

Holland Finance Board

27 Sturbridge Road, Holland, MA 01521

Holland Town Hall – Community Room

Meeting Minutes for Thursday, February 23, 2023

Virtual and Physical Meeting of the Board and Guests

Meeting Attendance –

Members in attendance, Andrew Harhay, Cara Bogacz, Karen Peret, Paul Tortolani.

Remote: Robbin Luzon, Clelland Johnson, Select Board, Stacy Stout, Town Administrator.

Guests in Person: Valerie Lundin, Town Clerk, Ernie Fancy, Select Board, James Whalen, Select Board.

Open Meeting – The Finance Board Chair called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM, as did the Chair of the Select Board.

1. Approval of 2/2/23 meeting minutes:

A question of whether the wording in a section could be modified for clarification. A change in wording was proposed by Cara. Approval of the amended minutes were moved by Cara Bogacz, seconded by Karen Peret and approved unanimously by roll call vote.

2. Approval of 2/16/23 meeting minutes:

Motion to approve made by Cara Bogacz, seconded by Karen Peret, and approved unanimously by roll call vote.

3. Review of Town Clerk Budget request:

Holland Town Clerk, Valerie Lundin presented her proposed budget to the Finance Board. She highlighted the costs of election wages and expenses, both of which were high this past year due to primary and general elections being held in addition to town elections. Both line items were adequate to cover those costs, including voting machine maintenance, and no additional funding was requested

She identified the need to address the expense required for updating our Town bylaws, using the services the vendor, Element One. Select Board member Fancy assisted in helping the board understand what Element One does and why. Element One is a firm that provides Bylaw updating and conformance services. It reviews the town's bylaws, compares them to the warrant articles and checks those against the Attorney General's office for determination of final bylaw changes. Once the Select Board reviews and returns comments to Element One, it returns a clean draft to the Board for approval. The cost for this updating service is \$3,000 and the cost for routine access is currently \$1,200 per year. This amount is likely to change from year to year depending upon the volume of by law changes in any year. It was suggested that two new line items be included in the budget to reflect the service and the subscription separately on an annual basis going forward.

A question arose about \$3,000 appropriated by the previous Town Clerk to acquire a new drop box for the Town, as there has been no progress. Valerie said she would investigate and pursue the matter.

A question was raised about the Asst. Clerk stipend. Val responded that she had appointed Kathy Boyer as Assistant Town Clerk. The \$6,000 amount being requested is to allow Ms. Boyer's to work more hours. She would work either AM or PM or a mix of hours M to Th to balance Val's hours. The proposed hourly rate of pay was not provided, although the range discussed was from \$15 to \$18/hour for the part-time position. It was noted by Stacy that a compensation study will be performed that will provide grade levels for positions as well as a component that considers years of experience.

A question was posed regarding the 50% increase in the wage being requested by the Town Clerk. The ensuing discussion revealed that the salary for the position had been substantially reduced several years ago, during a transition from very experienced Town Clerk to one with no experience. It was calculated by Stacy that if the cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) had been applied to that salary for each year since its reduction, the current requested line item for salary would be on target with the calculation.

4. Review of Select Board Budget request

The proposed FY24 budget was quite similar to the FY23 budget. The hourly wage information currently being sought by the Treasurer will provide additional insights into appropriate changes in rates. The average hourly wage for clerks in Holland is \$19/hr. Increases in two wage line items were proposed. The Assistant Town Administrator's current wage is proposed to be increased to \$18/hr., which would be by 12.5%. Then the incumbent would receive the COLA increase and have 4 additional hours per week added to her work schedule. The All Board Clerk current wage is also proposed to be increased to \$18/hr., which would be by 9.1%. Then the incumbent would receive the COLA increase. No additional hours were requested.

There was discussion as to whether wage increases should be pegged to the COLA recommended to us by the Select Board (8%) or to the current CPI (6%). Each percentage point in additional wages for our municipal employees equates to about a \$10,000 increase in the town budget. While overall impact may seem small, it is important to have consistency across this decision, making for fairness to all employees and a transparent process.

Discussing energy costs, it was noted that the town's electrical costs have been locked into a three-year contract with Constellation, which should allow level funding in that area. For the cost of heating public buildings, the Select Board is considering some money saving options that would allow the line to be level funded.

The cost for ambulance Service was level funded in the requested budget. is represented with an estimated number as well. The upcoming meeting of officials from the three towns –Brimfield, Holland, Wales - will hopefully provide more clarity.

Relative to the Lake Maintenance line, the new company that won the bid to provide weed control services has introduced a different chemical, which is expected to be effective over multiple years. It was proposed that the line be level funded at \$40,000.

Additional mention was the difficulty of completing preparation of the budget without full numbers from the Highway Department and the lateness of the Cherry Sheets numbers this year.

The Chair of the Select Board closed their meeting at 7:27 PM, with only our Select Board liaison remaining.

5. Discuss Highway budget with Surveyor:

The Highway Clerk had asked to have Brian Johnson put on the agenda, so he could provide and discuss a requested amount for the Road Improvement line in the Highway budget requested for FY24, which has typically been a very significant dollar amount. Unfortunately, Brian did not show for the meeting.

6. Budget Development Activities:

The Finance Board returned to a discussion of the pending decision on the wage and salary increases to be provided by the cost-of-living-adjustment for town personnel. Each discussion on this has returned to the need for comprehensive and comparative data on wages and positions for comparable municipalities on which to base our decisions.

7. Select Board Updates:

Clelland indicated that the Select Board had exhausted the IT budget line and would be requesting a transfer from the Finance Board Reserve Fund. We are all waiting to hear from Tantasqua officials about the regional school budget and are asking the assessor for more detail on the increase in real estate assessments.

8. Roundtable comments:

Cara expressed concern about the lack of full highway department expenses data and the Board of Assessor Chair's comment of having an additional ~ \$160,000 of potential receivables before Holland reaches its taxation ceiling and whether it provides increased revenue that could be considered for appropriation.

Adjournment:

Karen Peret moved to adjourn. It was seconded by Cara Bogacz and was approved unanimously, by roll call vote. The Chair of the Finance Board closed the meeting at 8:06 PM.

Respectfully Submitted by,

Paul Tortolani