March 23, 2020 Minutes

Town of Sharon Finance Committee Meeting

**Present:** Daniel Lewenberg, Patricia-Lee Achorn, Anja Bernier, Gordon Gladstone, Ann Keitner, Ira Miller, Edward Philips and Anil Ramoju (left prior to voting articles).

**Not Present:** William Brack, Arnold Cohen, and Chuck Goodman.

Also present: Krishan Gupta, Director of Finance and Fred Turkington, Town Administrator.

1. **Dan Lewenberg, Chair, gave opening remarks:** 
   1. This meeting is being held through the Zoom online platform due to the State of Emergency based on the COVID-19 outbreak. He confirmed all present members could hear and that the meeting was being recorded and broadcast.
2. **John Ford, Police Chief, reviewed the Police budget:**
   1. 1.4% increase over FY20 budget.
   2. Possibility of a grant funding an additional officer so that salary has not been included in the FY21 budget.
   3. The department has worked to be as fiscally responsible as possible with this budget.
   4. Fred Turkington, Town Administrator, discussed that pursuing an additional officer was based on evaluation of overtime, time spent at the Academy, etc. The Select Board has reviewed their budget and feels that it is realistic.
   5. Due to the pandemic many events in town have been canceled, so there is savings there for the Police department in that they won’t be staffing those events. But there are costs associated with the pandemic such as ordering extra masks and other protective supplies. No police have experienced any illness as of yet. Currently each officer has 3 masks.
   6. Krishan Gupta, Finance Director, stated that there is a likelihood of being reimbursed from FEMA and MEMA in the future. Can use the existing budget to make purchases, and if necessary can request reimbursement.
      1. He has asked departments to track expenditures related to this emergency.
3. **Jim Wright, Fire Chief, reviewed the Fire budget:**
   1. Typically receive 75% reimbursement for expenses in an emergency, but there has been an indication that up to 100% will be reimbursed, although that may take up to 1 year.
   2. Variances in budget are due to ambulance billing and medical supplies. In lieu of change in reserve side they had moved the direct expenses over pre-COVID-19. This is not a savings, simply changing it to the ambulance fund.
      1. Funds come into this account through reimbursements from insurance, Medicaid, etc. Ambulance billing expenses are directly proportional to revenue.
   3. In the process of funding 4 additional firefighters. Receive 75% of 1 firefighter’s salary. Firefighters get raises as they go through so reimbursement ends up being less than 75%. In fourth year it is 100%. In the next year the costs for those firefighters will come into the Town’s budget.
   4. Other changes in the budget are small adjustments to line items such as radio maintenance due to dispatch contracts increasing.
   5. Cost of fuel has been decreasing over the last couple years. Brought the fuel budget down based on realistic expenditures.
   6. Have decontamination procedures in place. Have transferred some COVID-19 positive patients in ambulance, and have worn protective gear. After transport of a suspected COVID-19 patient the ambulance, gear and workers are all decontaminated onsite.
   7. Working with nearby towns to help each other in case significant numbers of public safety officers get sick.
   8. Completed a recent food drive to help more vulnerable town residents. Residents can call the Town offices to make requests and they will coordinate help.
   9. Strongly encouraged residents to practice social distancing and hand washing. Want to pull through this crisis as unscathed as possible, and we do not know how long this will last.
4. **Eric Hooper, Superintendent of Public Works, reviewed the Department of Public Works budget:**
   1. Three employees are out on long term leave. Have replaced two of them but need to cover the difference of those out and the replacement salaries.
   2. NPDES stormwater requirements and consulting contracts: Need funds to cover sampling and analysis. This is a federal mandate that we are required to comply with.
   3. Have been able to realize some savings related to fuel prices, as they have stabilized with costs decreasing.
   4. The utility and maintenance costs for the two new buildings are higher than what they were in the past.
   5. Sharon has an agreement with Town of Norwood to share an energy employee. After funding the position we will see savings in energy costs.
   6. Intent is to fill the position for Engineering Planning Specialist after the person previously in that position left.
   7. So far pavers and asphalt bathing plants are conducting business as usual during the pandemic, but if there are issues in the future that may affect ability to do road maintenance in Sharon.
5. **Eric Hooper gave a response to the citizen petition regarding recycled asphalt pavement:**
   1. Recycled asphalt pavement (RAP) is regulated in MA as a solid waste, and there are no movements afoot to further regulate it.
   2. The New Jersey document that was referenced in the presentation at an earlier Finance Committee Meeting has been superseded twice and is out of date.
   3. RAP has been used for years. Not to say that potential contaminants aren’t present in the material, but that they don’t rise to the level of concern and they are not in a high enough concentration to cause issues.
   4. Asphalt is the less expensive option for roads. Concrete would be ideal but it is more expensive.
   5. Municipalities can stockpile RAP material. Stockpiles previously discussed in Sharon have been removed within 6 months. It is more expensive to get rid of the material as it is produced, less expensive to stockpile and remove it later, but within a six-month window.
   6. Fred Turkington agreed to follow up with the Board of Health to determine if they have taken a position on this issue.
