest in joining and if another town does come in, there is the potential that the Town's assessment could be reduced.

Mr. Evans asked what the capacity is for SEMRECC and Mr. Yunits stated that the limit would be set on the amount of space in the building, which he emphasized there is a lot of. The Town Manager stated that Holbrook just took in its tenth community and advised that there is no limit as to how many communities can join. Mr. Evans clarified that the underlying premise would be the more towns that join the less the assessment will be for the Town. Mr. Yunits answered that this is what they anticipate as far as the fixed costs.

Mr. Yunits moved on to discuss the legal services expense line and provided a spreadsheet breaking down the legal expenses by department/board/committee, etc. After his summary, Mr. Tsilis pointed out that the Conservation Commission's expense for one month in the amount of \$10,374 stands out to him and asked what that was for. Mr. Yunits stated that he didn't know off the top of his head, but it was probably a case they had that involved court. Mr. Evans asked if it was typical for Conservation year over year to incur legal expenses like this. Mr. Yunits stated that Conservation, Planning, and Zoning are dealing with a lot of projects where issues might come up that need to be addressed through legal. Mr. Toole asked if the legal fees for Water/Sewer are reimbursed to the Town from them, which he confirmed. Ms. Deley referred back to the October expenses for Conservation and asked Ms. Jennifer Carlino, Conservation Agent, if she could clarify what the expenses incurred were for. Ms. Carlino said she could not go into detail, but the cases did involve going to court. Ms. Carlino added that there were also two DEP appeals. Mr. Conway asked the Town Manager to explain more about what falls under Labor Services. Mr. Yunits stated that it would be anything dealing with negotiations and contracts for negotiations.

Mr. Yunits referred back to previous discussions about the savings to the Streetlight account from converting to the LED lights and informed the Finance Committee and Select Board that in FY20 the Town spent \$87,213 and so far this year through December the Town has spent only \$16,601. Mr. Yunits explained that the Town converted all of its streetlights to LEDs and the Town now owns the lights. The Town Manager advised that the Town received about \$144,000 in grant money for that conversion. He explained that money is now kept in this budget for the replacement of lights and for the cost of the electricity. Mr. Tsilis asked if the Town owns the lights who is servicing them. Mr. Yunits advised that the Highway Superintendent coordinates the servicing when necessary, but an electrical company will do the servicing because it has to be a certified company and Town employees are not allowed to go near wires.

a.) Capital

Mr. Evans directed the meeting to review the Capital presentation. Mr. Yunits gave a summary of the departments' prioritized requests as follows:

Data Processing – IT

- Replace Aerohive Hivemanager Wireless Access Points (installed in 2011): \$18,250

Mr. Yunits explained that these are at the end of their life and the replacements will be installed on each floor of the Town Hall, Police Station, and Fire Station as well as two at the Highway Department, the Water/Sewer Department, and the Council on Aging.

Conservation

- Camp Edith Read Hazard Lodge Renovations (Potential Partnership/Grant): \$30,425
- Hazard Tree and Forestry (Potential Partnership/Grant): \$14,400

He explained that there are some hazard trees on some of the trails that need to come down. Mr. Yunits advised that Ms. Carlino is applying for grants to help with both of these, so anything that isn't spent out of Capital that is funded by the grant will just remain in Capital. Mr. Yunits mentioned that at Camp Edith Read some of the soffits are rotted and need to be replaced as well as some posts holding up an awning. The Town Manager lastly mentioned that Ms. Carlino is also looking to install some cameras at Camp Edith Read. Ms. Carlino mentioned that they also would like to make renovations to the pavilion and to the bathroom on the outside of the building.

Police Department

- Police line cruise replacements (3): \$165,000. The Capital Improvements Committee funded two.
- Police Station remodel: \$10,000. Money is available from a previous allotment so he doesn't need that right now.
- HVAC units replacement: \$45,000.

Mr. Yunits mentioned that there was a question regarding TRANE and if the program could do this work. He stated that they decided to leave it in here for now.

Fire Department

- Structural firefighting hose: \$18,110;
- (4) Thermal Imaging Cameras: \$54,000;
- Pumper Replacement (Year 4 of 5): \$140,250;
- Mobile & Portable Radios: \$18,911.

School Department

- Minibuses Lease to Own, Replacement Cycle: \$65,727;
- Asbestos Remediation Plan: \$15,000. This is for at the Henri A. Yelle Elementary School.

Highway Department

- Peterbilt 348-473118 with Tank: \$36,000;
- Peterbilt Dump Truck: \$28,150;
- John Deere 5090M Utility Tractor Diamond Boom Mower (Year 2 of 4): \$34,300;

- Holder Utility Tractor (Year 5 of 5): \$33,000.

Mr. Yunits mentioned for the Tree Department's request for the bucket truck (Year 3 of 5) is in the amount of \$53,400.

Everett Leonard Park

- ADA Compliant Chair Lift for the Everett Leonard Pool and Repairs to the Everett Leonard Pool House \$11,024.

