



SELECT BOARD BUDGET WORKSHOP

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 11, 2024

6:00 PM

Acton Town Hall, Room 204 and Virtual

Select Board Members Present: Jim Snyder-Grant, Fran Arsenault, Dean Charter, David Martin, Alissa Nicol

Finance Committee Members Present: Christi Andersen, Adam Nolde, Stephen Noone, Roland Bourdon, Christine Russell, Scott Sullivan;

Absent: Vladimir Kan

Mr. Snyder-Grant called the Select Board meeting to order at 6:00 PM. Ms. Andersen called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:02 PM. This was a joint meeting with the Finance Committee.

I. Budget Workshop

Mr. Mangiaratti informed both the Select Board and Finance Committee that budget presentations will follow the current FY25 Budget Book table of contents.

1. Land Use –

- **Planning**

Planning Director and Zoning Enforcement Officer Kristen Guichard – oversees the Planning and Conservation Division, totaling 3.5 FTE, provided an overview of the rolls and responsibilities of the Planning Division and highlighted several projects over the past year, along with continuing projects into 2024 such as the South Acton Vision Plan and Powdermill Corridor Project. A majority of the budget is salaries but maintain a level-funded budget. No further questions.

Mike Gendron, Conservation Manager, discussed his divisions budget which includes 2 FTE, provides staff support to Land Stewardship Committee, Conservation Commission, and provided an overview of the division, including its roles and responsibilities. Proposes a level-funded budget, moved tree service work budget to professional services line item, added \$1300 to electricity line item after budget split with the Recreation Department.

Mr. Bourdon – questioned about any other hazards associated with the 53 River Street project. – Mr. Gendron noted some setbacks with the dam project, including buried asphalt, soil contamination management, and noted they have hired a licensed site professional to complete site testing to mitigate future site issues; applied for CPA funding requesting \$650,000 to complete the project.



Mr. Nolde – questioned about damage to dam site after recent flooding; no damages of yet, flood plane working.

Ms. Andersen – front garden out front of Town Hall has been replaced, light poles in Kelley's Corner as well and asked how they have been funded – Mr. Mangiaratti noted the Garden Club is responsible for the renovation outside Town Hall and the initial installation 35 years ago – raised funds for the renovation. Ms. Guichard noted the pedestrian light poles have not been installed yet – cost has already been appropriated by the town at a previous Town Meeting.

Alissa Nicol – questioned if there were any potential additional sources of funding for the River Street park; Mr. Gendron noted that when presenting to the CPA also proposed an alternative amount for \$300,000 to continue the project in the Spring and not cut out items to continue the project then come back again to the CPA at a later date next fiscal year to potentially request additional funding; pushing for additional state funding, however the state requires a valid OSRP. The intent is to apply in the spring after the new OSRP plan is approved by the State. No additional questions.

2. Recreation,

Melissa Settipani-Rufo, Recreation Director; reviewed the Recreation budget, which consists of 3 FTE, includes 40 seasonal positions, oversees all municipal recreation operations and activities with the largest at NARA Park. Applies for several grants per year to fund various programs and projects along with large projects with CPA funding; added a new line item for light towers specific for the July 4th event, and internship line item. She explained the Recreation Department budget is level-funded. Ms. Nicol questioned the x-axis on the bar graph on page 117; Ms. Rufo noted it was actual registrations. No further questions.

3. Fire

Chief Anita Arnum presented the Fire Department budget, which consists of 44 FTE, 4 Fire stations, permitting inspections, training, hazardous material response, emergency medical response, and code compliance. She noted that staffing has been a challenge with 6 current vacancies. Changes in the budget include an increase in overtime expenses, equipment maintenance and repairs, and equipment and supplies. Total propose increase in this FY25 budget is 7.06%. Mr. Cole – noted the ambulance subsidies have decreased down to 200K vs. 400k in past – questioned if the change is due to the switch to ALS services and if there were more ALS service it would increase the number – Chief Arnum noted they are looking to restructure the ambulance service fees, and will look into the result of restructuring the fees to possible reduce the need for subsidies in future budgets.



Mr. Noone – questioned the metrics on response times with the North Acton station in operations – Chief Arnum noted an improvement in response time for North Acton, and will provide the most recent metrics after the budget meeting.

Mr. Bourdon – How long the life of ambulance – Chief Arnum noted the ambulance are in service of primary service for 3 years, secondary service for 3 years, and mechanical backup for 3 years, for a total of 9 years. Mr. Bourdon questioned if it would be beneficial to have 2 backup ambulances – Chief Arnum noted that the department has been operating sufficiently with 1 backup and to add a secondary backup would require an increase in staffing and facility space to store.

