

FY24 Department Budget Meetings

March 8th – Town Hall/Administrative

Fin Com Members: Ken Willette, Kelsey Sidur, Terry Smith, Devin Peterson, SK Robinson

Additional Attendees: Stuart Beckley (Town Manager), Tracy Meehan (Town Accountant), David Grace (IT), Rob (Development Planning & Conservation), Anna Marques (Building Commissioner)

5:05 – Information Technology – 155

Requested budget matches Town Manager Recommended Budget

Increase to service contracts (Comcast)

In the process of installing fiber lines for Emergency Communication Lines (Comcast Fiber), in the future Dave would like to install our own fiber lines everywhere downstream which would drastically reduce the cost of Comcast which is \$45k a year.

All firewalls are up to speed across the board (\$10k savings)

Pathfinder Senior Intern (helping with new website redesign, increase to salary budget), goal to have new website up before the beginning of FY24.

Capital Items – Server upgrades rotated each year with one year break with no upgrades in between, this year is the police department (going to be \$19k), sonic wall network security manager that allows firewalls to be brought together (assists with cyber security insurance)

Comcast, Microsoft, Antivirus Software

Got Cyber Security Grant again and there are about 50 employees taking part in that come September.

School requirements are much different then town building servers, so Dave is in contact with Mike but they work separately for the most part.

Future Requests:

1. Town Fiber – all internet routed through town hall and simplify disaster recovery system
2. Update voice over IP phones, very outdated. All locations would be updated at once but cannot be done at Fire and Police because voice over IP doesn't work at those locations.
3. Update phones at Fire and Police.
4. All CAT6 wiring that was done in these buildings was done prior to 2010 and most is CAT5 wiring. Fire Dept is up to date, but other buildings would need updating.

5:18 – Town Accountant – 135

Paying for Annual Audit

Payroll Services

Actuarial Valuation is a every other year request

MMA Conf budget slightly higher so that the Asst can attend as well

Munice Finance Software System (Tyler Technologies)

General Ledger, Tax and Water & Sewer Billing

- Current software (Point Software) is going away on June 30th because Point was bought out by another company. GL and Tax are complete, working towards getting Water & Sewer billing switched over prior to June 30th.
- Tracy is working with Managers to get them set-up with access.
- Data comes from the Assessors Software (Patriot Properties), they got a grant from the State to upgrade software that will likely happen in the fall.

5:29 – Inspectional Services/Code Enforcement – 241

Viewpoint Online Permitting System

- Plumbing was previously handled by the board of Health but has now shifted over to the Building Dept
- Software also used for keeping track of periodic inspections and complaints
- Planning Department is also utilizing Viewpoint as well, and their services are covered under the building department budget.
- There is an increase every year but we are unsure exactly what the total will be, Anna predicting \$21k

Online Code Subscription to allow easier Access

Part Time inspector, there have been a handful of interviews.

- Someone from town that was retired came forth with interest and Anna provided info for them to apply

Plumbing Inspector Avg Salary is \$5,600 (hence Stuart recommending \$6,000)

Permit fees go back into the General Fund, Anna thinks that it would be good to do a study on the permit fees in the next year or two to see if there are any adjustments/changes (last done 8 years ago).

Vacant Property Program, Administrative Asst is going to get started on it and send notifications to the property owners.

- Working on formalizing a list before we can get mailings out, this covers Commercial as well as Residential.

Who issues final determination on BML Demolition?

- Starts with Demolition permit (within building dept)
- Baystate would have to go to every department for review and approval, then Anna can sign off on it.
- Certificate of liability provided by Baystate and insurance etc.

Future/Downstream

1. Hoping that everything that has started will have downstream positive change. Example: Regular inspections and follow-up, that would require more time but are of value.
2. Vacant property registration, more demolition, quick action when there is an event and things are cleaned up quicker than what has been allowed in the past.
3. Would be ideal to have a pot of money that is set aside that is used by the town to help these properties to get cleaned up faster.

5:55 – Planning & Community Development Dept – 175 & Conservation Commission – 171

Conservation Commission has moved under this Department now

- Biggest change to Conservation Commission is the increase to Salary (for the Assistant) who will work 38 hours per week now. Her total salary is split between 175 & 171.

Where do NOI (notice of intent) fees go when they're received?

- Per Tracy Meehan, there is a balance sitting in an account that has never been spent. Should these funds be applied to support Salary fees associated with the processing and review of the NOI's.