Sewer

Mr. Yunits explained that the Sewer Department is going to work on Cobb Street using retained earnings in the amount of \$300,000. They are also looking for a generator for the Knollwood sewer pump using retained earnings in the amount of \$100,000.

Water Department

- Dodge Ram 1500 pickup 4x4 (retained earnings) \$33,000;
- Wells 5 & 6 Phase 5 Completion \$725,000 that they are looking to borrow.
- White Street at East Main Street Main (Reservoir Street Funds) \$350,000.

Mr. Yunits mentioned that the balance in the Water Retained Earnings is \$2,516,242 and for the Sewer Retained Earnings it is \$2,472,115.

Total Capital Request: \$656,818

Total Ambulance Reserve Fund: \$69,129

Total Borrowing: \$725,000

Total Sewer "Surplus" (Retained Earnings) \$400,000

Total Water "Surplus" (Retained Earnings) \$33,000

Total Other Transfer \$350,000

The total balance in the Capital account is \$332,690. So, they will also be looking to appropriate money for Capital at town meeting from free cash, which has a current balance of \$1,926,248.

Mr. Evans asked in reference to the Fire Department and the new radios for the new firefighters if the grant the Fire Department received covers only salaries and not equipment like the radios, which Mr. Yunits stated was correct (covers their salaries, but not outfitting them). Ms. Sawyer asked if they have looked to see if some of these items can be supplemented by the American Rescue Plan that they are supposed to be getting \$2,000,000 for because there is a lot on this list that isn't being funded. Mr. Yunits responded that without this money, what the Town would always do is look to the free cash that is certified in the fall to possibly fund some of these things like they usually do. Mr. Yunits further stated that the Town will be receiving \$1.97 million of new funds from the federal government, but they do not know at this time what the strings are attached to these funds.

Mr. Evans asked what was left of the CARES Act funds. Mr. Yunits answered that there is a little over \$300,000 remaining that they have until December to spend. Mr. Yunits advised

that they are still unsure of what FEMA is going to cover and informed the Committee/Board that the Town hasn't received any money from FEMA yet. The Town Manager explained that they are hesitant to spend the CARES Act funds because they may need to use these funds to pay for whatever FEMA isn't going to cover. Mr. Evans mentioned that FEMA had changed eligible reimbursable items from 75% to 100%, which Mr. Yunits confirmed to be true for certain items. Mr. Evans asked if the Town could do what Ms. Sawyer inquired about as far as using CARES Act funds to some of the Capital items. Mr. Yunits advised that they cannot unless they change the guidelines because the expenses have to be related to COVID-19.

Ms. Daniels asked in regard to the Water Department's Capital requests how it is decided on what will be paid out of retained earnings. She further questioned why the Water Department would be borrowing the \$725,000 for the completion of phase 5 of wells 5 and 6. Mr. Yunits replied that this is a decision the Water/Sewer Commissioners would make.

b.) School Department Budget

Dr. Joseph Baeta, School Superintendent, was present. Mr. Evans explained that this is a \$30 million budget that the Finance Committee reviews and asked that if there are any questions resulting from the presentation this evening to forward them to himself and/or Ms. Sawyer to get the answers at a later date since they haven't had adequate time to review the budget.

Dr. Baeta explained that the federal funding that has been coming in have been great, but they still don't know what the most recent Biden bill will be, but he anticipated the School Department receiving over \$1 million (approximately \$1.5 million). Dr. Baeta stated that the budget increased by 5.55%; 3.02% of that is mandated for Special Education and ELL) and the remaining 2.53% is in general education making the overall increase equate to \$1,722,545. He stated that they are adding some positions. Dr. Baeta explained that they are looking to expand their mandates within Special Education by making choices. The presentation showed five mandated positions being added as well as increasing the High School Music Teacher's hours to full-time (increase of \$13,000), Digital Instruction Specialist, Instructional Technology Staff (increase of Full Time Equivalency [FTE] by 0.32), and a Reading Specialist. Dr. Baeta advised that 2.32 positions are covered under the stimulus fund and School Choice equaling \$150,800. He informed the Committee and Board that the number of School Choice students went from 52 students in the first year to 168 students this year, bringing in just under \$1 million in revenue.

The School Superintendent gave an overview of the leasing costs for iPads, Chromebooks, and laptops for staff (200). Dr. Baeta followed with a summary of the Revolving Accounts and pointed out that they are recommending a decrease in transportation and athletic fees from \$350 to \$250. He gave a summary of the Grant Accounts and added that the Circuit Breaker is at 60% (\$833,000); right now they still do not know what the Circuit Breaker is going to be. Mr. Evans asked for an explanation as to what the Circuit Breaker is. Dr. Baeta explained that if a student goes out of district for tuition, not transportation, that student's first \$40,000 (if you will) they own and the remaining amount (say it is \$60,000) and \$45,000 you owe, you are getting a percentage of that \$15,000. Dr. Baeta said that percentage has been as low as 50% and as high as 73% or 74%, but most years it is between 65%-70% and that figure goes directly to the School Department. He explained that in the case of the grants, using the example of the Federal Sped IDEA, that is put into the School Department budget and offsets the \$624,000 of their paraprofessionals in Special Education.

