

Finance Committee MEETING MINUTES

February 25, 2025

Upton Town Hall, Room 203

Paul Flaherty and Stephen Bern, Virtual - Shawn Craig and Nick Ensko
Joe Laydon, Brett Simas, Laura Hebb, Maureen Dwinnell, Susan
Brouwer, Michael Antonellis, Mary Overholt, Tania Paparazzo, Matthew
Bachtold, Nick Palmieri, Peter McGowan, Diane Tiernan and other virtual
participants

The Finance Committee meeting was opened at 6:35pm by Paul Flaherty.

Joint Meeting with Select Board to review financial presentation and discuss FY26 budget process:

Town Manager Joe Laydon opened the conversation by providing a brief overview of the process and what was planned for this meeting – budget reviews for Land Use & Inspection Services, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Elder & Social Services, Library, Police and Board of Health.

Land Use & Inspectional Services, Planning Board and Conservation Commission:

The Director of Land Use Inspectional Services (LUIS), Mike Antonellis, joined by Conservation Administrator, Mary Overholt, provided an overview of the changes within the department. They have transitioned 2 part-time roles into one full time role along with transitioning from a Department Specialist to an Assistant Town Planner (more professional). This role has been hired and these changes will lead to a full functioning office. Finance Committee asked about hiring the Assistant Planner position prior to Town Meeting approval along with the comparison of Finance Director comments related to declining New Growth and Permit Revenues. Mr. Laydon explained that the department was not increasing staff, it was renaming the Department Specialist role with a new college graduate. Finance Committee also asked how the CPC got involved with funding the Assistant Town Planner role. This role will be funded by Planning Board, Conservation Commission and CPC. Building / Permit Fees have recently been adjusted and we may experience an increase. New role taking over for previous Building Inspector and Building Commissioner roles. Conservation Commission is experiencing some increases due to Assistant Planner position along with adding a Summer Intern. This role would be helping to maintain trails, mowing, cleanup trails, manage volunteers, fix bridges and kiosks. Currently maintained by aging volunteer base. This is a trial year to see if it works.

Elder & Social Services:

Director of Elder Services Tania Paparazzo provided an overview of the proposed budget increase. The increases are primarily due to increased wages, driver hours along with increased attendance / usage of new facilities. Some funding for Dept Specialist continues to come from formula grant. Increasing from 33 driver hours to 40 per week to operate both vans. Adding a driver and looking to add a small van (large van for trips, smaller van for medical trips). 49% increase in attendance and >100% increase in ridership, but continuing to operate on a level budget from what was funded for previous building. Modest increase to cover cost of programming and supplies. 15% increase to accommodate 49% increase in attendance. Looking at increasing fees, but there is a downside to that (reduced attendance due to increased fees). Finance Committee asks Director what funding would be needed to increase programming to appropriate levels vs staying near level funding against previous, smaller facilities. 49% increase

should lead to increased programming to accommodate the resident needs and expected continued growth. Managing Staffing will become the next challenge with increased programming and associated work. Transportation increase is biggest current concern.

Library:

Library Director Matthew Bachtold presented the budget overview on behalf of the Library Trustees. Following up on the previous discussions, Mr. Bachtold mentions the need for increased custodial services due to increased programming for both the Library and the Senior Center. Mr. Bachtold provides recently approved budget numbers (by the Trustees). The bulk of the increase for the budget is to wages. Circulation has increased moderately, # of visits has increased considerably as well as program attendance. Year over year is still showing an increase against initial year of activity. Expanding programming could be possible without increasing staff. Most of the programs cost staff time plus materials. Mr Bachtold explains outside use of the facility seems to be increasing as well. Community is using the space and coordination is being managed. Finance Committee asks about shared costs - mailbox, shared calendar, etc. and if there could be savings in the future.

Police:

New Police Chief Nick Palmieri along with Interim Chief McGowan present the Police & Communications department budget. Chief Palmieri describes that the union is in year 2 of the 3-year deal. A number of officers are receiving increases due to step and educational incentive increases. Committed Officers to the department. From an expense perspective, most are level funded with the exception of increased Taser program and police cruiser replacement. Finance Committee asked about when the department purchases two vehicles versus one per year. Chief Palmieri responds that will be requested next fiscal year. Cruisers are not delayed like some other equipment / trucks have been. The department is planning to stick with the Tahoe.

Board of Health:

Diane Tiernan presents the budget overviews for Board of Health which includes Board of Health, Animal Control, Waste Removal and Health Services. Increases are driven by salaries and waste removal. Waste removal increase of \$37k is a combination of 3% increase plus other costs increase. Wheelabrator costs also assumed to increase, assumed to be \$10k. Finance Committee asks about some of the new developments and some are required to provide their own trash services. Ms. Tiernan then explains some of the costs for the trash, including the cost of trash bags. Recycling costs were also discussed along with having the residents take care of their own trash (has been voted down in the past). The topic of two line items for a Nurse is asked and it is explained that Blackstone is funding for apportion of our Nurse. It is a part time role that is shared with Blackstone.

Budget Status and Additional Warrant Articles

Mr. Laydon addresses the next step for the TM Budget Recommendation. Mr. Laydon then reviews the memo regarding the additional articles for the ATM warrant. The articles include the Community Center / Playground Capital Improvement Stabilization Fund, Ambulance, Assessor Certification and Expenditure of Default Funds.

Finance Committee asks why we would fund the entire Community Center Stabilization balance once versus over the next ten years. Mr Laydon explains he put the total value in so that we could reduce, if necessary, on the warrant.
Mr. Laydon provides additional overview of the Ambulance strategy.

Scheduling of Next Meetings with Select Board and Departments/Committees:

The next Finance Committee is expected to be held on March 4, 2025, as another joint meeting with the Select Board to discuss the remaining budget process.

Motion to adjourn is made by Paul Flaherty at 7:50pm, seconded by Stephen Bern. Unanimous approval.

Respectfully submitted,
Stephen M. Bern, co-chair of the Finance Committee