Brimfield Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

**Meeting Date:** March 26, 2024

**Location:** Hitchcock Academy

**Committee Members Present:** Joe Ballou: Chair, Mike Moloney, Denise DuPont (Via Phone), Nancy Waugh, Ted Steensen, Patrick Kubala

**Committee Members Absent:** Billie Jean Rubio

**Town Staff Present:** Marie Arsenault (Accountant), Don Contois (Fire Chief), Michele Metcalf (Admin -Board of Health), Dick Costa (Chairman, Board of Health), Eva Pittsinger (Senior Center Director / Outreach) Patricia Plasse (Finance Committee Clerk)

**Other Attendees:** Deb Gran, (First Congregational Church)

**Called to order:** 6:30 p.m.

**January 30 & March 27, 2024, Minutes**

**MOTION:** Ted Steensen made a motion to approve the minutes from January 30th and March 27th, 2024.

**SECOND:** Patrick Kubala

**VOTE:** All

**Conflict of Interest and Open Meeting Law Acknowledgement**

Joe Ballou asked Committee members if they completed the Conflict-of-Interest training and if so, to forward the certificates to the Finance Clerk.

**Classification and Compensation Report, Market Salary Survey**

Joe Ballou asked if everyone had reviewed the report. He stated he sent questions through the Select Board and said the Market Survey and the Benchmark report needed some clarification.

**Council on Aging Budget**

Joe Ballou advised that the lease for the Senior Center had been separated from the expense account. Eva Pittsinger said that there has been an increase on the lease of $600.00 per month from last year. She stated there was no control over the increase in the cost of the lease or snow removal. She said there was no increase for the van maintenance and there were only 2 changes in the budget which was the lease and the snow removal. The representative from the church, Deb Gran, explained that the mission of the church is to have the Senior Center as community. She said they calculated the number of hours the Senior Center used the space, and the Church hours, the Boy Scouts, the bells, and other church use. She stated the Senior Center’s use is 50% of the time. She went on to say they looked at shared expenses and improvements and decided the Town had to carry their share. She stated they don’t look to make money from the town. She said the painting of the church was all done from money raised from endowments. She said if the Town has some cost-saving ideas they would welcome them. She said the rent had to be increased to cover the costs.

Ted Steensen asked if the solar on the church has helped with utility costs. Deb said it helped some. The system they installed is not meant to cover all energy costs and the energy cost has gone up. Ted asked if there was a summary of the costs and Deb said she could get it to them. Mike Moloney stated that sharing the cost is reasonable. He said that getting the cost summary would give the Town a basis for the future.

There was the question of whether the lease was capped, and the answer was no, but the church would have to give the Town a 90-day notice if the rent were to be increased. Joe Ballou asked if the lease could be for three years instead of five. The Committee decided they would discuss this at the next meeting.

**Board of Health Budget**

Dick Costa explained he would like to increase the salary for the Administrator Assistant for the Board of Health. He explained she has been in the position for nine (9) years and has only ever received a cost of living raise and never received a step grade increase. He gave an account of her responsibilities which included her interfacing with the public, overseeing the landfill operation, plumbing inspections, and well, septic and food permits. He asked for a 23% increase in the position’s salary.

Denise Dupont asked if the Finance Committee was using the Benchmark study for everyone. Joe Ballou said they were not using the study for anyone at this time, since there were questions regarding it. Dick Costa said that the Benchmark had the Board of Health Administrator listed as a clerk and she has been an administrator since the beginning. Dick Costa requested that her rate of pay be increased to $31 per hour. Marie Arsenault stated the current salary rate was $24.37.

Dick Costa reiterated that Michele Metcalf (Board of Health Administrator) had been in the position for nine years. Patrick Kubala said he was concerned that if we approved this increase, others would be asking for the same. There was a discussion surrounding the Longevity Award and how it helped reward a long-time employee. Marie Arsenault said that it was a one-time payment. Joe Ballou suggested that $28.00 an hour was consistent with the benchmark study. He asked for a motion to approve this amount. There was no motion, and it was decided it would continue to the next meeting.

**Trash Contract**

Michelle Metcalf discussed the Trash Contract. She said the bids would close on 04/08/2024. She said they asked if the bags could still be used as the revenue from them offsets the contract. She said most trash companies do not want to use bags. She said most would include 1 roll-off bin for trash and 1 for recycling. She said if residents wanted additional bins, they would have to purchase them. She stated the maintenance of the bins would be included in the contract. She stated they estimated an increase to $250,000 on their budget, but she could not provide the new contract amount until the bids were closed and a new contract signed.

**Fire Department**

Don Contois (Fire Chief) explained the line item for $5,000 for radios. He said some radios are 20 years old and there was potential for failures. He said certain equipment has a ten-year life and it is better to replace the radios over time instead of waiting for them to break and incurring higher costs. He said the Fire Department would replace three radios a year. He said portable radios cost $1,500 and mobile radios cost $1,200. He went on to say that they use grant money when they have it, but it is not always guaranteed. Chief Contois stated that everything else in the budget was level set. Joe Ballou asked if Chief Contois passed on the percentage recommended for the cost-of-living increases to his employees. Chief Contois said he did.

The discussion continued into the Flea Market Detail issue. Patrick Kubala related a question from Billie Jean Rubio about the taxpayers having to pay for extra fire coverage during the Flea Market. He asked if it cost more for out-of-town people to fill those positions during the flea market. Chief Contois replied that the payrate was the same.

