



TOWN OF NORTON
SELECT BOARD
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Select Board
Meeting Minutes
March 22, 2021

1. Call to Order by Chair

The March 22, 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 7:00 P.M., by Mr. Stephen Evans, Chair of the Finance Committee. Finance Committee member(s) present: Mr. Peter Carignan, Mr. Richard Dorney, Mr. Michael Fiore, Mr. William Rotondi, Mr. Aaron Smith, Mr. Kevin Snyder, Mr. Zack Tsilis, and Ms. Bonnie Yezukevich. The Select Board meeting was called to order by Mr. John Conway, Chair of the Select Board, at 7:01 P.M. Members Present: Ms. Renee Deley, Mr. Michael Toole, and Mr. Bramwell. Also in attendance: Mr. Michael D. Yunits, Town Manager.

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

Mr. Mark Morris, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Administration for Southeastern Regional Vocational-Technical School District, came before the Finance Committee and Select Board to present their budget. Mr. Morris gave a brief summary of what the school offers. He advised that the school's Chapter 70 money, which is what they are required to spend on education, comes to a total of \$31,128,039. He explained that this breaks down to \$19,168 per student. Mr. Morris advised that the \$31,128,039 figure is comprised of \$11,821,457 for required district contribution and \$19,306,582 of Chapter 70 aid. The next page of Mr. Morris' presentation showed the required minimum contribution by community and pointed out that Norton is \$1,517,141 which is an overall increase of \$206,043 from FY21. He added that the Town has four more students attending the school compared to last year. Mr. Morris reported that the required minimum contribution in federal funds, ESSER II, Southeastern is receiving \$788,324 and the State has said in the federal funding formula that 75% of that amount can go back to the towns and the city to reduce their assessment; so, \$591,243 will go back to the towns and the city based on the percentage of their contribution that they pay in assessments. Mr. Morris pointed out that Norton's percentage of that is 12.8%; so, of the \$591,243 that figure comes to \$75,879 that can be used to reduce its assessment.

Mr. Morris reported that overall Southeastern's enrollment has increased. He explained that regional transportation is supposed to be 100% funded by the State, but unfortunately it hasn't been. Mr. Morris emphasized to the Committee and the Board that they should let their State legislators, Senators, and/or Congress people know that this is very important to the Town because if this was fully funded, the \$1,703,693 in transportation costs would be totally funded by the State, but instead they funded \$1,301,965 leaving a difference of \$401,728 that gets assessed to the Town. He informed the Committee and the Board that Norton's full

assessment for FY22 is \$1,579,070 and if the Town decides to use their portion of the ESSER II funding, it would reduce its assessment to \$1,505,760 (an increase from FY21 by \$58,625).

Mr. Fiore referred back to the number of enrolled students and pointed out that Stoughton has one more enrolled student and Norton is paying more in its assessed value and asked how that works. Mr. Morris explained that the formula is broken out based on the Town's wealth and property values. Mr. Evans asked what might be some reasons that they wouldn't use the federal funds to reduce the assessment. Mr. Morris answered that the Town could decide that it is not in financial need of those federal funds and could decide to keep it at Southeastern and let Southeastern use it as they see fit for the school. Mr. Evans stated that he assumed there were some savings in FY21 due to COVID-19 and asked how that impacts the assessment overall assuming that there is something. Mr. Morris pointed out that the numbers in FY21 are the exact same numbers as FY20; so, even though there may have been some savings, those savings were used to balance the budget.

Mr. Tsilis asked if there were any fees, such as bus fees or sports fees, involved for the students like there are in Norton. Mr. Tsilis also questioned how the construction going on at the school is being assessed to the towns. Mr. Morris answered that there are no bus fees because as previously mentioned, regional transportation is funded 100% by the State, so the school can't charge the students. He added that there are no athletic fees either. Mr. Morris informed Mr. Tsilis that the construction at the front of the school is a performing arts center and referred to the page of his presentation showing the bond payment in the amount of \$489,810. He advised that this was a payment that they had on the books for their bond, which they were able to refinance to a lower amount; so, the local assessment to the Town in the amount of \$320,000 is actually less than what it was prior to that bond payment.

