

APR 19 2022

SUFFIELD TOWN CLERK

**Minutes of the Budget Meeting of the Board of Finance (BOF)**  
**Town Hall 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Conference room & Zoom Call April 04, 2022**  
*Call recording available under BOF on Town Website*

**Members Present:** Ryan Anderson, Chris Childs, Michael Haines, Eric Harrington, Dr. Ann Huntington, Brian Kost **Members Absent:** None **Alternates Present:** Tom Frenaye, Mark Sinopoli, J Michael Stevens **Alternates Absent:** None

**Also Present:** First Selectman Colin Moll, Retired Finance Director Debbie Cerrato

Chairman Anderson called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

**Citizen Comment/Correspondence:** None

**Budget Review**

**Building Department**

The budget decreased by \$24k with the current assistant building official going part-time, expected to be appropriate for the workload. They are currently in negotiations regarding the part-time Fire Marshall position which is in the Fire Department budget. Although the salary is competitive, it has been a challenge trying to fill the building official position created by an upcoming retirement as there are limited candidates in the market.

**Human Resources – Karin Ziemba**

- The budget increased by \$3,246. Operating expenses increased 11% with the cost of the employee system program increasing 7%, a slight increase in the employee assistance program, \$500 for employee recognition as well as increased hiring fees.
- Hiring has increased significantly with a 25% turn-over rate due to several retirements, many new part time library clerks, new police officers, recording secretaries, and seasonal positions. It is a competitive employee market and like other towns, we no longer have the pension program which was a selling factor.

**Planning & Zoning(P&Z)and Economic Development –Bill Hawkins**

- P&Z has a \$1600 decrease. Staffing is the same; mileage is a bit less with more conferences being offered remotely. Revenue is flat as a large application fee was returned after a litigation case was resolved.
- Economic Development has a \$37k increase to the hire of a part-time economic developer.
- Mr. Hawkins' original request for Farmland Preservation was \$200k with ACCE approving \$100k, but he believes that is sufficient. The farmland preservation current fund balance is \$1.3m with \$611k already approved via Town Meeting for two projects. There are four others in the pipeline estimated to be about \$220k. The Board discussed moving these funds into CNRE for a better return until they are needed for closing, using the Town Meeting to approve both the project and the transfer from CNRE to fund it. This is to be discussed as a possible change to standard operating procedures with new Finance director after the budget.
- The Tax Increment Financing (TIF) zone was discussed. Area is approximately from the bank next to the Post Office on Mountain Road up to Suffield Village and a couple properties beyond that. The incremental tax increase on those properties goes into the TIF Fund annually (\$116k balance in 2021). There is a master plan for that district, with any projects requiring approval through the budget process

or Town Meeting. Beautification of the Highway Garage, Ffyer Place, Bridge Street school property, and business signage are all possibilities. The desire is to have the fund to build up enough to do a meaningful project that promotes business growth.

- Co-chairs of the Economic Development Commission, Brian Banak and Sue Thorner discussed the benefits of adding a part-time economic developer (15-25hrs/week, \$35k). The prior consulting position has ended, development is more active post pandemic, Mr. Hawkins' capacity is limited and the timing is right to do more business attraction vs. just retention. The position can help develop and implement a marketing plan, react to companies looking for land, help with grants. Sixty-one towns have a part-time position at an average salary of \$32k. The Board would like to stay informed on the impacts of the role.

#### **Town Assessor – Lisa Trase**

- The budget is increased by \$122k for the 5-year revaluation for which an RFP has been sent with opening bids expected tomorrow. It is very costly to do a full revaluation so they use mailer questionnaires (signed equates to interior inspection), comparison of real estate listings vs. property cards, notifications from appraisers and insurers, aerial imagery for sheds/additions, changes in income/expense reports for commercial properties.
- In 2018 the commercial appraiser met with the prison so their assessment did change but the amount from the CAA (airport) has been \$695k since 2012 with neither being funded at the commitment level by the State.

