

Holland Finance Board

27 Sturbridge Road, Holland, MA 01521

Holland Town Hall - Community Room

Meeting Minutes for Wednesday, March 3, 2021

Virtual and Physical Meeting of the Board and Guests

Meeting Attendance:

- In person: Members Sharon Ashleigh and Ernie Fancy and Town Administrator Stacy Riley; Surveyor Brian Johnson attended only the portion of the meeting involving the review of the Cemetery, Tree Warden and Highway Department budgets.
- Remote: Members Kelli Robbins and Andy Harhay and Selectman Clelland Johnson.

Open Meeting –

The Chair opened the meeting at 6:30 pm.

Review of the Planning Board Budget Request –

Ms. Ashleigh recognized that the Town currently does not have a functioning Planning Board at this time, so there is no request to review. The amounts approved for the FY21 budget were \$2,500 for stipends and \$2,700 for expenses, a total of \$5,200.

Review of the Board of Health Budget Request –

- Ms. Ashleigh indicated that she had spoken with BOH Chair David Kowalski earlier in the day and he indicated that he could not attend. Mr. Kowalski indicated that he is requesting that the Lake Water Testing line be increased by \$1K and that \$4K be provided to grind the brush at the Town's brush dump.
- Selectman Johnson asked how the BOH determines when a lake water test is necessary. Mr. Harhay indicated there is a routine weekly test at sites around the lake, with testing increased if test results are abnormal. Ms. Ashleigh recalled regularly posting lake test results when serving as Town Clerk.
- Mr. Fancy recalled that Harrington Hospital Services used to be a line item in the BOH budget. Selectman Johnson indicated that the line item was eliminated because no funds had been spent for ~ 3 years. Mr. Harhay recalled that some other organization has assumed responsibility for tracking of medical issues at no cost to the Town.

Note: Selectman Mandell joined the meeting by phone at 6:35 pm, not realizing that Selectman Johnson was in attendance as the liaison to the Finance Board. Since two Select Board members would constitute a quorum of that Board, Selectman Mandell agreed to sign out.

Review of the Building Department Budget Request –

- The Building Inspector had not submitted a budget request.
- Mr. Harhay noted that the Zoning Enforcement Officer position appears to not to be currently filled and the position has not been posted. Ms. Robbins indicated that the responsibilities of the position would, by law, default to the Building Inspector. Ms. Riley suggested that it would be appropriate for Selectman Johnson talk to our new Building Inspector to ensure that enforcement responsibilities are being addressed.

Review of Draft Minutes –

The draft minutes for 11/11/20, 1/06/21, 2/17/21 and 2/24/21 had been previously distributed for review.

- 11/11/20: Motion to approve, as amended, by Mr. Harhay, 2nd by Ms. Robbins; all in favor by roll call vote.
- 01/06/21: Motion to approve, as amended, by Mr. Harhay, 2nd by Ms. Robbins; all in favor by roll call vote.
- 02/17/21: Motion to approve by Mr. Fancy, 2nd by Mr. Harhay; all in favor by roll call vote.
- 02/24/21: Motion to approve by Mr. Fancy, 2nd by Mr. Harhay; all in favor by roll call vote.

Review of the Weekly Expenditure Report –

Mr. Harhay noted that only 10% of the funds in Tax Title Expenses line have been expended, while we are 8 months into the fiscal year. Ms. Robbins thought that other funds were available to the Treasurer to allow for aggressively pursuing this activity.

Review of the Special Revenue Report dated 12/31/20 –

- Mr. Fancy was concerned that we seem to be running a deficit in the Off-Duty Police account, which appears to indicate that the Police Chief is submitting off-duty payroll hours prior to the companies using the service paying the Town. Mr. Fancy noted that, a few years ago, the Town paid off about a \$16K year-end deficit in this account as bad debt.
- Ms. Robbins noted that companies that do not pay the Town in a timely manner can be charged a fee. This typically resolves late payment issues and eliminates potentially getting into a deficit situation.

Review of the Cemetery Department Budget Request -

Mr. Brian Johnson indicated that he recommends level funding the expense line at \$1K.

Review of the Tree Warden Budget –

- Although the Tree Warden position is currently integrated into the responsibilities of the Highway Surveyor, Mr. B. Johnson said that consideration should be given to increasing the stipend should someone other than the Highway Surveyor have the responsibility; he said that he would research the compensation paid by other for the Tree Warden position.
- The Tree Warden requested that \$100K be provided for the removal of dead or dangerous trees along roadways in FY22. He indicated that this would deal with about one-quarter of the population requiring removal. The Tree Warden said that the Town owns many properties taken through tax title that have trees that need to be cut down. Although the Tree Warden initially said that he wanted the funds for tree removal to go the Tree Warden Expenses operating budget line, Ms. Robbins pointed out that it would seem advantageous to have the funds be provided through a warrant article, as then they would remain available for tree removal until spent. The Tree Warden agreed that funding through a warrant article made sense.

