

Holland Finance Board
27 Sturbridge Road, Holland, MA 01521
Holland Town Hall – Community Room
Meeting Minutes for Thursday, February 9, 2023
Virtual and Physical Meeting of the Board and Guests

Meeting Attendance –

Members in person: Andrew Harhay, Robbin Lauzon, Cara Bogacz and Paul Tortolani.

Members attending remotely: None

Member Absent: Karen Peret.

Guests in person: Clelland Johnson and Ernie Fancy – Select Board; Stacy Stout – Town Administrator; Brenda Palmer – Community Center Director; James Gagne – Fire Chief.

Open Meeting –

The Chair called to order at 6:00 pm.

1. Approval of 2/2/23 meeting minutes, if available:

The 2/2/23 minutes were not available for this meeting.

2. Review of the Community Center FY24 Budget request:

Director Brenda Palmer provided a detailed review of the activities being provided at the Center. She indicated that her four-member staff has been amazing in supporting Center activities and have been willingly volunteering extra hours to support new programs. While Brenda's budget request is level funding the Expenses line, she is requesting that a total of 15 hours be added to overall staff work hours at an additional cost of \$11,986/ year, based on the current hourly rates. An 8% COLA was requested for all positions. The overall proposed budget would be an increase from \$110,173 to \$118,438, or 18.2%.

3. Review of the Fire Department budget request:

Chief Jim Gagne presented the Fire Department's budget request to FY24 which overall is a 27.5% increase over FY23. The major increase was in the salary line for the Fire Chief – from the current \$15,479 to \$32,000. Jim said that he spends 15 to 20 hours at the Fire Station each week doing administrative work for the department, not including responding to fire calls. The the position of Chief has him sitting on five area committees working on improving the operation of all fire departments in the region. Jim recognized that his request represented a very significant percentage increase, but indicated that the Fire Chief position in Holland has the lowest compensation of any comparable town in the area. For example, in FY22, the chief in Wales earned a salary of \$25,500, in Brimfield it was \$29,035, in Oakham it was \$29,000 and in Hardwick the chief's salary was \$30,700.

The Chief submitted a request to transfer \$4,000 from the Reserve Fund to the department's expenses line to pay for the unexpected need to replace both the well pump and hot water tank, anticipating that the expenses line will be depleted before the end of FY23. (The Chief subsequently inform us that he is

withdrawing the request, after just learning that Holland Fire and Police were awarded a large Public Safety grant from the State.)

Andy initiated discussion on the need to have a contracted compensation study performed, to see how all of the Town's salary and wage positions compare in pay to other like towns in the area. Stacy said that our Grant Writer is going to investigate if funds might be available for this proposed study through a State Community Compact grant.

4. Budget Development Activities:

On 2/8/23, the Highway Department submitted a request for the transfer of \$31,241.17 from the Reserve Fund to pay for project costs that could not be fully funded with State dollars available through the Chapter 90 and WRAP grants, which totaled ~ \$277K. The reason for the projects costing more than originally bid was indicated to be due to the escalating cost of asphalt used in paving.

5. Expenditure Report:

There were no questions on the FY23 expenditure report distributed by the accountant on 2/6/23.

6. Select Board Updates:

Clelland noted that additional ARPA were provided to two previously approved projects, as there was an increase in installation costs. The upgrade to the Community Center kitchen was increased by \$5,000 to a total of \$30,000 and the VPN project was increased by \$600 to a total of \$6,000.

Ernie indicated that there will need to be a Special Town Meeting to codifying the Town bylaws. Based on the current progress, it is anticipated that the meeting will occur this Fall.

Stacy commented that her being able to attend the MMA Annual Meeting and Trade Show was an extremely rewarding experience. Workshops on a variety of subjects related to municipal operations were conducted during the Saturday meeting and provided her with valuable insight on policies and how others are dealing with difficult certain difficult issues.

7. Roundtable comments:

There were no addition comments by members or guests.

8. Next meeting: February 16, 2023

Adjournment:

Cara made the motion to close the meeting and Robbin seconded; all in favor. Andy closed the meeting at 7:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Harhay, Chair