#### **Tax Collector – Jill Schechtman**

- The budget has a slight decrease of \$800. Collections are doing well across the board. Last year closed out June 30<sup>th</sup> at 99.1%. This year we are already at 98.41% for the 2020 grand list. Interest, liens and fees doing very well and motor vehicle supplemental came in at \$617k vs. the \$400k estimated. They are going to use a new program for personal property collections.
- Staffing hours were reduced a little bit to be part-time and they are doing well covering the work.
- They anticipate more activity at the Board of Assessment Appeals with the 25% increase in car tax based on increased values. They may use inserts with the tax bills to explain this situation.

#### **Town Clerk – Kathy Dunai**

- The budget has a slight increase of \$6k. Last year the part-time staff hours were cut by 10/week and they are asking for a couple hours back due to the increase in real-estate transactions. The State may begin managing all dog licenses which would be great for the workload.
- Shelving for the new vault was covered by the Dollar Fund at no cost to the Town. Digitalizing is going well, reducing title searchers coming into office. It is free to look at the records and \$2/page to print and they get \$2100/month from companies printing documents and maps.
- Upcoming changes: new legislation may allow legal notices to be posted on the Town website saving newspaper publishing fees, the State may begin managing all dog licenses and there are new laws for the absentee ballot so they will be busy incorporating those.

#### **Finance Department– Deb Cerrato**

- Budget is flat to prior year but may need to be increased once we have the new Finance Director in place.
- The Police Department had turn over in the Chief's assistant and the file clerk so they were requesting \$21k more to find staff and increase hours. However their payroll piece will be moved to Finance's payroll clerk (4 days/month, \$5k vs. \$21k). Freedom of Information requests from camera footage requires the file clerk to blur faces in each slide so they are looking for more efficient solutions.

- The Treasurer position, which is elected and will have oversight and coordination with the Finance Director, was discussed. The position is estimated for 3.5 hours/week to sign checks and transfer money. Mr. Childs ideally would like the position to determine how to generate revenue, the best option for cemetery funds and ensure we are adhering to the investment policy. Ms. Cerrato said the statute specifies the position requirements and suggests 8 hours/week. Chairman Anderson recommended waiting until the new Finance Director is in place to determine needs and ensure the compensation is appropriate as well as our adjusted controls structure.

#### **Selectmen, Town Counsel, Town Hall – First Selectman Colin Moll**

- **The Selectman's budget** has a \$61k decrease from consolidating the Communications Manager position. There was \$2k remaining from the 350<sup>th</sup> celebration that was moved to Community Service to do some pre-funding for the June carnival until they get vendor revenue in to fund it. Mr. Frenaye asked if there are sufficient funds to cover the annual report since it is much larger than the previous one but First Selectman Moll believes they are able to cover it.
- **Town Counsel** was kept flat. In the past we had arbitration costs of \$170k vs. the budgeted \$93.5k. We have 5 contracts to negotiate this year but will reserve using attorneys only for mediation (i.e. Fire Department) or disputes.
- **Town Hall** budget is basically flat.

#### **Overall Budget Review**

- The Board reviewed amounts in various funds. There is currently nothing in the budget for Covid Relief Funds but that Committee voted unanimously to spend \$2.1m of the \$4.6m next year and will present a formal update on the items at the next meeting. The ACCE budget list will stay the same but will have a transfer in from American Rescue Fund to show the offset.
- The Board discussed various options for Contingency. Mr. Childs believes the investment earnings should be recognized as a revenue line item in the budget with a spending policy.
- The 2.8% mill rate increase was reduced by putting in a negative \$2.1m and that plus the additional tax revenue puts us at -1.77% as a starting point for next week to decide what BOF action may be taken.

#### **Adjourn**

Mr. Kost made a motion to adjourn and Mr. Harrington seconded. All were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 8:38pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kris Kelliher

*These minutes are not official until accepted at a subsequent meeting.*