Denise Dupont asked where that money would come from for the Flea Market detail. Chief Contois said it was moved to the Fire Department budget. He said Martin Kelly (Select Board Chair) asked if the Fire Department detail was committed just to the Flea Market and Chief Contois told him if there was a fire, the detail Fire Department Members would respond to the fire. Mr. Kelly said that meant it was not dedicated to the Flea Marked, so it cannot come out of the Flea Market Emergency Services Fund. The Town Counsel rendered the same opinion. When asked why he pays the firefighters a detail rate of $35 per hour instead of their regular rate, Chief Contois said that the fire fighters take vacation from their full-time jobs so they can work the flea market.

Ted Steensen asked if there were no flea market, would there be anyone at the fire station. Chief Contois said no. Ted made a statement that because the answer is no, the flea market forces the fire station to be manned and they must spend money to pay those manning the station, but they cannot pay for that out of the flea market fund. Don said they have to man the fire station during the flea market because the fire fighters cannot get across town to get to the station if there is a fire. He said if they need to get across town when there is a fire, it’s difficult even with the fire trucks and sirens going.

There was a question of where the flea market fees go. Marie Arsenault said they go into a revolving fund account and only fire is not paid from this fund any longer. She stated any left-over funds go into the General Fund. Chief Contois discussed the staffing for the flea market and is anticipating a short fall. He said they could cover the May show. Joe asked Chief Contois to resubmit the numbers with a revision to his original Reserve Fund Transfer request. Chief Contois agreed to make a revised request.

Patrick Kubala asked about having an ambulance at the flea market. Don said this was included in the Ambulance contract and Francesco’s restaurant lets them set up there. The ambulance service is paid from the flea market account and is in addition to the regular town ambulance coverage.

Joe Ballou advised that the Select Board has stated that, since excess funds from the flea market account go to the general fund, the flea market is still effectively paying for the fire detail. Mike Maloney asked Marie Arsenault to confirm this and she agreed.

**MOTION:** Mike Maloney made a motion to approve the Fire Department budget.

**SECOND:** Parick Kubala

**VOTE:** All

**Assessor Budget**

Joe Ballou said the Assessor Budget was within the target increase. There was a discussion regarding the Patriot Property (software vendor) increase.

**MOTION:** Parick Kubala made a motion to approve the Assessor budget as requested.

**SECOND:** Nancy Waugh

**VOTE:** All

**Library Budget**

**MOTION:** Parick Kubala made a motion to approve the library budget as requested.

**SECOND:** Nancy Waugh

**VOTE:** All

**Treasurer/Collector**

Mike Moloney asked what the increase in the budget was for. Marie stated that there were software costs for new licenses and longevity awards. She said that the Treasurer would like to see the license costs be absorbed by each department that requires a license. She said they are all under the Treasurer/Collector budget currently. Denise Dupont said she has no objection to paying for licenses.

**MOTION:** Parick Kubala made a motion to approve the Treasurer/Collector budget as requested.

**SECOND:** Denise Dupont

**VOTE:** All

**Treasurer Benefits Budget**

Mike Moloney said he added all the corrections that Marie Arsenault sent. Marie explained the treasury payment. She said approximately 3 employees go through Mass Health for their health insurance. She said it costs less than what the town pays for health insurance for employees. She said the town has been paying the Department of Revenue in this way for years. She said there was also an increase to our health insurance from last year since the split was 50/50 and now it is 60/40 with the town’s contribution to health insurance increasing from 50% to 60%.

**MOTION:** Mike Maloney made a motion to approve the Treasurer Benefits budget as requested.

**SECOND:** Patrick Kubala

**VOTE:** All

**Building Department Budget**

There was discussion regarding the Building Department clerk’s salary. The Building Department requested a salary increase from $18.36 to $21.06. The Finance Committee said they would hold off on this for now.

Patrick Kubala said there should be merit increases and the department heads should set the rates, not the Finance Committee.

**Accountant Budget**

Marie Arsenault stated she level funded her budget, but she wanted to keep the line item for additional work in case it’s needed. She stated there are 3,000 vendors and she needs to work on the W-9’s because we do not have a lot of them completed. She needs to follow up to obtain the missing ones. She said the Town gets fined if they don’t have them and there is an audit. She will send letters to the vendors who have not sent theirs in. She said she won’t need the additional line item once these are caught up.

**MOTION:** Patrick Kubala made a motion to approve the accountant budget as requested.

**SECOND:** Patrick Kubala

**VOTE:** All

**Police Budget**

**MOTION:** Patrick Kubala made a motion to approve the Police budget as requested.

**SECOND:** Nancy Waugh

**VOTE:** All

**Historical Budget**

**MOTION:** Patrick Kubala made a motion to approve the Historical budget as requested.

**SECOND:** Mike Moloney

**VOTE:** All

**Finance Budget**

**MOTION:** Patrick Kubala made a motion to approve the Finance budget as requested.

**SECOND:** Mike Moloney

**VOTE:** All

Joe Ballou said the Appropriations balances from the January report looked good. Marie said she would have a more current report soon. Joe asked if there were any Capital Articles. There are not any yet.

Mike Moloney said that they should hold off voting for the school budget. He said they have the total but want the breakdown of the budget. He said they can’t control the costs at a 4.3% increase. He stated the overall operation costs are 3% so enrollment must have gone up.

Marie Arsenault said they increase the amount for the overlay. She said the excess is growing and an article is needed to use it. She explained the need to raise it every year and this money goes for exemptions, abatements, and the Senior Work-off program. She said whatever is left over remains in the account. She said she could send a list to the Committee to show the excess amount for each year.

Joe Ballou discussed the Building Project and said there were informational meetings to attend to hear about the options.

**MOTION:** Patrick Kubala made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

**SECOND:** Denise Dupont

**VOTE:** All

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

 The next meeting is April 02, 2024, at 6:30 p.m.

 Respectfully submitted by Patricia A. Plasse, Clerk