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TOWN OF NORTON  
FINANCE COMMITTEE

March 1, 2021  
7:00 P.M.  
MINUTES

**I. Call to Order**

The March 1, 2021 meeting of the Finance Committee was held via Remote Participation Meeting and was called to order at 7:01 P.M. by Stephen Evans, Chairman of the Finance Committee.

Finance Committee Members Present: Mr. Peter Carignan, Ms. Paula Daniels, Mr. Richard Dorney, Mr. Michael Fiore, Mr. William Rotondi, Ms. Aimee Sawyer, Mr. Aaron Smith, Mr. Kevin Snyder, Mr. Zachary Tsilis, Bonnie Yezukevich.

Absent: None

**II. New Business**

**FY 22 BUDGETS AND CAPITAL DISCUSSION**

Mr. Evans asked what was driving the Excise Tax receipts to be higher this year in the operating receipts. Mr. Yunits stated that the returns are coming in higher so far than last year.

**210 Police**

Chief Clark presented a budget document and pointed out that there is a minimal increase of about \$20,000. This is due to the fact that many officers are getting off of the salary augmentation program and there have been no new hires to boost the salary budget. There are two School Resource Officers one which the school pays for totaling \$70,477.78. He pointed out that other increases are mostly contractual. The Expenses line decreased because a few items were transferred to data processing where it was more appropriate. He presented a graph showing the overtime breakdown. The highest line in his budget was for backfilling shifts and explained when that is used. Mr. Evans asked if there are any challenges or concerns for this or next fiscal year. Chief Clark stated that next year many Police Mandates will be coming forward from the state and training will be required. He would like to increase the records clerk hours due to additional record requests. The department used to get 8 requests per week; now getting 8-12 per day. The increase for additional hours is not in the budget for this coming year at this time. It would be about a \$10,000 increase. Chief Clark stated that the town still doesn't have four officers on the road at any one time and that due to COVID it wasn't an issue. However, he thinks once the warmer weather starts and things begin to open up again they will be needed. Mr. Evans asked how many grants have been received. Chief Clark stated that since 1994 no new personnel grants are available. He did

receive a \$40,000 grant for traffic equipment, \$5,000 for Opioid Addiction and other Mental Health follow ups, and \$34,000 for traffic equipment, for example speed signs. Chief stated that Wheaton College seems to be able to keep up with their own at this time which means no additional support is needed. Mr. Tsilis asked why we wouldn't hire extra personnel to cover backfill for vacations, sick time, etc. Can we use some of the \$200,000 in overtime and hire a new officer? It may save money in the long run for the items that you know will happen. Chief said because it takes 9 months to get a new officer up and running; hiring someone new is not a quick fix.

#### **541 Council on Aging**

Mr. Yunits stated that this department includes the Director, Ms. Rossi and two part time people. Ms. Rossi stated that part of her Activities Budget is supplied with the State Formula which is rumored to decrease this fiscal year. They have been extremely busy due to COVID; meeting food needs, tax preparations, and the other needs of the elderly in town including scheduling them for vaccines. Mr. Evans asked if there are any challenges or concerns for this or next fiscal year. Ms. Rossi stated that the State Formula covers programs and \$10 of the \$18 hours for part time pay. It is rumored that the formula will be dropping. Mr. Evans asked what incentive pay covers? This is a new piece of her contract as she needs to be SHINE qualified each year. She would like to get that for her part time SHINE counselor as well. Mr. Evans asked how she is running the center during this time. Ms. Rossi stated that the building is open for one on one appointment only. The building is closed for activities but is creatively getting some via Zoom. She has a food program four days a week which is feeding 40-50 people a day. Because she is the Human Resource Person, when COVID began they had many younger families stop in for Food stamps, fuel assistance, helping with Unemployment Application. She is on social media as much as possible telling the town what the center does. Mr. Tsilis hopes a new building will be available in a few years. He also asked how she will continue provide those benefits on such a small budget when the new building opens. She had over 35 volunteers before COVID hit and hopes they will return. Is there a plan to go back to activities once seniors get their shots? It would be nice to be able to meet outside for activities, but the building is too small for indoor activities with spacing requirements. The other problem is how do you allow some inside the building and stop others that might not have received the vaccine. Mr. Dorney asked if the food program is aligned with the school program? Ms. Rossi stated that the Bristol Elder Services Food Program gives her food which allows the drive through 4 days a week. She also has a Supplemental Program that delivers boxes once a month for others. There is also a Soup Program. She explained the difference between the school program and the seniors.