   7. It is not within the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission to weigh in on this issue because it is not within the buffer of a wetland.
   8. DPW stopped laying down RAP on the path of their own accord once they knew of the citizen’s petition.
   9. RAP on the path is currently mostly covered by leaves and pine needles.
   10. Committee members discussed that they don’t necessarily feel comfortable regulating this at the Town level but would prefer to hear guidance from EPA.
   11. DPW feels that they would be able to remediate the trail within the required 120 days if necessary.
   12. Have tested routinely for these materials in Town’s wells and have never found them. Sampling is typically done for groundwater elevation, not for constituents. October 7, 2019 testing for PAH compounds came back non-detectable.
       1. Willing to test the wells on a more frequent basis. Testing at the monitoring wells would give an early warning if detected.
       2. Cost is approximately $500 a sample, although may be able to receive a discount on this with frequent sampling.
       3. The Committee discussed that more frequent testing would be a good compromise.
   13. Eric Hooper also discussed the Water Department’s upcoming projects, including the emergency connection to MWRA, the bypass on Tiot Street and the water tank replacement on Massapoag Avenue.
       1. Given the pandemic it is understandable that not all projects will be able to proceed according to their planned timelines, and DPW’s priority would be to finish Heights as that has been an ongoing, significant project.
       2. Revenue stream is consistent and DPW is in a good position to do the work. Approximately $4 million in revenue each year. High users pay more for their water, low users pay less.
       3. Bumped fixed component up so that it is sufficient to cover capital projects moving forward.
6. **Other general government sector budgets - Fred Turkington, Town Administrator:**
   1. The rest of the budget is relatively flat. Town Clerk’s budget is down this year due to the new Town Clerk who will be at a lower salary range than the retiring Town Clerk.
   2. Council on Aging is having three people retire, and new hires will be at a lower salary range than those retiring.
   3. Health Administrator left and the Public Health Nurse plans on retiring. Considering having the Public Health Nurse position move to full time and take on more administrative duties when rehire.
   4. Veterans outreach has increased, so the budget for this has increased. Lag time in reimbursement for these services is up to one year.
7. **Debbie Tatro of Sustainable Sharon gave a presentation of the revised citizen petition regarding artificial turf fields:**
   1. Have revised the petition to be a three-year moratorium on artificial grass in Sharon.
   2. Toxins that present in the top layer of the artificial grass can result in disruption of hormones, and also contain UV inhibitors, flame retardants and PFAS. These can impact IQ, inhibit growth, etc.
   3. Various industries are voluntarily removing PFAS from their products currently.
   4. Concern that the drainage ditch drains directly from the high school field to the beach and lake in Sharon, which is only about 500 feet away.
   5. Concern that the microplastics in the artificial turf such as polyethylene, polyurethane and polypropylene don’t fully degrade and will pollute.
   6. Warranty for an artificial turf field is eight years.
   7. MA DEP will soon regulate PFAS at 20 parts per trillion. These are proprietary chemicals so testing is only available for 36 of them, and there are approximately 4700.
   8. David Teter only tested for 29 PFAS and should have done further testing.
   9. Cost comparison:
      1. Artificial turf cost is $1.1 million.
      2. Sports Turf Specialties, a premier grass field company, would charge $200,000 for an organic field at the high school, and has stated they would renovate an additional 10 fields in town for $620,000. Maintenance of an organic field would cost $21,000 per year.
   10. A moratorium of three years on artificial turf would give the Town time assess the costs and risks associated with artificial turf, including the potential risk of contaminating water.
   11. Paul Lowenstein discussed the potential risk of contaminating the Sharon water supply, where 18,000 residents get their water.
       1. Wells 2,3 and 4 supply 60% of the Town’s drinking water.
       2. A pipe under Beach Street conducts runoff from the athletic fields to the lake.
       3. Ditches are unlined, and standing water from the ditches ends up in the aquifer after heavy rains.
       4. Sharon High School is 50 feet higher in elevation than Beaver Brook and water crosses the boundary.
       5. Large costs associated with joining the MWRA system and purchasing water if Town’s water becomes contaminated.
   12. Helen Poynton stated that Lake Massapoag is an essential natural resource in Sharon. Discussed that zebrafish have had abnormal development after PFAS exposure.
       1. PFAS are listed in the Toxic Substances Reduction Act. State of Massachusetts hasn’t regulated yet, but PFAS are listed for subsequent reductions in use.
   13. Debbie Tatro discussed that they have presented to the Conservation Committee in December regarding the new high school project/fields who has not voted on it yet. Agreed to contact the Board of Health regarding this issue.
   14. Town of Concord is in their 4th year of a moratorium related to recycled chrome rubber. Other towns are looking at similar moratoriums.
   15. Committee members discussed that a moratorium is more comfortable than an outright ban as it would give time to research and get information and wouldn’t require the removal of any existing materials.
8. **Article 13 – Revolving Fund Authorizations:**