Mr. Martin questioned the operational status of the ladder truck – Chief Arnum noted the current aerial truck is a 2009 model, which had recently caught fire and has since been repaired and back in service, but currently experiencing issues with the diesel exhaust system, continued issues with corrosion, but operational.

Mr. Charter questioned if there has been any discussion on potentially closing one station due to staffing issues – Chief Arnum noted the challenge to staff 4 stations with only 2 staff members, they did temporarily close station 1 for repairs to the showers and need to re-evaluate the need for 4 stations with the potential of a large building project in South Acton.

Ms. Nicol questioned what potential cost savings would be to close a station permanently – Chief Arnum noted not having analyzed that metric, Mr. Mangiaratti noted is approximately \$20 K via municipal electrical rates.

Ms. Russell – questioned if the inability to fill open positions is the town not providing a competitive salary or a systemic issue – Chief Arnum noted it is systemic problem nationally.

Mr. Bourdon – questioned the trade-in value of an aerial truck – Chief Arnum commented that it wouldn't be more than 100K.

Mr. Nolde – questioned if all Paramedics were Firefighters – Chief Arnum noted that is what the department is working toward as far as staffing.

No further questions.

4. Public Works

Corey York, DPW Director presented an overview of the staff and responsibilities of the Department of Public Works, introduced QinRui Pang, Town Engineer and Carl Maria, DPW Superintendent and discussed coordinating responses during weather issues, public safety issues. He also discussed how DPW is working with the Finance Division, Recreation Division, and Sustainability Office to improve internal operations, including Information Technology and working with the GIS Division to build a drainage data base infrastructure. Continues to assist other Divisions, providing staffing assistance and ongoing priority projects. The budget has been level-funded aside from position control, fuel line and machinery line items.

Mr. Nolde – noted his position is listed as part time in the DPW budget, Mr. York explained that his salary is allocated between transfer station. and wastewater funds.



Mr. Charter – questioned about the refuse collection and recycle collection drop in FY23 vs. FY22; Mr. York explained that due to the pandemic that residents may have used the time to clear out their homes of refuse and recycling items. Mr. Charter questioned the sales of transfer station stickers if it has remained consistent; Mr. York confirmed. Mr. Charter questioned the number of residents utilizing private hauler services experiencing service issues and if this has impacted the use at the transfer station, Mr. York noted an increase in inquiries due to residents noting substantial increase in fees for those services and looking for a more affordable solution by using the transfer station. Mr. Charter question about recent severe storms and maintenance of catch basins, culverts and stormwater if the town should be investing into them now; Mr. York looked at culverts and state reports from bridges to understand their status projecting approximately \$1 million per year needed in repairs due to age and maintenance moving forward, the Department has a revolving fund from stormwater permit fees and hope to leverage that for future maintenance but the full process would take about a year for review, permitting and placing the project out to bid for work to commence. Mr. Charter questioned about the overflow on the Boardwalk campus and any failure on the Town's side or if the Boardwalk was built at the wrong elevation; Mr. York noted he was not aware of the Boardwalk but aware of a breach in the Flint Drive neighborhood due to increased beaver activity. Mr. Cole noted the culvert and Boardwalk campus was built by the Army Corps of Engineers specifications and noted the increase in beaver activity.

Mr. Noone – noted the sewage flow is about 150K and what is the peak flow daily usage; Ms. Pang noted a one-time peak was 270K, and during spring the average is 230K.

Mr. Cole questioned the Public Facilities 7.3 FTE zeroed out in this section of the budget book– Mr. York noted the staff was shifted to Operations and can be found there.

Ms. Andersen – questioned the cost to maintain sidewalks and construction; Mr. York noted that a majority of work is done by a contractor for building.

Mr. Bourdon – noted the rising cost of steel, and what is the recycling trend for paper and cardboard; Mr. York noted that after PAYT program scrap metal was biggest money maker, paper and cardboard have a cost to them.

Mr. Martin – questioned if 3 sidewalk plows is sufficient for all the sidewalks in town. Mr. Maria noted it depends on having the staff available to operate the plows which takes several days to clear all sidewalks. Mr. Martin questioned if sidewalks are on a resurfacing schedule like road surfaces, Mr. York noted they are on a similar schedule.

Ms. Russell questioned if the level service budget is only increased by 3% per year for next five years is it sustainable; Mr. York explained that to be proactive for stormwater maintenance and upkeep would require more money in the budget.

Ms. Nicol questioned if overtime is incurred on Saturdays at the Transfer Station; Mr. York confirmed it was in order to keep a 3-person staff to assist the public on Saturdays. Ms. Nicol questioned about changing the hours of operations and if it



would help cut overtime, Mr. York would have to check with the Town Manager about shifting hours.

