

February 28, 2022 Minutes
Town of Sharon Finance Committee Meeting

Present: Daniel Lewenberg, Patricia-Lee Achorn, Anja Bernier, Brian Collins, Gordon Gladstone, Charles Goodman, Ann Keitner, Ira Miller, Jada Wang.

Not Present: William Brack.

Also Present: Krishan Gupta - Finance Director; Eric Hooper – Department of Public Works, Mark Hogan – Town Clerk, Lee-Ann Amend – Library, Cheryl Weinstein – Library.

1. Dan Lewenberg, Chair, gave opening remarks:

This meeting is being held via remote means through the Zoom online platform pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021.

2. Correspondence –

Mr. Lewenberg discussed that the Committee has received emails in support of the Town funding full day Kindergarten and not in support of funding a full-time position for Diversity and Inclusion.

3. Sector Budgets –

Budgets for each sector were presented:

- a. Town Clerk's proposed budget FY23 – Mark Hogan:
 1. Salaried: \$663.63 increase = \$67,373, based on contract rates
 2. Elected: \$5,317.50 increase, or 6.82% = \$83,317.60, which includes a one-time increase for becoming fully certified
 3. Longevity: \$925
 4. Earned time: \$1,548.82
 5. Salary total: \$153,164.95, +4.07%
 6. Services: mostly level-funded
 7. Printing: \$750 increase, as now more people are using online systems for renewing licenses
 8. In-state travel: \$1,950, which represents a \$700 increase
- b. Town Clerk's revenue FY22 (through 2/14/22):
 1. Vital statistics: \$7,790
 2. Marriage intentions: \$1,300. These increased during the pandemic because Sharon opened up marriage intentions to non-residents
 3. Dog licenses: \$19,136
 4. Permits / poll location: \$80
 5. Other fees include:
 - a) Late dog fines: \$9,850. This is an increase because in the past the dog officer had stopped fining people who registered their dogs late. In FY22 sent out citations to 800 dogs
 - b) Business certificates: \$1,935
 - c) Non-criminal violations: \$4,900
 - d) Other fees total: \$16,896.30
 6. Town Clerk total revenue: \$45,202.30
- c. Library proposed budget for FY23 – Lee-Ann Amend and Cheryl Weinstein
 1. Salaries: \$1526 increase, or .18%. Proposed for FY23 is \$844,794. Employees in higher positions left and new hires started at lower rates and don't have longevity
 2. Longevity: \$800 decrease, or -15.02%. Projected for FY23: \$4,525

3. Earned time: \$10,000
 4. Electricity: \$25,000, level-funded
 5. Fuel: \$7,500, an increase of \$500 over the last fiscal year, or 7.14%
 6. Technology: \$11,000, level-funded
 7. Postage: \$5,500, an increase of \$4,750, or 633%, over the last fiscal year. This is due to a mandated mailing this year. This will not be required next year
 8. Materials: \$170,000, an increase of \$5,000, or 3.03%, over the last fiscal year. Mandated that a certain percentage of the budget be spent on materials to qualify for state aid
 9. OCLN dues: \$44,000, an increase of \$2,000, or 4.76%
 10. Contracted services: \$20,000, an increase of \$20,000, or 100%. This is typically paid for by the Friends of the Library, but due to Covid they have not been able to fundraise through their typical activities such as book sales, etc. This year the Library is asking for programming monies but shouldn't need to in the future when the Friends resume their normal fundraising activities. Hopefully a book sale will be held this May, during this fiscal year, that can help offset this ask
 11. Office supplies, telephone, advertising, etc. are level-funded
 12. Discussion regarding the Library's proposed \$20,000 for legal expenses, an increase of \$19,000. Do not know what the specific costs will be this year, but anticipate additional funds may be needed for potential items related to the new library.
 - a) Trustees have spent \$63,000 so far on appeals. The Town may not need to allocate this request to the Library, as no other Town departments have allocated legal fees, but may want to allocate it somewhere
 - b) Responsibility may lie with the Standing Building Committee, or could make a reserve fund transfer later as needed
 13. Library expenses total: \$343,500, and increase of \$51,250, or 17.54%
 14. Department total: \$1,202,819, an increase of \$51,976, or 4.52%.
- d. Finance Budget – Krishan Gupta, Finance Director
1. Trimmed \$1,000 off of VisGov for contract services. Will inquire whether a tracker is available on the VisGov site to see how many viewers it has
 2. Finance expense total: \$2,555.00, a decrease of 28.13%
 3. Department total: \$8,555.00, a decrease of 10.47%
 4. Legal, training and education, postage, advertising, office expenses, in-state travel, dues and subscriptions are level-funded for this next fiscal year.
- e. Moderator Budget
1. Level-funded at \$50.
- f. Personnel Board
1. Level-funded at \$3,500.

4. Discuss Annual Town Meeting warrant articles not yet presented –

- a. General bylaw change to amend the beach / boating fees (Chapter 120)
 1. This article will raise the fees from \$20 to 'up to \$250' depending on what type of incident. Police were called to outdoor spaces far more frequently than normal this past year as residents spent more time outdoors due to the pandemic. A higher fee would act as a stronger deterrent from violations
 - a) Signage will need to be updated, as well as the Town's website to reflect the higher fees
- a. Acquire 94 South Main Street
 1. Mr. Turkington, Town Administrator, discussed that the Town retained an appraiser for an estimate and the owner accepted the proposal, at \$350,000. Last year the owner was subject to a wellness check due to the condition of the

- house. Town asked the owner if could buy as-is, and owner felt the Town's offer was fair
2. Plot is approximately .25 acres
 3. Would pay for out of free cash.