**543 Veterans** - Mr. Yunits stated that this department includes Ms. Estelle Flett and one new part time clerk. The salary increase is contractual and the largest portion of this budget is the Veterans Benefit. Mr. Evans asked if there are any challenges or concerns for this or next fiscal year. Ms. Flett stated that she thought there'd be a Chapter 115 increase. However, due to COVID that piece decreased because people were making more money collecting unemployment. She explained that as long as the paperwork was substantiated, the state reimburses 75% of the Veteran Benefit. Mr. Evans asked how many grants are used. She has no grants. Mr. Evans asked how she learns of new Veterans in town. She stated that Veterans learn about the services through the VFW, American Legion, Senior Center, and Social Media. The state sends a monthly list monthly of veterans recently retired or returned from deployment. She then reaches out to them. She also has access to the census. We are just under 1,000 veterans at this time.

**692 Memorial and Vets-** Mr. Yunits pointed out the budget amount is \$2000. This covers expenses such as town flags, flag holder for each cemetery site and parades.

**440-450 Water/Sewer-**

**Water -**

Mr. Yunits stated that is the first time this department budget has come forward after the new treatment plant is running and explained the increases and other differences. Mr. Frank Fournier, Superintendent, further noted when he hopes the other wells will come online. Mr. Evans asked if these increased expenses were anticipated when the new wells were agreed upon. Mr. Fournier said that there was an anticipation of increase. He also stated that the water volumes from the new wells are wonderful. Ms. Sawyer asked about why there is difference of chemical outlay on the budget. Mr. Fournier stated that the chemicals are currently being used at 40% because the wells are at 40% capacity. There will be increased cost of the chemicals when the new wells go online. The number shown is an estimate and he further explained where other items could change. The adjusted budget could be available in two weeks. Mr. Tsilis asked if the salaries are different for water and sewer. Yes. Mr. Tsilis asked if the amount being charged for the town water is appropriate. Is there an excess? Mr. Yunits stated that because this is an enterprise the department cannot run at a loss. Mr. Tsilis asked if there will be enough water for the summer without a ban. Mr. Fournier said that since we are in a stressed water aquifer there will be an ongoing ban. Mr. Rotondi asked if we could get the same breakdown for how overtime is allocated? Operation of the plant is where you'll see the overtime because a licensed person must be on duty during all operational hours. We do not have enough people to cover without overtime and those individuals are the highest paid people. Mr. Tsilis asked if there is a point where hiring a few additional personnel would decrease the overtime cost. It takes 3-4 years to get a person trained and licensed to be on call by themselves and the town of Norton doesn't pay enough to hire someone at that level. Mr. Dorney asked if the enterprise accounts participate in SERGG. Mr. Yunits stated yes.

**Sewer** – Mr. Fournier explained the salary increase is for an additional entry level person. He also addressed each line item showing increases. Ms. Sawyer asked if he has a number of the houses on the Sewer system. He will get this information to the next meeting.

**122 Selectmen-** Mr. Yunits stated that the Town Election Budget is down due to fewer elections this coming year. Last year's budget included the Presidential Election. Mailing costs will go up next year due to the upcoming mandate for early voting and mail-in votes. We will not know how this will affect us until we hear from the state. Hopefully we will know by the end of March.

**123 Town Manager -** Mr. Yunits Budget includes himself and his Assistant. He gave updates regarding the staff and longevity. He pointed out where the increases were and the reasons for them. Mr. Rotondi asked what we will do with the information from the Salary Survey. Mr. Yunits stated that this survey is inclusive of HR services. What is the breakdown between the two departments? Mr. Yunits will bring the breakdown at the next meeting.

**131 Finance Committee -** Mr. Yunits suggested making an increase for the amount of clerical services due to the need to catch up with old minutes.

