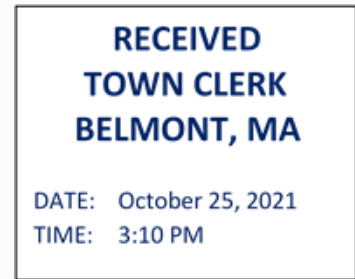


Approved by
the Select Board on:
10/18/2021

SELECT BOARD MEETING
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2020
REMOTE MEETING
7:30 AM



CALL TO ORDER

A meeting of the Select Board was called to order at 7:30 am by Chair Roy Epstein. Vice Chair Adam Dash and Select Board member Tom Caputo were present, along with Town Administrator Patrice Garvin, Assistant Town Administrator Jon Marshall, DPW Director Jay Marcotte, Library Director Peter Struzziero, Town Clerk Ellen Cushman, Assessors Daniel Dargon and Bob Reardon, Director of Council on Aging Nava Niv-Vogel, Acting Director of Human Resources Shawna Healey, Treasurer Floyd Carman and Director of Health Department Wesley Chin.

ACTION BY CONSENT

BUDGET MEETINGS AS FOLLOWS

Patrice Garvin has been meeting with department heads the last two weeks about FY22 budgets. All departments are based on minimal service level budget as dictated by the Financial Task Force 2. Each department head is here to discuss their individual budgets.

All budgets for FY22 are assuming the level services budget that would result from a successful override. The non-override budget will be discussed at a later time.

Facilities

Garvin announced that the Facilities budget needs more work. The former department head was granted an extension before they left their position, and the submission was never provided. The Budget Director provided a draft budget with 2% place holder for personnel increases. Garvin and Supt. Phelan (Superintendent of Schools oversees Facilities), met and decided that Jay Marcotte and Mike Santoro would oversee the Facilities Department until a new director is hired.

Epstein asked if there was an expectation to continue with the same vendors. Garvin said the cleaning contract may change due to the additional square footage from the renovated Police Department and new High School, but she is not sure what the financial impact will be. Jay and Mike have a history of previous facilities management and hopefully they can help the department move forward before a new director is hired. She said they are currently trying to figure out the specifics of the unpaid bills. There will be an article brought to Spring Town Meeting to request payment of prior year bills. So far they know that Sprint and fuel bills have not been paid.

Epstein asked how long she thinks it will be before we get a budget. Garvin said she expects it to take a couple of months before have identified outstanding payments.

Dash asked if there would be any additional FTEs in Facilities. She said they are planning to add a Systems Manager position in Facilities to help meet the green energy goals of the community. Caputo

reaffirmed that after discussion by Financial Committees and Financial Task Force, the decision was made to hire in-house for optimal efficiency.

Epstein said maybe discussion about Facilities could be put on the Select Board agenda in December.

Department of Public Works, Jason Marcotte and Mike Santoro

Jay Marcotte announced that the budget for DPW is a rollover budget. The biggest change in the budget is the processing fee for recycling that increased back to the same level as FY20. The processing fee in FY21 was artificially low because of a grant. He said that he anticipates the processing fee to remain high.

The soil processing budget also increased. This is the fee for processing contaminated soil that cannot be put back in the ground. He said they used to be able to put in landfill but now it has to be hauled out of Town.

Marcotte said one of the main problems in Belmont is trying to keep up with tree maintenance. He said there are 100 trees in the queue for removal and they have limited funds for tree trimming and removal. He added 5% increase to the tree line, but he may need to raise that. However, he is investigating whether Belmont Light may be able to partner with the DPW on this.

The Tree Warden will be retiring this year and Marcotte is exploring whether this position could be handled through split duties with existing Town staff. The State mandates that we have an appointed Tree Warden.

Santoro said that some of the requests we have on the books at DPW dates back to 2018. Garvin managed to secure \$75k from a state grant, but the budget is grossly underfunded. Epstein said that maybe an increment to the tree budget could be added once more critical financial assessment is completed.