**Motioned:** by Gordon Gladstone **Seconded:** Edward Philipsto recommend approval of Article 13 **Voted:** 7-0-0.

1. **Article 14 – General Bylaw change to increase restrictions on expenditure limits.**

**Motioned:** by Gordon Gladstone **Seconded:** Edward Philipsto recommend approval of Article 14 **Voted:** 7-0-0.

1. **Article D – Rename driveway to Public Safety Building and DPW Joe Roach Way.**
   1. Discussion that this is an honorable tribute to Joe Roach who gave many years of service to the Town of Sharon.
   2. Understand that their may be consequences as this opens up the opportunity that not everyone who serves the Town can be honored in this way.

**Motioned:** by Gordon Gladstone **Seconded:** Edward Philipsto recommend approval of Article D **Voted:** 7-0-0.

1. **Article 18 – Artificial turf moratorium:**
   1. Will vote at next Finance Committee meeting.
2. **Article 19 – Recycled Pavement:**
   1. Committee will wait to vote this article.
3. **Article 20 – Approve adjustments to size of parcels within recreational and residential overlay district.**
   1. Fred Turkington discussed that the Town Council and Council for Cape Club just circulated the latest version. Expect Select Board will wait for Planning Board’s recommendation. Advise Committee to wait for their recommendation regardless of when the warrant goes to print.
   2. Committee will wait to vote this article.
4. **Article 21 – Zoning Bylaw change.**
   1. This may be withdrawn. Committee will wait to vote this article.
5. **Article 22 – South Main Street:** 
   1. Awaiting revision for this article. Revised text will have exact measurements.
   2. Commitment to outreach to abutters before the warrant goes to press.
   3. Committee will wait to vote this article.
6. **Article 24 – General Bylaw change to increase the number of alternates on the Council on Aging:**

