

## WEST NEWBURY FINANCE COMMITTEE

Date, Time, Location: **Tu. March 22, 2022, 6 PM** (1910 Bldg. & remotely via Zoom)

Attendees (& initials): Gary Roberts (GR), Nathan Kelly (NK), Chris Wile (CEW), Walter Burmeister (WB), Jim Sperelakis (JS), Angus Jennings (AJ), Stephanie Frontiera (SF). Absent: Chuck Wegrzyn. Guests/Participants (+ Depts): Christine Marshall (COA), Leah Zambernardi & Tim Cronin (Planning), Michelle Greene & Judy Mizner (Conservation), Corinne Flaherty (Library), Bob Janes (Historical), Wendy Reed & Rick Parker (Select Board), Greg Labrecque, Brent Conway, Justin Bartholomew (Pentucket), Dick Cushing (Water)

### **Meeting Minutes – Mar. 22, 2022**

1. Call to Order: 6:00 PM
2. Public Comment: None
3. Approval of Minutes: None. Deferred to Mar 29, 2022 mtg.
4. Review of Departmental Budgets & Articles:
  - a. **Council on Aging**: Total Salary & Exp. = \$119.8K, an \$18.6K incr. (+18.4%) vs FY22. NK: motion to approve. CEW: 2<sup>nd</sup>. AJ commented that in prior years, the EOE formula grant had partially paid COA salaries/wages, but in FY23, it will be used for expanded COA programming. JS asked why the FY22 YTD 'salary expended' figure is so low. AJ responded salary was partially paid via Worker's Comp, due to a (confidential) HR issue. NK asked if COA Dir. will take on some Park & Rec responsib. AJ responded the COA Dir. will oversee another Town employee charged with P&R admin tasks. **Approved 5-0.**
  - b. **Planning**: Tot. Salary & Exp. = \$77.1K, an \$11.4K incr. (+17.4%) vs FY22. NK: motion to approve. CEW: 2<sup>nd</sup>. AJ commented that the proposal reflects an increase in the Town Planner's hours from 25 to 28 per week, due to expanded responsibilities. AJ noted that Tim Cronin (planning bd chair), participating remotely, intended to make a statement in support of the budget, but had audio issues – Tim's comments will be added to public record. **Approved 5-0.**
  - c. **Conservation**: Tot. Salary & Exp. = \$66.6K, an incr. of \$21.5K (+47.5%) vs FY22. NK: motion to approve. CEW: 2<sup>nd</sup>. AJ explained that WN is the lead entity in a Municipal Agreement (MOU) for shared Conservation Agent services with Merrimac, so the incr. budget will be offset by revenue from Merrimac, anticipated at \$24.6K. The agent will work 40 hrs/wk, 27.5/12.5 hrs for WN/Merr., respectively, a 69%/31% split. JS asked M. Greene (MG) whether she felt the split was accurate. MG responded yes, she keeps careful track of hours expended in each town. CEW commented that the MOU is a contractual obligation, so we, as FinCom,

have less impact on cost control. JS asked if the proposed new wetlands protection bylaw will result in incr. workload for Conserv. Agent/ConCom. Judy Mizner responded, if passed, it likely will. **Approved 5-0.**

- d. **Library:** Tot. Salary & Exp. = \$385.3K, an \$11.8K incr. (+3.2%) vs FY22. AJ explained that the budget proposed by Town Mngr. does not include the targeted wage increase proposed by the Library Trustees, nor the proposed 10 hr/wk (0.25% FTE). The Town has initiated a thorough 'wage /classification study', expected to be completed next FY, which will address Library personnel, along with all Town Depts, so the Library's wage increases, above COLA, are deemed as premature. NK: motion to approve. CEW: 2<sup>nd</sup>. AJ estimated the proposed new 10 hr/wk employee, would add \$8,613 to the budget. Corinne Flaherty (CF) explained that the library has been cutting hours – i.e., two addit. weekday evenings – due to staff shortages. NK commented that other local town libraries chose to cut hours from mornings, to not negatively affect family participation and programs (often on evenings). CEW added that local schools have used former library space as classrooms, so the need for Town library services have increased. After discussion, NK withdrew his motion and JS offered an amended motion to include the addition of the proposed 10 hr/wk employee. CEW: 2<sup>nd</sup>. Upon JS' question, Wendy Reed (SB) said she is personally in support of the new 0.25% FTE position. NK asked if the new position would cause books/materials to be funded <19% of tot. expended (a min. of 19% is a State requirement). AJ calculated and replied that we would still be >19%, if the new position were approved. NK added that, if the new position is approved at ATM 5/14, his hope/expectation is no further reduction in evening/family hrs. **Amended motion approved 5-0.**
- e. **Special Counsel:** \$65.1K, an incr. of \$7.1K (+12.3%) vs FY22. NK: motion to approve. CEW: 2<sup>nd</sup>. AJ explained that this budget is a 'purchase of service' from an outside Counsel, KP Law. The expanded need for outside Counsel, resulted from the retirement of former Town Clerk/Gen'l Counsel, M. McCarron. CEW asked if the new Town Clerk's salary, when combined with this Special Counsel budget, is equal to the former Town Clerk/Gen'l Counsel expense. AJ responded that with the inclusion of prior outside Counsel expenses, e.g., \$20.5K expended in FY21, FY23 Special Counsel + Town Clerk budgets are within approx. \$10K. **Approved 5-0.**
- f. **Historical Commission:** \$500 total, equal to FY22. NK: motion to approve. CEW: 2<sup>nd</sup>. **Approved 5-0.**
- g. **Article requesting CPC funding for Historical Property Survey #3:** \$2,500 requested by Historical Commission to complete final phase to inventory the Town's historical and architectural resources. GR: motion to approve. NK: 2<sup>nd</sup>. The \$2.5K request would complete our grant match obligation with MHC (Mass. Hist. Comm.), who has already awarded