Mr. Dorney stated that his company back in January of 2020 got involved with Southeastern in an internship program and wanted to express to Mr. Morris that they couldn't be anymore pleased with the students and acknowledged their willingness to learn and their talent. Mr. Dorney reported that his company has four interns and they will be graduating in June and the company plans to hire them full-time after graduation.

Mr. Toole referred back to comments made by Mr. Morris about how they will have 375 spots open, but have 1,000 applicants and asked if the school has thought of ways to increase the number of available spots. Mr. Morris replied that unfortunately a lot of the land around the school is not buildable. Mr. Bramwell recognized Southeastern Regional Vocational-Technical School District for what they do, their programs, and how they work with their students.

Mr. Tsilis asked Mr. Morris as an alumnus of the school what has changed to adapt to the new economy (what programs have gone, what are new, etc.). Mr. Morris stated that since 2009, they have added a legal and protective program, a CAD program, engineering programs and he mentioned that they are always updating them.

308: Bristol County Agricultural High School

Mr. Yunits showed the budget request in the amount of \$75,570, which he pointed out is a big jump from last year. He advised that the major change to this year is the assessment for their new project. The Town Manager pointed out that Norton has 9 students at Bristol County

Agricultural High School. Mr. Yunits informed the Committee and Board that the project's cost is \$52,507,000. He gave a scenario of three different rates and what it would cost the Town per student with a range of \$5,233.15 per student to \$5,979.66 per student. Mr. Yunits advised that the same question posed to Southeastern was posed to Bristol Agricultural asking if there would be money that could be used towards the budget from the federal government. Mr. Conway asked for clarification as to the Town's assessment and Mr. Yunits stated that it is the \$75,570 figure, which includes the budget for the students plus the building project. Mr. Carignan calculated the cost per student including the building project and stated that it is \$8,396.67. Mr. Carignan expressed that this was still a bargain because it was about half of what the cost is for Southeastern Regional. Mr. Evans asked the Town Manager to reach out to Bristol Agricultural to see if there will be federal funding that will affect the Town's assessment. Mr. Conway referred back to the substantial disparity in costs between Southeastern Regional and Bristol Agricultural. Mr. Snyder stated that Norton is subsidizing the other towns with the fees it is apportioned for Southeastern Regional. Mr. Conway pointed out that the cost per student for Norton Public Schools is \$15,681 per student.

Animal Control (#292)

Mr. Yunits advised that there is the Dog Officer and his assistant, who is part-time. He proceeded to give an overview of the budget to the Committee and the Board. Mr. Yunits stated that this is the Dog Officer's 21st year with the Town. Mr. Evans asked what the cause was for overtime to substantially increase from around \$6,600 for FY21 and to what is being proposed for FY22 in the amount of \$9,700. Mr. Yunits explained that this is in result of the increase of calls the Dog Officer has been getting over the weekends. Mr. Evans asked if the longevity is contractual, which Mr. Yunits confirmed and added that this position is in the SENA-B Union.

Mr. Yunits referred to the American Rescue Plan and mentioned that himself, the Town Accountant, the School Superintendent, and the School Business Manager are scheduled to meet tomorrow to figure out if the Town can use of that money towards the budgets to try and soften the blow. He said the first run they are still short about \$700,000; so, they want to see what they can use from the American Rescue Plan since the Town is receiving \$1.97 million and the School Department is receiving \$1.789 million. Mr. Yunits explained that they have a couple of years to spend these funds and have until the end of December to spend the CARES Act funds. The Town Manager informed everyone that the funds should become available for the American Rescue Plan 60 days from the date it was signed. Mr. Yunits advised that these funds can be used due to loss revenue in result of the pandemic, which is something that was not available with any of the previous funds. He added that you can also use the funds to improve ventilation in the buildings.

Mr. Evans asked if Mr. Yunits had been given information at this point as to how they will be reconciling that the funds were used as they were supposed to. Mr. Yunits stated that the only one that they are concerned about with that is the FEMA funds and the Town is expecting its first payment the first week of April, so they will know what was allowed and what wasn't. The Town Manager explained as far as the CARES Act funds, the Town has gone through the State and has been approved by them, so hopefully this will not involve a difficult reconciliation.

Fixed and Shared Budgets (#711, #750, #910, #911, and #940)

Mr. Yunits gave an overview of the budget. He advised that for FY22 the Maturing Debt is \$1,946,319; Interest \$520,028; Employee Benefits \$12,288,832 (\$3,365,604 is the payment to Bristol County Retirement, \$8,377,228 for Health Insurance, and \$546,000 for Medicare); and Unemployment \$130,000. Mr. Yunits advised that for Unemployment he put in the same amount as last year, but he has a meeting tomorrow where they will see if they can bring that number down. The Town Manager lastly stated that under Miscellaneous is Fuel Expenses in the amount of \$120,000 and Charges & Expenditures \$755,903. Mr. Evans asked in regard to the Unemployment budget how the Town was doing with the fraudulent unemployment claims. Mr. Yunits answered that the Treasurer has done a great job with handling this and submitting for reimbursement; however, since the last bill passed that put the \$300 back in, the fraudulent unemployment claims started all over again.

Mr. Conway asked if the dispatchers that were working with the Treasurer were finally able to get their claims processed. Mr. Conway clarified that he knew most of them had, but there were one or two of them that still hadn't. Mr. Yunits replied that he believed they had and further mentioned that all but two of them got new jobs. Mr. Conway asked Mr. Yunits to look into this, which he agreed to do.

Miscellaneous Town Officers and Board Expenses (#131, #177, #294, #692)

Mr. Yunits gave an overview as follows:

- Finance Committee: \$2,415
- Zoning Board of Appeals: \$300
- Tree Warden: \$2,000
- Memorial & Vets Day: \$2,000

Mr. Conway asked what these funds cover. Mr. Yunits advised that the Finance Committee would cover the recording secretary and any membership the Finance Committee has. For the ZBA, it would cover any printing they may have to do or advertising. The Tree Warden is the salary and Memorial & Vets is for flags that need to be replaced and markers on the graves, and any costs associated with a Memorial Day parade or a Veterans' Day parade. Mr. Conway clarified that the Finance Committee does currently have a recording secretary, which Mr. Yunits confirmed.

Capital

The Town Manager explained that the Capital Committee met and voted and will be meeting again. He stated that he spoke with them individually and they all gave him the okay to move forward. Mr. Yunits said they would get together and vote later, but they did vote on the plan, but then the Water and Sewer Department reduced the cost of one of their items and everyone was happy with the reduction and advised the Town Manager to move forward. Mr. Yunits gave an overview of the various departments' Capital requests, which were already discussed at previous meetings (Select Board Meeting on March 11, 2021 and the joint meeting of the Finance Committee and Select Board on March 15, 2021).

A summary of the totals were provided as follows:

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
Total (Inc. From All Funding Sources): \$2,233,947

Mr. Evans pointed out that the Capital Improvements Committee grand total is higher than the Town Manager's and asked why that is. Mr. Yunits explained that this is because of the reduced cost for the generator for the Knollwood Sewer Pump and since the Capital Improvements Committee hasn't voted on the revised Capital budget yet, he hasn't changed that column.

