

Present: Dr. Meg Dussault, Fred Turkington, Krishan Gupta, Judy Crosby, William Heitin, Daniel Lewenberg, Tanya Lewis, Ira Miller, Adam Shain and Emily Smith-Lee.

Introductions

- Each member of the committee introduced themselves. The Priorities Committee is comprised of members from the Schools Committee, Finance Committee and the Select Board. The Priorities Committee meets at this time of year to review revenue forecasts and available allocations for the three sectors.

1. Discuss and vote updated revenue, fixed estimates and budget allocations for the three sectors:

- Mr. Turkington discussed that the governor's draft budget included significant state aid to Sharon to support education.
- Norfolk County retirement contribution estimate decreased
- Capital Outlay recommended to fund \$166,700 for school technology
- Budgeted for the land lease at the East Elementary School for solar generation: \$20,000
- The property tax amount assumption was lowered by \$177,213 to an estimated 2.25% (rather than the 2.5% increase allowed by law)
- Proposed allocation to the three operating sectors (Schools, Select Board, and Finance Committee) has been increased from 2.028% to 2.8668%.
- State aid estimate increased from \$10,429,736 to \$11,037,790
- Net available for appropriation at Town Meeting: \$95,249,299
- Unemployment benefit fund contribution estimate has increased significantly from \$75,000 in the FY21 appropriation to \$300,000 for FY22
- New marijuana local taxes are budgeted in FY22 to provide: \$270,000
- Total funds allocated to operating sectors for fixed costs: \$31,499,898
- Total amount increased allocation to three sectors:
 - Select Board: \$413,507
 - Finance Committee: \$37,685
 - Schools: \$1,325,415
 - Total: \$1,776,607
- Still watching variables such as building permits for Sharon Gallery, which have not been included in these estimates. If this number is known prior to the warrant being printed will include it there.
- The Town is refinancing a portion of its debt to take advantage of lower interest rates, which should result in significant savings; estimated savings included in debt service
- Motels, hotels, meals and vehicle excise taxes are expected to rebound as vaccine roll out continues and economy improves
- Dr. Dussault discussed that Schools are working hard on budgets, focusing on preparing funding for still living in a pandemic. Still have to make cuts. Unsure of teacher union negotiation salary numbers yet, but confident that they can reach a budget with the new priorities numbers without cutting programs the community wants to retain like elementary school foreign language and instrumental music
- Revenue estimates are conservative for this budget. Consensus among experts that the economy may start to recover by February or March
- Unsure as of now if all Covid-19 expenses will be covered by grants, state or federal aid. Once the \$1.9 trillion Federal government relief package is passed, then monies will go to city and town coffers, but Sharon won't know final pandemic reimbursement numbers for a year or two due to FEMA process for payments
 - Some funds are earmarked and some have restrictions. Looking at where

- unrestricted funds can be used to cover certain expenses
- Commonwealth in past allowed Towns to run deficits in certain accounts other than snow and ice. May be allowed to run a deficit for Covid-19 expenses
- FEMA reimbursement under Biden administration may be 100%, but won't get resolved for another year. Can take Covid-19 response expenses out of general fund if needed. FEMA has now declared there is a pandemic in schools
- Should have snow and ice estimates soon from DPW
- Meeting with workers' compensation adjustors to reduce premium increase. Original estimated increase to \$640,000 but have revised down to \$610,000. 10-13 employees have been out on workers' compensation, and 2/3 of their wages come from that account.

MOTION: by William Heitin, **SECONDED:** by Ira Miller, that the Priorities Committee approves a 2.88668% budget increase over the fiscal year as discussed. **VOTED:** 6-o-o.

2. Adjournment

MOTION: by William Heitin, **SECONDED:** by Judy Crosby, to adjourn. **VOTED:** 6-o-o.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:12 pm.