matching grants of \$12.5K for the first two phases of project. **Approved 5-0.** Sunset: end FY 23 (6/30/2023).

- h. **Open Space Committee**: \$750 total, equal to FY22. NK: motion to approve. CEW: 2<sup>nd</sup>. **Approved 5-0.**
  - i. **Cultural Council**: \$100 total, equal to FY22. AJ commented and SF confirmed the \$100 is traditionally not expended, as it acts as a 'pass through' for grants, which fund the majority of the Cultural Council's work. NK: motion to approve. GR: 2<sup>nd</sup>. **Approved 5-0.**
  - j. **Education**:
    - i. **Whittier**: \$270.7K total assessment represents a \$93.4K incr. (+52.7%) vs FY22. AJ commented that WN's enrollment in Whittier grew from 9 (in FY22) to 14 students in FY23. GR: motion to approve. CEW: 2<sup>nd</sup>. **Approved 4-0-1**, with NK abstaining.
    - ii. **Essex No. Shore Ag**: \$43.2K assessment is a \$911 decr. (-2.1%) vs FY22. Per AJ, Essex Ag is budgeted at 2 WN students, but could grow to 3, as final enrollment will not be known until Oct. 1, 2022. NK: motion to approve. GR: 2<sup>nd</sup>. **Approved 5-0.**
    - iii. **Pentucket**: \$9,485,229 represents WN's assessment of the Regional School District's FY23 budget. This is a \$949.7K (+11.1%) incr. vs FY22. AJ noted that this proposed budget does not reflect a proposed 'draw' of \$397.3K from School Stabilization in FY23, to offset debt service for the middle/high school project. NK: motion to approve. CEW: 2<sup>nd</sup>. NK asked if this will require an override vote. AJ responded no, it will not. Brent Conway (BC) Asst. Superint., gave a presentation comparing Pentucket 'per pupil' and total expenditures, as well as academic performance, against similarly sized/demographic and local (CAL) districts, as well as historical financial comparisons, budget unknowns, Chapter 70 funding, etc. BC commented that Pentucket enrollment, at approx. 2400 students, has likely 'bottomed out', with enrollment growth anticipated in future. CEW commented that schools have been tradit. underfunded, but after the School Stabiliz. Fund is exhausted, likely in 3-4 yrs, taxpayers will bear the full cost of education, debt on the school bldg. project, 'aging' Page school issues, etc. NK asked how Pentucket compares, technology-wise, to peer districts. BC replied "we are improving", and cited new 'chrome-books', as an example. **Approved 5-0.**
5. **Assigning 'sunset clauses' for previous articles considered:**
- a. Page school \$85K struct. assess: end FY24 (6/30/2024). **Approved 5-0**
  - b. Page \$25K ext. brick evaluation: end FY24 (6/30/2024). **Approved 5-0**
  - c. Fire Dept. \$15K AED devices: end FY24 (6/30/2024). **Approved 5-0**
  - d. Fire Dept. \$10K rescue airbags: end FY23 (6/30/2023). **Approved 5-0**
  - e. Fire Dept. \$14.5K rescue power tools: end FY23 (6/30/23). **Approved 5-0**

- f. Emerald Ash Borer \$34K audit: end FY23 (6/30/23). **Approved 5-0**
- 6. Adjournment: Motion to Adjourn, approved 5-0. 7:50 PM