Caputo asked if we should tweak the minimal services budget for the tree line right now. Jay is hopeful that Craig Spinelli's offer to help with tree trimming will alleviate some of the costs. Garvin said that she may also be able to find direct costs to direct to tree service that won't impact the minimal level service budget and increasing the aggregate budget amount.

The Select Board asked questions about certain line items that seemed to have increased and Marcotte explained the increases. Dash asked the impact a non override budget would create in reductions in work force, solid waste, changes in road maintenance and delays with the reduction in staff. Marcotte said that by law, the Mass DEP requires certain maintenance levels. If we have a 10 to 20% reduction, the work will not get done in the manner people are used to.

Caputo said that there will discussion with the Warrant Committee about override budgets.

Library, Peter Struzziero

Peter Struzziero, Library Director, and Kathy Keohane, Library Chair of Trustees from Library talked about their budget.

Struzziero reported that the Belmont Library was voted the 10th best in Mass. This year, despite the pandemic, they had a successful online summer reading program, they were the largest contributors to

the Belmont Food Pantry, they provided free books to citizens and they gave back the best percentage of any other Town department in FY20. And he is proud that the Library did not have much downtime due to the pandemic. He said they are allowing full citizen use and are opened for computer use.

Kathy gave overview of the budget. She said that staffing is the highest component of budget, and a good portion are union employees. They laid off a number of people during the pandemic. Building operations is largely building maintenance and less was spent on this due to the anticipated plans for a new building. In the FY22 budget we need to think about the longer term effects of the new building. She said any increases in the budget are to make up for decreases in previous year.

Epstein commented that the percentage increases are due to comparison to FY21 which was an unusual year. Epstein asked if Struzziero sees any looming capital issues with the building. Peter said the capital budget estimate is \$4.5M for a five-year outlook. He said they had always only put forward emergency items in the last few years because they thought they were getting a debt exclusion for the new building. He did not get any capital improvement money approved last year so they also put preventive maintenance for major business systems forward. Anything beyond basic maintenance, would have to be brought back to Town Meeting for approval.

Epstein asked if there are no catastrophic failures, is the budget they put forward capable of keeping normal operations going? Are we safely above any penalties by the State? Struzziero said they are only 3% above the State requirement. If the budget is cut anymore then we not make the waiver from the State and we would get far less services. The Mass Board of Library Commissioners oversees disproportionate cuts. If there are disproportionate cuts, then we will not be able to participate in inter library loan program and we could lose accreditation.

Struzziero said he compared the original FY21 budget without revisions to the FY20 and it's a 3.9% increase from FY20.

Town Clerk, Ellen Cushman

Ellen Cushman reported that the Town Clerk's office has three separate domains: election support, Town Meetings and State licenses for businesses. The budget is fairly simple. This year, Town Meeting was delivered so differently and she feels they were successful in getting Town Members to participate remotely. This year we budgeted for four elections. There was an 84% turnout of voters. 78% of those people voted through early voting, mail or absentee ballots which is a large labor cost for us. At this point, we are waiting for the State auditors to perform their review and then some of the money spent can be recouped.

Looking forward, she budgeted for two elections for FY22. She always budgets for an extra election, in case. At each election, the COVID pandemic required more people, more PPE for workers and more volunteers. Early voting will probably be continued into FY 22. That is a significant additional cost.

The Town Clerk's office overtime was reduced in 2021 and it was reinstated in this budget. Garvin asked about costs savings with remote meetings. Cushman said that the main cost savings are for custodians and visual set up. But that was offset by increases for electronic voting support and webinar licenses.

Epstein asked about how elections are run now? Cushman said there would still be voting by mail and early voting and they are leaning towards Towns to require both early voting by mail and in person. She

said the system for counting mail-in votes is pretty antiquated and labor intensive. We needed volunteers from other town departments to complete this year's processing

Epstein asked if there were any other systems that we could purchase to help with vote tallies and processing. Cushman said since we need to use the single central voter registry from the State, there is not a lot we can do to help alleviate labor hours. Epstein thanked the Clerk's office for all the extra work.