**135 Town Accountant** – Mr. Yunits stated that this department has two full time and one part time people. There is a yearly audit expense for school and town buildings. Mr. Evans asked if

there are any challenges or concerns for this or next fiscal year. Mr. James Puello stated that his only concern would be that if he lost his part time person it would take a full time person to replace him. The Expenses Budget increased slightly, but feels comfortable with the remainder of his budget at this time. Mr. Evans asked how remote processing is going in his department. Mr. Puello stated that they are in the office. Mr. Evans asked where they are with the audit. Mr. Puello stated that the audit is complete and waiting for a date with the Select Board to make the final report. No surprises or issues with the audit.

**151 Legal Services** – Mr. Yunits stated this shows a decrease as the needs are less for this coming year. He also explained how these services are paid. Mr. Evans asked if the amount shown for last year is accurate or will there be extra bills coming. Mr. Yunits stated that he does have an additional and will bring it next week. Mr. Dorney asked if there could be a breakdown of legal services used for each department. Mr. Yunits will bring that to the next meeting. Mr. Tsilis asked if we know how much of this cost was used for the Charter Committee and therefore a one-time expense. Mr. Yunits has it and will bring that next week.

**171 Conservation** – Mr. Yunits stated that this department has two full time staff people, and the largest expense is under maintenance for conservation areas. This increase is up about \$2000 due to Camp Edith Reed and the engineers required inspecting the dams for the state. Mr. Evans asked if there are any challenges or concerns for this or next fiscal year. Ms. Jennifer Carlino stated that the lodge is very close to being opened and gave details. People are showing interest in renting the building. Mr. Evans asked what the potential revenue could be for a year. Ms. Carlino stated \$60,000 as an early estimate. She also stated the following grants have been received: \$2,000 Cable, \$2,000 Cultural Council, \$10,000 Taunton River Stewardship. Several more are being written. Mr. Tsilis asked why there is a 44% increase in salary since 2019. Mr. Yunits explained that the clerk position went up to a full time position.

**192 Municipal Building**- Mr. Yunits went through the line expenses and where the increases and decreases are and why the changes. Mr. Evans asked what buildings are included in this budget. Mr. Yunits stated the Police, Fire and Town Hall buildings.

### **III. Old Business**

#### **Follow up items from this meeting:**

1. Mr. Tsilis still surprised by the high cost of Medical Insurance for the town. Would we be able to get a breakdown of the number of employees in town and who is covered?
2. Ms. Sawyer asked if he has a number of houses on the Sewer system. He will get it to the Finance Committee next week.
3. Mr. Rotondi asked for a breakdown between the Town Salary and HR departments in the survey?
4. Mr. Dorney asked if there could be a breakdown of legal services used for each department.
5. Mr. Tsilis asked if we know how much of the legal cost was used for the Charter Committee and therefore a one-time expense.

Follow up items from previous meetings answered at this meeting:

Follow up items from previous meetings unanswered:

1. Ms. Rice and Mr. Yunits to give a breakdown of the Revolving Funds to see what the impact would be for using these funds to expand Parks & Recreation Department hours. This was requested by multiple members.
2. Mr. Carignan asked if Mr. Yunits will provide a breakdown of the IP upgrade and the costs of the laptops.
3. Mr. Smith asked if any of the charges no longer shown on the Communications chart above have moved to other departments. Mr. Yunits will bring those numbers.
4. Mr. Tsilis asked what the Total Debt of the town is. Ms. Van Dyne will send that out to the committee.
5. Mr. Tsilis asked for a breakdown of cell phone costs from each department.
6. Mr. Tsilis asked what the Total Debt of the town is. Ms. Van Dyne will send that out to the committee tomorrow.
7. Mr. Dorney asked if there is a breakdown showing the number of permits per electrical, plumbing, etc. And how much money the town receives through this process.

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

**V. Adjournment**

Mr. Evans entertained a motion at 8:47 P.M. to adjourn this meeting. Ms. Sawyer moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Rotondi seconded.

All were in favor.

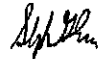
Vote – Unanimous

Respectfully submitted by

Patricia Tarantino, Recording Secretary

Minutes approved by Committee on:

Signature:



Stephen Evans, Finance Committee Chair