5. Vote Annual Town Meeting warrant articles –

- a. Amend Charge to Lake Management Study Committee:

Motioned: by Anja Bernier, **Seconded:** Ann Keitner to recommend approval of amending the charge of the Lake Management Study Committee. **Voted:** 8-0-0. Charles Goodman was experiencing technical difficulties and was unable to vote.

- b. Approve Ambulance Billing Contract:

Motioned: by Gordon Gladstone, **Seconded:** Ira Miller to recommend approval of the ambulance billing contract. **Voted:** 8-0-0. Charles Goodman was experiencing technical difficulties and was unable to vote.

- c. Historic District on East St – will postpone this vote until the next meeting.

- d. Outdoor Water Use Bylaw – will postpone this vote until the next meeting.

- e. Stormwater Protection Bylaw:

Motioned: by Anja Bernier, **Seconded:** Patricia-Lee Achorn to recommend approval of amending the stormwater protection bylaw. **Voted:** 8-0-0. Charles Goodman was experiencing technical difficulties and was unable to vote.

- f. Amend Fine for Licensed Dogs:

Motioned: by Ira Miller, **Seconded:** Anja Bernier to recommend approval of increasing the fine to \$50 to be in compliance with state law. **Voted:** 8-0-0. Charles Goodman was experiencing technical difficulties and was unable to vote.

- g. General bylaw change to increase expenditure limit for solid waste and recycling fund

Motioned: by Ira Miller, **Seconded:** Anja Bernier to recommend approval of increasing the expenditure limit for the solid waste and recycling fund. **Voted:** 8-0-0. Charles Goodman was experiencing technical difficulties and was unable to vote.

- h. Personnel bylaw change to rename Columbus Day - will postpone this vote until the next meeting.

- i. Amend beach / boating fees:

Motioned: by Patricia-Lee Achorn, **Seconded:** Gordon Gladstone to recommend approval of increasing the fines to up to \$250. **Voted:** 8-0-0. Charles Goodman was experiencing technical difficulties and was unable to vote.

- j. Acquire 94 South Main Street - - will postpone this vote until the next meeting.

6. Priorities Committee update

- a. Mr. Lewenberg discussed that the Town will not be borrowing \$20 million for the high school and library projects in this borrowing cycle as had been contemplated. Also, there was a roughly \$1M increase in state aid vs. the previous revenue estimate. New Priorities numbers have been shared with Committee members
- b. Mr. Turkington discussed that the revised Priorities number has come in at 3.9458%. Changes have been made to a few of the estimates such as hotel / motel, meals tax, marijuana tax, etc.
- c. Borrowing at a better interest rate than anticipated
- d. High school project is projected to be completed on-time and within budget, which is why the Town will not have to borrow extra monies
- e. Moderate increases in fixed costs
- f. School Committee is exploring phasing in fully funded Kindergarten. Priorities voted 4-2 on an allocation that would shift \$75,000 from Select Board and Finance Committee sector budgets to the School Department for this purpose and the School Department would contribute the same amount from their own budget. Schools discussed that if they continue to do this they should be able to fully fund Kindergarten in 4 years. Estimated yearly cost for this, by the School Committee, is \$600,000
 1. The Committee discussed the importance of reviewing these estimates carefully to ensure accuracy and that they encompass all related expenses. Some expressed concern that Priorities voted without closer examination of true costs. 3.94% is higher than usual, and in the future can expect to be closer to 3%, as it typically is each year, which would mean they may not be able to fund this as easily in future years
- g. If the Finance Committee approves the proposed budgets as is there will be \$20 – 50,000 of unused allocation which would result in reduced taxes for residents (less than 1%% reduction).

7. Debt issuance / bond rating affirmation – Krishan Gupta, Finance Director

- a. Raised approximately \$4.7 million, with net interest cost to Town of only 1.9%
- b. Bond rating at S&P remains affirmed at AA / stable
- c. Most of debt raised is:
 1. \$2 million for School
 2. \$1.7 million for Water
 3. \$800,000 for DPW
- b. Exempt debt for the new high school and public safety building is \$116 million, with debt for Water at approximately \$10 million and Rattlesnake Hill at \$4.5 million
- c. Monitoring total debt service. Total debt service from the General Fund is 12% of total budget
- d. Sharon is in “very good shape” financially.

8. Town exposure to COVID-19 related health care costs and need and/or options to mitigate – Fred Turkington, Town Administrator

- a. The question was raised previously regarding how the Town, as a self-insured entity, might be able protect itself from elevated health care costs on behalf of employees who refuse the Covid vaccine. The Town has not been keeping track of which employees are vaccinated. Blue Cross Blue Shield was able to separate out the numbers for billing charges coded to Covid and Mr. Gupta has filed for reimbursement of approximately \$400,000 – because Sharon is self-funded can file for reimbursement. Still waiting to hear whether these will be reimbursed.

9. Liaison updates:

Schools - Ann Keitner:

Ms. Keitner recommended Committee members watch the Priorities meeting.

Standing Building Committee - Gordon Gladstone:

No update.

Library - Charles Goodman:

No update.

Planning Board – Brian Collins:

Mr. Collins is the new Planning Board liaison, appointed by Mr. Lewenberg, Chair.

Community Preservation - Patricia-Lee Achorn

Ms. Achorn discussed that they have 7 applications for funding projects and have so far voted unanimously on 4 of them. The CPC does 2 votes for each funding project.

10. Minutes to be Voted

No minutes to be voted.

11. Topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chair in 48 hours:

None.

12. Adjournment:

Motioned: by Patricia-Lee Achorn, **Seconded:** Anja Bernier to adjourn. **Voted:** 9-0-0.
Meeting adjourned at 10:22 pm.