Caputo said remote meetings have produced more public engagement. Are there costs in the budget to continue virtual participation? Cushman said those costs are already in the budget. Belmont's IT has been very supportive and have helped us immensely this year.

Assessors, Daniel Dargon and Bob Reardon

Daniel Dargon and Bob Reardon joined the group. Bob Reardon reported that it was a difficult year because they had to take precautionary efforts in order to perform inspections, but they managed to do most of the inspections needed and should finish by the end of the year. The plan has been to inspect all houses in Belmont over the period of five years. That helps to keep the budget flat. The department does not have much discretionary funding but the funding they do have drives revenues.

During travels around the Town, Reardon said they try to identify houses that may not have pulled a permit. But the State does not allow back payments on late permits. Caputo and Epstein suggested that the assessors put together a Frequently Asked Questions on the website to inform people about how the Assessors' Office works.

The Select Board agreed that the budget looked fine.

Council on Aging, Nava Niv Vogel

Nava Niv-Vogel reported that the FY22 budget had a 17% increase, because of adding a full-time social worker. Other than that added position, the budget is pretty flat except for the 2% increases on salary. She said that because of the pandemic, they have had to re-invent their approach to senior outreach without the advantage of the volunteer staff.

One major initiative is to offer a billing program along with the Recreation Department to pay online for events and they will be rolling this out in January. They have also been doing more remote programming for seniors. This second surge of COVID seems to be affecting people who are living at home. They repurposed some of their personnel to do different services. Revenues and expenses have gone down but so they have cancelled each other out.

Epstein asked if there is a way to redo the way that COA provides transportation because it takes up a significant amount of the budget. Nava said other towns contract out to a ride share but she has learned that the ride share has not saved them money. She said that Belmont developed a volunteer driver program with over 10 drivers this year before COVID hit. She is working with Springwell Communities to try to develop a new transportation service to get seniors to the Boston medical centers. She is currently submitting a grant that will allow taxi service to medical appointment.

Human Resources, Shawna Healey

Garvin said the HR budget is a rollover budget. There are only two people in the department, Shawna Healey and an Administrative Assistant. She would like to see an additional staff person added to the department. All staff are non-union so a 2% COLA is included in the budget.

Garvin said that she would like to wait until we get a new HR Director before they explore the suggestions to merge the Town and schools Human Resources offices.

Dash asked if the flat budget will be able to cover potential GIC insurance changes? Garvin said that the GIC additional expense would go in another budget. Garvin said the biggest priority is to get an HR generalist position after the HR Director is hired.

Treasurer, Floyd Carman

Treasurer Carman reported that the department has 7.5 full time staff members. The FY22 budget has \$10K+ increase from FY21. Contractual salary increases account for most of that increase. If you compare FY22 and FY20 budget, they are about the same. His biggest challenge is online security, preventing external access to the Town's banking network, maintaining Belmont's Triple AAA rating and maintaining tax flow.

Floyd said that the cash flow from FY20 and FY21 taxes is currently behind by \$1.3M. He says he plans to collect this amount, but FY20 unpaid taxes are now considered delinquent. There will soon be a list of names in the Belmont Herald of those that owe FY20 taxes.

The Select Board commended Carman for maintaining services without increasing the budget.

Health Department, Wesley Chin and Diana Ekman

Wesley Chin reported that there are five divisions to the Health Department and their goal is provide better health for the Town of Belmont.


Chin reported that the FY21 budget is a flat budget. Chin said they are fortunate to have received extra funding from the State. They have been given a one-time \$80K grant to supplement staffing. They plan to bring on part-time supplemental nursing help and contract tracers with this funding.

The Select Board asked about two lines on the budget that increased significantly and Chin said he would check those lines of the budget to make sure they are correct.

Caputo asked if the Town would be doing any work with administering vaccines and how it would be funded? Chin said if the State wanted the Town to administer vaccines, he would expect that the State would cover those costs with a grant.

Motion was made to adjourn the Select Board meeting. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

Respectfully Submitted,



PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator

