

Minutes Holden Finance Committee, March 23, 2022 Remote via Zoom
Recreation, Senior Center, Veteran's and continuation of DPW, W/S Capital Budgets

Members Present: Paul Challenger, Dave White, Joe Dolak, Don Graves, Al Berg, Stephanie Adams, Jane Titcomb, Marilynn Foley

Member Absent: Chris Lucchesi

Also Present: Peter Lukes, Town Manager, Stephanie King, Assistant Town Manager, John Woodsmall, DPW Director, Lori Rose, Town Accountant, Louise Charbonneau, Senior Center Director, Nichole Hallett, Recreation Director, Isabell McCauley, W/S Superintendent, Chris Demoranville, Town Engineer, Patrick Wood, Town Engineer, Rick Bates, Selectman, Susan Sullivan, Senior Center COA Board

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M.

The Recreation Director highlighted the Recreation Budget and answered questions from the Committee. The biggest change this year is the combining of the Recreation and Before/After School Revolving Funds into a single budget. Some programs and staff overlap between the two funds and this change will make for better, easier accounting process since expenses don't have to be split between the funds. Final approval of this change will have to be made by the Annual Town Meeting through a couple of warrant articles. Budgeting was difficult this year because of 2 years of COVID 19 that curtailed many programs and made direct comparisons difficult. The prior Director of 10+ years retired in August and a new director was hired. Other challenges were programs that had to be held at reduced capacity, such as the pool, school buildings not being available in the evenings and staffing shortages. Wages were increased to compete with other employers. Recreation Director Nichole Hallett plans to expand and modernize the department, principally by hiring an Assistant Director to cover some of the hours the program runs during the week and by creating two new supervisory positions to oversee the operations of the pool when it is open, to ensure a safe environment. Other plans are to evaluate the current software used to track the programs and participants, further review the pay scale as needed, staff training, and getting WiFi at the pool for more efficient check in process. The budget is developed based on a perfect summer when the pool can be open every day from 9A.M-8P.M. There was considerable discussion about the town fields, their condition and the plans to improve them. The problem is that the fields are constantly over used, although it was noticed that the fields were not used at all for 18 months and they are still in terrible condition.

The Senior Center Director highlighted the Senior Center Budget and answered questions from the Committee. There has been an increase in attendance in the Center since people have been vaccinated against COVID19 and are anxious to get out of their houses and socialize. Meals on Wheels have been stable and those using the Senior vans have increased numbers. Security cameras in the Senior Center capital budget were eliminated as it is difficult to identify vandals that cause problems at the Center and the Bandstand, because of clothing that hides the individuals. Police patrols around that area have been increased. Louise suggested a carport for the vans as a safety issue to eliminate the need for the volunteer drivers to clean snow from the roof of the buses.

The Veterans Services Budget was reviewed. There are no changes. The program is running well and serving 7-10 people at a time, helping them get the aid they need, and transitioning them onto more permanent state based programs.

DPW Director John Woodsmall discussed the DPW Capital Budget. Culvert and bridge rehabilitation is an ongoing project with Town funds supplemented by the state. Local roads and sidewalks is an annual line in the budget book with state Chapter 90 funds supplementing Town expenditures. The 1995 air compressor needs to be replaced. Tree removal for hazardous trees would be contracted out. This was last done in 2013. Replacement of the listed DPW vehicles and the life expectancy of the trucks was discussed. The Cemetery Trust Fund will be used for the purchase of the 2 mowers. The landfill swale replacement and the brine maker were discussed at the March 23 meeting, and revisited in more detail tonight. The forklift is for the new DPW facility, to allow access to the mezzanine storage areas added late in the project.

John also discussed the W/S Capital Budget. The water main replacement in the Shrewsbury area is the final phase of a 3-year project. The circa 1962 sewer pump in Jefferson Pump station needs replacement due to leaking as well as pumps at some other pump stations in town. The Spring Street well needs treatment due to at times a discolored water issue. There has been an increase in the cost of the new pickup trucks since the budget book as printed, which will be reflected in the updated budget the manager will issue next week. The W/S department is looking to improve accuracy of the MWRA meters at the Rutland, Holden and Worcester town lines.

Peter will update the Resource Profile as to any changes before we begin our deliberations.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Marilynn Foley, Clerk