Funds to pay for Planning Salaries has been apportioned between town funds and Grant Funds (approx. half to each)

- Recently informed that the State is no longer going to fund Salaries through the Community Development Block Grant.
- We apply through Pioneer Valley rather than the state and therefore salaries will no longer be

covered in the grant.

- These funds must be applied towards something else in the community other than Planning & Development Salaries.

How much did we receive in the most recent Community Block Grant? – \$1.2M

- We were using approximately \$60k towards salaries, which will now be 100% funded through the town and the \$60k will be allocated through something else.

Pioneer Valley – Regional Planning Agency

- We pay them through the grant funds to do all the work involved with the grant and they take a lot of hours off the town departments plate, allowing the town department to focus more on the town zoning and planning and community development.

SK Robinson motions to adjourn at 6:31pm, Devin Peterson seconds motion. Passes unanimously.

March 15th – Public Safety

Fin Com Members: Ken Willette, Kelsey Sidur, Terry Smith

Additional Attendees: Stuart Beckley (Town Manager), Tracy Meehan (Town Accountant), Fire Chief Martinez, Police Chief Shawn Crevier, Heidi Reed (Library Director), Justine Cagiano (HR)

5:10pm – Young Men’s Library Association – 610

The Library is treated as a non-profit organization/association.

The town has increased over a population of 10,000. The state requires that the library be open 40 hours (increase from 31 hours) a week and gives the Town 3 years to do that.

- First increase is to raise staff from 33 hours a week to 37 hours a week

The plan is to increase to 40 hours within two years.

4k more in energy cost to reflect the increases that have happened.

Mini-net member to a full member (for CW/Mars) which is required due to population change.

- CW/Mars offers IT support as part of the membership.

Books & Materials (\$5k increase) – State requires a certain percentage of the budget to be spent on books and materials (16%), some other trust funds also supply monies for books only. The Books and Materials line in the budget is used for DVDs and other items.

- Retirement, Health Insurance, Worker’s Comp excluded from 16% calculation

Historically have not received enough funding from the town to eliminate the need for the waiver (state aid), 5-year window was given in 2020 to get funding and no longer need state aid (\$21k/year).

- Heidi plans to come looking for that funding next year (approximately \$50k).

What is the status of the external brick work? The \$20k of Capital that the town was willing to pay since the insurance was not willing to pay for it.

Outstanding balance approximately \$36k

Goal is to always have two people in the building, but ideally would like three.

- There is concern about retention for the Children’s Librarian.

The library employees are on the towns Payroll but the Library reimburses the town for 100% of that expense.

Heidi Reed to send Trust Fund figures to Stuart who will forward to us.

5:31pm – Fire Department – 220 & Ambulance – 231

Ambulance Account for paying for Paramedic Programs moving forward.

- To maintain ALS service, we must have paramedics on staff. We have had to hire basics rather than paramedics, so we must send them to paramedic school. Historically we haven't had the budget to put members through this paramedic program.
- Budget request in FY24 is enough to send 2 people through the program each year (\$35k per person). Plan is to phase it in over the next 3 to 5 years to get to fully staffed paramedic level.

Increased requested for maintenance of fire apparatus to keep them on the road.

- Must make sure that we maintain so that we can get the longevity of the vehicles and keep them in peak condition rather than needing major repairs and trying to catch up.

New Ambulance coming within 18-24 months because of last year's appropriation.

- Originally had a brand-new power load stretcher, which had to be deleted due to increase in other areas. Chief will be looking for the money to get the power load put back into the truck (\$30k) – this can save on insurance claims because of less back injuries. Currently this is part of the capital request.

18 Full Time Positions, and about 6 Active Call Fire Fighters (half are not EMTs)

- Chiefs' intent is to start an internship with the High School at some point to begin training them and start getting them onto our roster as full-time employees

Increase Chief and Deputy new roles/offsite training (also lieutenants) is for professional/staff development. Currently have two vacancies from positions that were funded last year.

- Civil Service hiring process is slow going but the 4 interviewees (3 EMTs and 1 paramedic) have been interviewed. Ranking and interview process must be completed correctly before moving forward with any offers.

No longer have a contractual agreement to service Hardwick for Ambulance services

- Call reduction has been good because we weren't getting receipts for all the services that we've provided but there is reduction in revenue due to not being able to bill for services.
- ALS Intercepts has cause call volume to increase, due to mutual aid.
- Approximately have 3,000 calls per year.