Mr. Yunits informed the Finance Committee and the Select Board that representatives of TRANE came to the Town Hall and described that the look on their faces were of disbelief and they told him they were not sure if there was anything they could do for the building. The Town Manager further stated that when the TRANE representatives went down to the Highway Department, they told Mr. Keith Silver, the Highway Superintendent, that at least they have windows to open to exchange air and commented that they didn't know what the employees do at the Town Hall since there are nearly no windows that they can open.

Mr. Conway advised that there is an informational session coming up that will be held via Zoom at 7:00 P.M. [on Tuesday, March 23rd] and the information is posted on the Town website as well as social media. Mr. Evans asked if they could use the push notification system to further get the word out and Mr. Yunits said he would check with Ms. Charlene Fisk, the IT Coordinator, to see how to do that. Mr. Yunits addressed concerns he has heard repeatedly about the costs for maintenance and utilities at the buildings and provided a spreadsheet showing what the expenses are now at the current Town Hall and Senior Center. The information showed an increase of \$4,289 for the proposed Town Hall and \$2,614 for the proposed Senior Center for cleaning/maintenance. Mr. Yunits emphasized that this information is all hypothetical from the discussions they have had using the example of there will be no gas at the new proposed buildings and rather will be electric. The Town Manager stated that this all depends on the design of the building. Mr. Yunits reported that the Town would be saving \$2,954 for the Town Hall and \$2,557 for the Senior Center for gas. Mr. Yunits explained that for the Senior Center, the cost for electricity would go from \$2,198 to \$7,584 with a total estimated increase of \$5,385. He advised that for the proposed Town Hall with the improvements and energy efficiencies, the bill for electricity would be for approximately \$15,680; with that said, the actual payment for the \$37,642 in electrical fees the Town Hall currently costs, the Town actually doesn't pay any of that because it is offset by the solar credits from the Hill Street landfill. In result, the Town Manager pointed out that the solar credits would then move to these two proposed buildings and would offset any increase in electricity.

Mr. Conway reported that the third informational session has been tentatively cancelled due to a scheduling conflict with a Charter Commission public hearing, so they will be picking

another date in the near future. He clarified that the informational sessions are scheduled for Tuesday, March 23rd and Tuesday, March 30th at this time.

Mr. Yunits informed Mr. Evans that at the next Finance Committee meeting, there is someone interested in applying for a TIF [Tax Increment Financing] Agreement, so that will be on their agenda and also advised that the Planning Board is holding a meeting tomorrow night to go over some of the zoning articles. Mr. Evans asked Mr. Yunits if he would be ready to provide some of his budget recommendations at their next meeting as well as some projections and Mr. Yunits confirmed that he would. Ms. Deley mentioned that she didn't receive the debt schedule that was prepared by the Treasurer/Collector and asked that this gets circulated to the Select Board, which Mr. Yunits answered he would do and asked the Finance Committee if they needed that again as well, which Mr. Evans confirmed they do.

Mr. Evans stated that he wanted to discuss the next steps of the process. He advised that he doesn't know where they stand on the articles, but emphasized that the Finance Committee needs to start voting on the articles as well as the budget because everything has to be done in the next couple of weeks. Mr. Evans instructed that he would like to keep the meeting scheduled to once a week on Mondays, if possible. He asked to have the town meeting timeline provided again as well as the score cards. Mr. Conway stated that he would like to hold an informational session on the warrant articles a week or so before town meeting to get residents educated on the articles. Mr. Toole emphasized the need for a Human Resources position to the Finance Committee and the other Select Board members before adjourning the meeting.

3. Adjournment.

MOTION was made by Ms. Deley to adjourn at 8:20 P.M. Seconded by Mr. Bramwell. Vote: Mr. Bramwell – Yes; Mr. Toole – Yes; Ms. Deley – Yes; and Mr. Conway – Yes. MOTION CARRIES.

URL Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqxqqW1sYu8>

Respectfully Submitted by:



Jennifer Reid, Office Administrator

**SELECT BOARD
MINUTES OF MEETING
MARCH 22, 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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