The School Superintendent moved on to discuss the Mandated Education Detailed Budget. He informed the Committee and Board that mandated areas are either they have to do it by law or they have an option to do it in various ways. He referred back to the example he gave of do they start their own internal program because you have four students within the elementary grade who need specialized instruction or do you send all four students out at a cost that would be more than average hiring one teacher and one or two paraprofessionals. Dr. Baeta advised that under the Biden Plan, the School Department will be forced to spend 20% on summer extended year/extended day; this does not include areas of mandates like Special Education. The Special Education increase as a percent of the total budget equals 3.02%. Dr. Baeta told Mr. Evans that he would provide a breakdown of the grants the School Department received for both what was received through the Town with the CARES Act and through Commonwealth.

Mr. Evans asked how the kids are doing overall. Dr. Baeta responded that they have great kids and when they were told that they were returning to in-person learning the following day in their virtual classrooms the kids were as giddy as can be. Dr. Baeta pointed out that there will be some students that will have a hard time returning to the classroom because they are scared. The School Superintendent informed the Committee and Board that Tuesday, March 23rd kindergarten through fifth grade will be returning to in-person learning. Dr. Baeta mentioned that if there is an increase in the budget, he would anticipate it being driven by academic and counseling needs. Mr. Evans asked if there any other challenges he anticipates facing. Mr. Evans also asked in reference to the purchase of equipment the School Department received through CARES and FEMA funds and with the reduced weeks if the Town could expect any potential turn-backs since there has been no travel or conferences and reduced sporting events because of COVID-19. Dr. Baeta responded that he believes there are going to be limited turn-backs because in September the budget was frozen and they had an \$800,000 shortfall because they had nineteen FMLA situations, which led to the hiring of more than eleven people.

Mr. Evans asked in reference to "Other Revenues" if the School Department was using all of their School Choice money in this year's budget, which Dr. Baeta confirmed was correct. Mr. Tsilis stated that he read a publication that reported that the Commonwealth was receiving \$1,833,128,000 and it will be disbursed \$1,896 per student and asked Dr. Baeta if this was correct. Dr. Baeta replied that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has not provided them with any numbers yet. Dr. Baeta mentioned that he read a publication on Twitter that cities would be receiving between \$5,000 and \$7,500 and suburbs like Norton would get \$2,500. Dr. Baeta advised that they do use the Title I formula to come up with Norton's numbers, which hurts them rather than helps them. Mr. Tsilis clarified that in the School Department's budget they are assuming nothing from the federal government at this point. Dr. Baeta replied that he is assuming the \$721,000 in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER), which came from the Trump administration. Mr. Tsilis started by stating that the School Department does a good job in addressing needs. Mr. Tsilis specifically referred to the kids with the social/emotional issues, particularly resulting from COVID-19, who want to participate in after school activities, but can't due to financial needs. Mr. Tsilis emphasized that they do not discriminate against race or handicapped individuals, but they do discriminate against economic needs. Mr. Tsilis pointed out that the School Department's transportation fees and athletic fees are less than 1% of their budget. He expressed that he knows the budget is tight, but year after year these are not a priority and he thinks that this is discriminatory. Dr. Baeta responded that this year's budget he and the

School Committee have worked towards reducing these fees and to keep doing so year after year where hopefully the athletic fees will go from \$350 to \$0.00. Dr. Baeta informed the Committee and Board that they also have a third-party that assists with donations for those who can't cover certain expenses like athletic fees. Dr. Baeta added that as far as the transportation fees, the School Department is charging \$52 for the remainder of the year and they can't get kids on the buses.

Ms. Deley stated in regard to the question about turn-backs and at the end of last year that there was around \$300,000 from the CARES Act that the Town did not expect it was going to be able to use but then they were able to. She asked Dr. Baeta with the eleven or so teachers that the School Department needed to hire because of COVID-19 and staff being out on FMLA and stated that she thought that these expenses could have been paid out of those funds and asked if they were not. Dr. Baeta answered that they received a separate targeted per pupil expenditure that they utilized for that exact purpose that had to be used by December 2020, but that ended as of December 31, 2020. Mr. Wells added that they also used another small grant they received from the State to fund this and have been able to cover about half of the additional staffing costs, so they are still carrying around \$340,000 in the Appropriation budget that was not budgeted that they are supporting. Dr. Baeta mentioned that the only other situation where they could run into issues is if more staff go out on FMLA.

3. Adjournment.

MOTION was made by Ms. Deley to adjourn at 8:36 P.M. Seconded by Ms. Artz. Vote: Ms. Artz – Yes; Mr. Toole – Yes; Ms. Deley – Yes; and Mr. Conway – Yes. MOTION CARRIES.

URL Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3CehYjGtJI>

Respectfully Submitted by:



Jennifer Reid, Office Administrator

**SELECT BOARD
MINUTES OF MEETING
MARCH 15, 2021**



John Conway, Chair



Michael Toole, Vice-Chair



Christine Deveau, Clerk

Renee Deley, Member



Megan Artz, Member

Minutes Approved by Board on: April 29, 2021

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