**Motioned:** by Gordon Gladstone **Seconded:** Edward Philipsto recommend approval of Article 24 **Voted:** 7-0-0.

1. **Article 25 – Authorization to transfer Rattlesnake Hill property from Select Board to Conservation Commission:**
   1. Sponsor for this article is the Select Board, and the Conservation Commission supports it.
   2. Discussion that there is little land available for athletic and recreational fields. Unsure if this would be suitable land for fields, but there is no road access.
      1. Fred Turkington agreed to look into this.
   3. Committee will wait to vote this article.
2. **Article 4 – Personnel Bylaw:**
   1. Question regarding wage of library page as it may be below minimum wage.
   2. Committee will wait to vote this article.
3. **Early assessment of COVID-19 costs:**
   1. Fred Turkington discussed segregating expenses and prepping for federal and state reimbursements.
   2. There may be additional expenses for ambulance, fire, police and overtime in the health department and costs for equipment such as masks and respirators.
   3. Schools closed for three weeks. Possibility is to bring students back early in the fall in order for them to complete the required school days to promote to the next grades.
   4. Anticipate that Town Meeting will be affected. Have not officially postponed yet. Potential new dates could be June 1 for Town Meeting and June 16 for voting. Have the authority to push Town Meeting as late as June 30. Current law states that notification for Town Meeting needs to be two weeks.
   5. Deadline for finished drafts of articles is April 2, with deadlines for write-ups this week. Will start circulating them.
   6. Schools have been doing deep cleaning and this may be reflected in their budget. They have received the final bills for the independent investigation, which totals approximately $90,000.
4. **Solar energy update:**
   1. Fred Turkington discussed that the solar leases are not yet signed. Energy Advisory Committee meeting tomorrow night. Allegations that certain things weren’t vetted properly. Has asked them to provide notes and rationale so that everyone feels comfortable that everything was considered.
   2. Lease signed by DST is part of agreement that is ready to be signed until can properly append. Following the Select Board’s guidance until have done their due diligence. Have asked the Committee and design people to review the lease and raise items before signing.
   3. Serious concerns raised at March 10 Select Board meeting regarding the signing of the agreement.
   4. Committee requested updates from Fred Turkington going forward.
   5. Judy Crosby, speaking as a citizen, stated that leases have been signed and will need to be voided.
      1. Town Council is continuing to assist and backdated a notary which Fred Turkington signed and they witnessed.
      2. This may jeopardize the Town’s bond rating.
      3. Needs to be dealt with properly so there is no fraud. Lease should be voided and started anew from scratch, and an appropriate committee expert in solar leases should be engaged.
   6. Finance Committee was encouraged to listen to the recording of the Select Board meeting.
5. **Liaison Updates:**
   1. Sharon Schools - Ann Keitner and Judy Crosby discussed:
      1. Teachers in the school system cannot be paid past June 30th so classes cannot be held past that date. DESI and governor have stated that no one will be required to attend school past June 24th. Air conditioning is an issue for schools in summer and may be an issue if students are brought back earlier in the fall to make up for missing days due to school closures now.
      2. School Committee is meeting tomorrow night to vote on budget.
      3. Schools are currently providing meals to students.
   2. Planning Board - Arnie Cohen
      1. No update given as Arnie Cohen was not present at the meeting.
   3. Standing Building Committee - Gordon Gladstone:
      1. Architect is imminently going to file with the Zoning Board. OPM for high school submitted required submissions on March 18th. Individual estimators engaged by the high school architect and Consiglie spent days negotiating their estimates and the conclusion was that estimates are very close to each other, within the required 1% goal.
   4. Library - Charles Goodman:
      1. No additional updates.
6. **Minutes to be Voted: March 9,2020**

**Motion:** by Anja Bernier **Seconded:** Ann Keitner to approve the March 9, 2020 minutes **Voted:** 7-0-0.

# Topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chair in 48 hours: None discussed.

# Adjournment:

**Motioned:** by Gordon Gladstone **Seconded:** Edward Philips to adjourn **Voted:** 7-0-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:32 pm.