5:57pm – Police Department – 210

20 FT Police Officers (Chief, Lieutenant, 4 Sergeants, 14 Staff Officers)

- Currently only staffed with 13 filled positions.
- 4th Sergeant position was supposed to handle accreditation/body cameras and post.
- Should be at 22 Officers based on recommendation of 2.2 Officers per thousand for the State Standard (not including Detective & School Resource Officer)
- Currently had to pull the School Resource Officer due to staffing issues.
- If 3 positions were funded, we would be closer to the state standard.

The K9 was retired recently

Cruiser increase for about \$8k – up to about \$70k.

- \$40k for the Tahoe, \$43k for Gas Explorer, \$45 for Hybrid

This year we only need to fund an additional \$7,500 on top of grants for this budget year for Body Cameras. Expectation next year is that the town will be responsible for the full \$15,000 next year unless we are able to get grants.

Requested amount for Police Academy (\$5k per officer) would have to increase up to \$25k from the \$10k in FY24 budget request.

Kelsey Sidur motions to adjourn at 6:49pm, Terry Smith seconds. Passes unanimously.

March 22nd – Parks, Highway & COA

Fin Com Members: Ken Willette, Kelsey Sidur, Terry Smith, SK Robinson, Devin Peterson

Additional Attendees: Stuart Beckley (Town Manager), Tracy Meehan (Town Accountant), John Piechota, Geoff McAlmond, John (Council on Aging), Justine Caggiano (HR Director), Chuck Niedzwiecki (Highway)

Meeting called to order at 5pm

5:01pm – Council on Aging – 541

Unknowns possibly with Fuel and Electricity

Capital – not a Copier as notated (comes out of a grant instead

- May be used as a shelter around the front door but the cost was more expensive for that. May use it instead to build out the back door since the casing needs attention.

Terry Smith poses question regarding the status of the roof and other building related issues

- Have not moved forward in requesting capital this year as directed, but the roof is approaching the 20-year mark so this needs to be addressed within the next year and reassessed.
- Foundation in the corner of the building needs to be fixed and Tighe & Bond is working on a study to determine this.

5:10pm – Parks – 693

With Pool closed the past couple of years, we were able to offset inflation costs over the course of those years

New Employee Request – Parks/Cemetery Laborer

- Split between Parks and Cemetery
- Budgeted \$7,600 for a part-time position versus \$41,000 (base salary for a DPW laborer) for new full-time position but John is not optimistic that this position will be filled

Update on Playground Project

- No dates determined in terms of when the project will start
- Some trees need to be limbed and taken care of before the project could move forward
- Camera and light project is a priority so that we can reduce the potential of vandalism etc. – this is on track and moving forward

Update on the Pool

- Will know more on 6pm April 3rd at the next Parks meeting about contamination and what direction the Park department wants to go.
- John wants to get public input, and will need to make sure that we are ADA compliant etc.
- Rehabbing the pool is not an option, this would be a complete reconstruction. Sewer lines need updating so it would go all the way to the road. Ideally, we would like to have a pool and a pocket park splash pad.

All drainage issues have been completed and taken care of as of last summer.

Need a water line for sanitary facilities at the office building or some type of relocation or reconstruction to be utilized possibly year-round.

- Might be opportunity through DCR trail grants.

Stuart – Town pays for part time help and has a difficult time filling positions so the \$13,400 for seasonal help may be adjusted to a higher hourly rate to help make the position more attractive and keep staff that is currently here.

5:26pm – Department of Public Works – Highway/Cemetery - 421

Tree Warden Duties have been taken over within Public Works, which are really the only accounts that have increases.

- Why is this not consistent with the vote to appoint this position? There was a by-law change years ago and attorney found that without charter change, this position should return to the Dept of Public Works as a forestry position
- The former stipend of the tree warden is split between Geoff and Chuck now and they are going out and assessing trees.

Capital –

Portable Lift – Addresses the Mechanics pit

- There may be some funds left over from this fiscal year to address this issue.
- Last time we were inspected (several years ago) and told that we are grandfathered in with the pit, had to add angle iron on the sides but that was it, but this is an exposure for the town and should be corrected.
- Needs a steel road plate or a fence around it when there is not a truck over the pit.

New Position – Head of Maintenance and Custodial Services

- Why is this position in DPW? Based on the language in the Charter, this falls under the DPW without having to create its own department.
- Would this individual be responsible for drafting RFPs? No, but they would assist.

Road Repair

- Request is for \$200k, Stuart suggested \$150k and there will likely be around \$75k funded by the Cannabis monies leaving the total at \$225k.

Highway

- Contract renews yearly and goes out to bid every year.