Review of the Highway Department Budget –

- Surveyor Johnson proposed an increase of 3.0% in his salary and the same increase in employee full-time and part-time wages. The *Snow & Ice Wages* line and the *Snow Removal Expenses* line would respectively remain at the standard \$25K and \$40K amounts. He said that *Highway Fuel* could be level funded at \$45K and proposed that *Highway General Expenses* be increased from the FY21 approved amount of \$150K to \$170K for FY22. For the *Highway Road Improvement* line, the Surveyor's request was for \$250K.
- Surveyor Johnson noted the possibility that funds might be needed to support Old County/Sandy Beach road improvements but, since this is an in-kind STRAP Grant project, the Town's share will likely be satisfied through the use of Highway Department resources.
- Ms. Ashleigh asked if the Department was requesting any capital equipment and Surveyor Johnson responded that they were going to submit a warrant article requesting ~ \$75K for a skid steer loader. Mr. Harhay asked that a Capital Purchase Request form be submitted to the FinBd and Mr. Johnson said that he would follow up.
- Mr. Fancy suggested that the Highway Department consider looking for a used or surplus skid steer, which could reduce the cost considerably. Selectman Johnson

said that grant opportunities are available for capital purchases; the Surveyor said that he would confer with the Grant Writer to see if there is a current opportunity.

Budget Review –

- The participants reviewed the line amounts in two drafts, the one developed by Mr. Fancy and the other by Mr. Harhay, with both working towards balancing the budget. Prior to tonight discussion with the Tree Warden/Highway Surveyor, Mr. Fancy felt that we were ~ \$150K in the red, but it now appears that the deficit is more like ~ \$250K. Given the budget lines that have not been addressed e.g., the stabilization accounts for the repair of the dam and roadways, Mr. Harhay felt that the current deficit was actually higher. General Stabilization was well-funded during ‘good’ past years and is within the DOR suggested range.
- Mr. Fancy asked if the \$85K going into Capital Stabilization, for the scheduled replacement of Town vehicles, was necessary, as the \$45K for the new police vehicle approved at STM did not come out of Capital Stabilization. Mr. Harhay indicated that the Capital Stabilization account was developed to allow level funding each year for purchases, rather than having large swings in funds needed annually... sustainability for at least 5 years was the goal. Based on not making the planned withdrawal from Capital Stabilization for the police vehicle, Mr. Harhay will assess whether budgeting a lesser amount will satisfy needs over the next 5 years.
- Ms. Robbins initiated a review of how Cherry Sheet receipt and expenses data was integrated into the levy limit calculation. Mr. Harhay indicated that the values being used are those recommended by the Town accountant based on her review of actuals.
- Selectman Johnson mentioned that we might want to establish a COLA recommendation based on norms in Western MA; last year, the FinBd researched data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- Mr. Harhay noted that ~ 6 years ago, the Assessors agreed to transfer the excess in their Overlay account for use in that fiscal year’s Town budget. There appears to be a significant excess currently in that account and, after further discussion, it was suggested that the Select Board request the Assessors to determine if Overlay funds are available for transfer.
- Relative to the Employee Benefit lines for health insurance and retirement contribution, Ms. Ashleigh asked Mr. Harhay (liaison to the Treasurer) to check with Ms. Blodgett to whether initial estimates remain satisfactory. Members briefly discussed the fact that a recent audit of the Hampden County Retirement Board uncovered some serious deficiencies.

Discuss Town Report –

Ms. Ashleigh noted that the Finance Board’s section of the Annual Town Report is due on March 24, 2021. Members discussed the general type of information submitted in past years

in terms of the narrative and financial charts. Mr. Harhay and Selectman Johnson to provide Ms. Ashleigh with reports from recent years. It was noted that these reports should be based on a calendar year, rather than a fiscal year.

Roundtable –

- Ms. Riley indicated that the ATM is scheduled for Wednesday, May 26, 2021, which requires that the Finance Board public hearing on the FY22 budget be on or before Tuesday, May 11, 2021.
- Mr. Fancy requested that Town Meeting minutes and budget data be made easier to locate on the website. Mr. Harhay noted that the website was upgraded about 6 years using a Community Compact Grant, although the full capability has not been utilized. Selectman Johnson suggested checking with Tantasqua to see if a software-savvy student might be interested in helping staff to enhance our municipal website.
- Mr. Harhay recognized that we had forgotten to discuss the agenda item on the Capital Planning process. Due to the length of this meeting, he suggested that the topic be covered at the next meeting, with all in agreement.

Adjournment –

Mr. Fancy made the motion to adjourn, Ms. Robbins 2nd; approved unanimously by roll-call vote at 8:28 pm.

Respectfully submitted: Andrew Harhay, Acting Secretary