Mr. Snyder-Grant mentioned the increase in pricing for gasoline and questioned shifting to hand-held electric machinery; Mr. York is looking into switching over smaller machinery. Mr. Snyder-Grant questioned if sidewalks fall under Chapter 90 money; Mr. York noted it is primarily for road paving but have used it in the past.

Ms. Andersen – questioned if continuing to add sidewalks would create more work for the department; Mr. York noted adding to busy streets would require plowing so it would increase workload equaling 50 miles.

Mr. Bourdon questioned about the weight of electric vehicles impacting the lifespans of roads; Mr. York looks at an average of 25 year lifespan of roads – heavier traffic is shorter but not specific data for EV usage.

No further questions.

5. Town Manager

Mr. Mangiaratti introduced Thom Begin, Assistant Town Manager, Lisa Tomy, Executive Assistant, Rosie Murphy, Customer Services, Wanjiku Gachugi, DEI Director, Andrea Becerra, Sustainability Director, and Julie Pierce, Economic Development Director. Mr. Begin introduced the Town Manager budget which has a bottom line decrease of .34%. He discussed the main budget drivers and noted a decrease in professional salaries through reorganization, reduction in compensation reserve, professional development and printing and copying line items, increases in clerical salaries, public relations, professional services, and real estate rental lease. Ms. Gachugi briefed both the Select Board and Finance Committee to the working of the DEI Office, announced the number of report filings to the DEI Office based on the recommendations of the Collins Center Report with a breakdown of categories of each bias filing. Ms. Gachugi serves as staff support to the DEIC and COD, collaborates with Jennifer Faber with the AB School District, the United Way, and has coordinated several workshops and special programs.

Mr. Noone- questioned about the decrease in compensation reserves and what contracts were up this year, Mr. Mangiaratti noted expiring dispatch and public works.

Mr. Bourdon – questioned line item “other insurance”, Mr. Mangiaratti will respond back with the information after budget meeting.

6. Sustainability

Andrea Becerra, Sustainability Director outlined the Sustainability budget which will allow no-cost consultations for residents for conversion to heat pump services to continue and sustain the clean energy coaching program, supported by grants totaling \$343K last year supporting several projects and services. Explained the Town was recently awarded a grant from Energize Acton to support a fellow who will support access to resources and information around energy efficiency and electrical upgrades for multi-family buildings and low-income residents; working on updating the Municipal Vulnerability Plan.



Ms. Andersen questioned if there are group programs to assist in the cost of battery storage units as it is currently cost prohibitive to average homeowners; Ms. Becerra noted that clean energy coaches are the best route to finding solutions to her question. Ms. Andersen questioned if Sustainability would be working with Historic District Commission on clean energy options for residents in historic districts, Ms. Becerra is working with the Planning Division and Building Commissioner creating a document to assist residents in those districts what their options are converting to clean energy.

No further questions.

7. Transportation Services and Economic Development

Mr. Mangiaratti outlined the Economic Development Office is funded through the Town Manger budget. Launched public art program, created a Business Boost newsletter, created a guide on “How to Do Business” in Acton, and Business Directory Guide, and received many grants for projects. Transportation program consists of 4 different transportation means and a pilot taxi/livery service paid out of a grant through Sudbury which fills gaps through the current transportation options including evenings and weekends and will continue to seek grant funding to continue services. Mr. Mangiaratti commented that the cost per ride is \$40 for Road Runner, \$35 for Minute Van, \$28 for COA shuttle, and \$18 for Cross Action Transit bus. Subsidies for the Transportation program for last 5 years were \$260 K, \$225 K, \$160K, and FY24 is \$160K.

Ms. Andersen questioned about financial viability of the transportation program, Mr. Mangiaratti noted that dispatch is main expense due to decrease in shared cost within multiple towns and working to decrease costs; recently awarded a Community Compact Grant for \$40K to find ways to reduce costs and change model for services.

No additional questions.

8. Town Clerk

Leo Mercado, Deputy Town Clerk – discussed his budget which consists of 2 FTEs. The budget remains level funded with a slight increase in salaries, membership dues and office supplies.

Ms. Anderson questioned the percentage of registered voters compared to the total population, Mr. Mercado did not have that data and will get it to her.

Mr. Nolde questioned the town population number, Mr. Mercado noted it was the result from the town census and not the federal census and will get the federal censuses report numbers to him.

No further questions.

Mr. Sullivan moved, seconded by Mr. Noone to adjourn and unanimously approved by roll call vote.



Mr. Martin moved, seconded by Ms. Arsenault to adjourn and unanimously approved.

Meeting adjourned at 8:15 PM

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Agenda, January 11, 2024
- Finance Committee Question and Answer Spreadsheet
- Town Manager Budget