

OPEN SESSION

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The Board of Assessors met on Wednesday, January 15, 2020 at approximately 6:05 P.M.

Present were Acting Chairman (Clerk) Cheryl Smith, Member Paula Bunker; Principal Assessor John Donahue, and Principal Secretary Daniela Nilsson. Chairman Steve McCarthy joined the meeting at 6:40 P.M.

The Acting Chairman announced that the meeting was being recorded by community access television.

Warrants, Motor Vehicle Excise, Statutory Exemptions applications, and Exemption Certificates were presented for approval/signatures.

The Principal Assessor reviewed the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2021 as follows:

- He stated that the first line item regarded Elected Officials salaries. The second line item regarded the Appointed Official's (Principal Assessor) salary with a 5% increase. He also noted that his contract expires June 30, 2020 and contract negotiations should begin around April or May, and that he plugged in the 5% increase for budgeting purposes.
- Clerical Salaries was the next line item and the increase is due to converting Principal Secretary Daniela Nilsson's position from part time to full time status; along with a 2% COLA increase factored into the clerical staff's salaries. Contract negotiations are ongoing with the clerical staff union and will be adjusted once a contract is agreed upon.
- The Overtime line relates to a significant amount of overtime accumulated by a staff member who would like to have it paid out in cash, as opposed to taking time off.
- Training is the next line item and is used for professional development; consistent with the notion that well trained staff members deliver superior service to the taxpayers.
- Web Hosting includes separate Property Record Card and Assessors Map databases.
- Record Preservation had a slight increase due to the increased cost of doing business.
- Contractual Services includes a projected increase for Patriots Properties' licensing fees, but the exact figure is not known at this time.
- Office Supplies was increased by \$500 to reflect the actual cost of supplies in 2019.
- Dues and Meetings had a slight increase for professional development.
- Annual School was put into the budget because it is offered annually in the summer and no one in our office has attended for more than 10 years. The Principal Assessor intends to have the clerical staff attend the Annual School next year.

Member Bunker asked if the 5% increase in the Principal Assessors budget was just a number plugged in for the projection and the Principal Assessor confirmed that was the case. She also asked when he had last checked Principal Secretary, Tami Houde's, overtime. The Principal Assessor stated that he had checked it approximately a month ago. Also, nothing had changed in accumulating more or less time for the last 6 months and that she has about 68 hours recorded. Member Bunker requested that he check it and let them know the actual amount.

Member Bunker asked if the mapping is available online and the Principal Assessor stated that, although we have paid for the development of the software, we have not put it online yet due to the fact that the mapping software vendor submitted a list of 'mismatched properties' that needed to be reviewed prior to launching the data online.

Member Bunker asked how much the budget is increasing overall. The Principal Assessor stated it was about a 10% overall increase.

A **motion** was made by Clerk Smith, to enter Executive Session to discuss Applications for Abatement/Exemption, relative to Purpose 7 of the Open Meeting Law (OML), in compliance with MGL CH 59, § 60, and also to review and discuss pending Appellate Tax Board litigation, relative to Purpose 3 and 7 of the OML - because to do so in open session could have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the Board of Assessors - and to reconvene in open session at the conclusion of the Executive Session. A **roll call vote** was taken as follows: Clerk Smith = affirmative, Member Bunker = affirmative. The Board adjourned Open Meeting and entered Executive Session at approximately 6:17 P.M.

The meeting reconvened in Open Session at approximately 6:30 P.M. Clerk Smith made a **motion** to temporarily adjourn and to reconvene at 6:40 P.M., when Chairman McCarthy would be able to join the meeting. Member Bunker seconded the motion. Voted 2-0-0.

The meeting reconvened in Open Session at 6:40 P.M. Chairman McCarthy was present. The Board reviewed the proposed Fiscal Year 2021 budget again.

- The Principal Assessor stated that his salary was estimated using a 5% increase and that it was for budgeting purposes and his contract will need to be renegotiated soon.
- He also went over the increase in the clerical staff salary largely being due to the conversion of the part time position to a full time position.
- Overtime was added to the budget to buy down a portion of 68 hours owed to a staff member.
- Training is for professional development because better trained personnel provide better public service.
- Web Hosting has an increase due to hosting the Property Record Cards and Maps.
- The Record Preservation line item has a small increase due to the increased cost of doing business.
- Contractual Services increase is for licensing fees based upon historical increases.
- Office Supplies increase is based upon the actual cost of supplies during Fiscal 2019.
- Due and Meetings has a slight increase in order to include clerical staff membership subscriptions to MAAO and to attend membership meetings.
- The Annual School is for the clerical staff to attend this upcoming summer.

The Board observed that the largest increase to the proposed budget is due to the part-time Principal Secretary position transitioning to full time. Chairman McCarthy stated it was sorely needed. He also stated that the budget was typical of past budgets notwithstanding the status of the part-time position.

Chairman McCarthy inquired about the online Assessors Maps. The Principal Assessor stated that the 'mismatch list' we received shows some instances where parcels in our assessors' database (map and lot numbers) do not agree with those in the vendor's database. One problem he found was a large proposed development that went bankrupt and was subsequently purchased by another developer. As a consequence, the newer subdivision is an overlay of the previous subdivision, thus creating a mismatch of conflicting map and lot numbers. The Principal Assessor stated that the Assessors' Office had previously discovered some issues, but thought those issues had been 'scrubbed' and ready to 'go live' at that time. However, a new batch of issues were discovered and are currently being reviewed.

Member Bunker stated she could not support the clerical position transitioning to full time status due to her reasoning from last year. Chairman McCarthy stated that her opinion is valued but he has been doing this for a long time and he believes we could use 2.5 people in the office. He believes there is a very obvious need for full time status of this position. Member Bunker stated that she thinks there are some 'bumps' in the office and that she would like to see the 'kinks worked out' before she could support a full time position although she does agree that the office is very busy. Chairman McCarthy stated that he doesn't know what the 'bumps' in the office are but having more help processing the large workload is needed. He has been in this field for many years, as has the Principal Assessor, and both of them are in support of this upgrade; so he doesn't understand why the full time position isn't being supported by Member Bunker. Clerk Smith also stated that she supports transitioning the position to full time status.

A **motion** was made by Chairman McCarthy to accept the preliminary budget as proposed and seconded by Clerk Smith. Voted favorably 2-1-0. Member Bunker opposed.

A **motion** was made to adjourn by Chairman McCarthy and seconded by Clerk Smith. Voted 3-0-0. The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:00 P.M.

Next Meeting: February 5, 2020

I certify that the minutes of this meeting are true and accurate to the best of my recollection.

Respectfully submitted,



Cheryl Smith, Clerk

Prepared by Principal Secretary, Daniela Nilsson

*Documents referenced during the meeting:*

- *Bills payable, Motor Vehicle Excise, Statutory Exemptions, Exemption Certificates, and other administrative documents referenced during the meeting*