Water Enterprise Funds

All water is pumped with electricity

PFA's testing added an extra \$2k to expenses

Truck repair expenses increased from \$3k to \$10k

Capital Request was originally \$150k for Hydrant Replacement and Meter Replacement

- Meter Replacement was moved up into the Supply line (\$50k) and the \$100k was left in capital for hydrant replacement.

Approximately 10 hydrants replaced for \$50k – hoping to replace 20 hydrants to total the \$100k

Sewer Enterprise Funds

Solar Credits allowed us to drop Energy expense significantly

Another \$1000 to telephone/internet because price is increasing

Sludge disposal increased significantly – they are working on ways to try to improve it but there's no alternative plan in place yet.

- Liquid sludge - 95-97% water and 3-5% solids.
- Potential to experiment with Polymers

Centrifuge or Filter Press to potentially save on Liquid Sludge

- But we need a screen to screen out wipes etc that are clogging up the system before we can look at this.

Capital \$50k – to do Assessment? Voting on at town meeting?

- \$175k Grant from the State to do the Assessment

Enterprise Funds exist the way they are to be entirely independent and self-sufficient and eliminate expense to the Taxpayer and keep these expenses within the expense of the ratepayers

SK motions to adjourn at 7:21pm, Devin Peterson seconds, passes unanimously.

March 29nd – Schools

Fin Com Members: Ken Willette, Kelsey Sidur, Devin Peterson

Additional Attendees: Stuart Beckley (Town Manager), Tracy Meehan (Town Accountant), Chris Desjardins, Brian Winslow, Superintendent Dr DiLeo, Andy, Alex Bergeron

Meeting called to order at 5:06pm

Needs Based Budget:

May possibly be some State Funding provided towards 14% increase for increase in SPED expenses

Need to separate funds for Maintenance and Technology whereas they've historically been combined

Students entering the education classroom have little to no foundation like in years past due to impacts from COVID

Request to add another preschool classroom (SPED Teacher, General Ed Teacher, and a Para) to address this need

2 Pre-K Paras – one IED and a second need in another classroom

Reading Tutor to provide intervention to students

Science Textbook materials

Project Lead the Way – STEM focus in computer science

ST Math Materials (Software)

Social and Emotional Coping Tools

Middle school requesting a Math Coach and license fee for ST Math Intervention/Project Lead the Way for the Junior/Senior High School

Had purchased Chrome Books for time at home, Tech director has built in a replacement place for these

Chrome Books in addition to the photo copier contract

Buildings and Grounds – Nighttime custodian, fire panel in need of repair, increase in cost in electrical maintenance and equipment replacement

Gap b/t Town Manager Recommendation and Budget Request, how do we address this?

- School choice, target approx. \$400k a year but this year we are targeting using \$700k – there may be additional funds available here but they try to hold off on using this to keep it as contingency.
- Special Ed Circuit Breaker - \$610k
- Grant - \$300k
- Grant – \$16k
- Total of \$1.67M

They reassess over the Summer to bridge that gap and close it down even more

Current Ware Schools Student Population – 1,264 enrolled

- Per pupil cost: Dept Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) cost = \$15,348

How many facilities? 3 Buildings

District Analysis Review Tool

Benchmark against – Athol Royalston, Palmer, Gill Montague are the DART DESE comparisons

Personnel costs – What is the difference between the two budgets? There are 7 positions in the needs-based budget; one of these positions may be covered by a grant but we do not yet know that.

3% Salary Increase built into budget – sometimes it can be up to 6% depending on where they are in the salary scale

Utilities – Obligation to buy so many gallons per year, sometimes it levels out year to year and credits roll over if we don't use them

Makers Space Program – they finally found an engineering teacher; they are having a fair and having manufacturers come to show students some of the options that are available to them if they do not pursue higher education. Partnership Council started in 2018 (Flexcon, Quabbin Wire etc.).

Can we do something like this with the Fire Department? May possibly have a software to do some virtual online training. Can we provide a stipend to Fire Fighters who come in and teach the classes? We have not historically but it would provide incentives. E2E EMT course

Manufacturers Pathways, applied for Healthcare Pathways, working towards a Fire Science Program

School Resource Officer was pulled because of Police staffing needs, this position has never been a part of the School Budget

Student Opportunity Act (SOA) – We're on year 3 of 6

Next Steps/Timeline –

Recommendations on Budget Target/Being More or Less Conservative etc.

Meeting next Wednesday, 4/5/23 to discuss the overall budget.

Motion to adjourn – 6:14pm, Passes unanimously