

Holland Finance Board

27 Sturbridge Road, Holland, MA 01521

Holland Town Hall – Community Room

Meeting Minutes for Thursday, March 2, 2023

Virtual and Physical Meeting of the Board and Guests

Meeting Attendance –

Members in person: Andrew Harhay, Cara Bogacz and Paul Tortolani, Karen Peret

Members attending remotely: Robbin Lauzon

Member Absent: None

Guests in person: Stacy Strout, Town Administrator; Laurie Barkus, Town Accountant; Sharon

Ashleigh - Town Treasurer

Guests attending remotely: Clelland Johnson – Select Board

Open Meeting –

The Chair called to order at 6:01pm.

1. Approval of 2/23/23 meeting minutes, if applicable.

Karen made the motion to approve the minutes Cara seconded; approval was unanimous, by roll call vote.

2. Review Treasurer, Capital Planning and Employee Benefits budget request.

Sharon indicated that she will not know the exact numbers for the Capital Planning budget until about April. She is requesting \$62,500 from free cash to pay off the Sandy Beach/Mountain Loan and that any available funds from free cash, if possible, be used to pay-down the Sichel Loan principle, so as to reduce the total subject to upcoming higher interest rates. Sharon asked to increase ~~in~~ the Assistant Treasurer line to \$5,616, which would be for 6 hours a week at \$18 per hour. She deleted the temporary loans line item as it will not be needed this year and does not need the line item for Treasurer Bank fees, as she will not do business with banks that charge fees. She is requesting an increase in the Treasurer Salary from the initially requested \$58,725 to an of \$60,000, which she feels is equal to the same hourly rate as for the Principal Assessor's salary, which she calculates to currently be \$42.80/hr., based on weekly work hours. Comparative data from the salary schedule of other towns shows that Treasurers uniformly earn more than Assessors which she feels would not be the case in Holland on an hourly basis

3. Review Accountant budget request.

Laurie indicated that the contract for Outsourced Accounting Services would be \$34,200 and she requested \$250 for expenses. There will be no Audit for 2024, so that line item was left at zero.

Laurie provided information on the Levy Ceiling, the Levy Limit and the Levy amount. At a recent Select Board meeting, the Board of Assessor Chair gave the impression that an additional ~ \$161K

might be available for appropriation in FY24. Laurie indicated that the amount is not extra for FY24, but an amount already calculated into the levy amount that can be appropriated.

4. Budget development activities.

Robbin sent out a draft of the 2024 budget earlier in the week. To help members in deliberating on the budget to be recommended at ATM, giving that he will be on vacation in March, Andy distributed a budget spreadsheet showing his first cut suggestion for creating a balanced operating budget and the use of free cash. The budget has to remain somewhat fluid at this time, as the State has a way to go before finalizing their Cherry Sheet numbers.

5. Select Board Updates.

Clelland reported that the Select Board has discussed the issue of stipends for Committee and Board volunteers. Several of the Boards/Committees have requested increases in the stipends for the 2024 budget, in one case representing a 400% increase in the stipend line item. As the 2024 budget looks to be pretty tight, the Select Board has decided to forego their stipend and suggested that all stipends be eliminated.

Following a lengthy discussion, the Finance Board felt that it was the Select Board's responsibility to start a conversation with residents on the possible elimination of stipends, as it will likely be a very controversial issue. Andy indicated that he does not anticipate that the Finance Board will vote to increase any of the current stipend amounts.

Select Board members and Finance Board Chairs from Holland, Brimfield and Wales met with the Action Ambulance officers regarding issues important to their delivery of services. The Select Board has not made a final decision in regard to continuing with Action Ambulance or bidding out the contract.

There was a Saturday 'listening session' for residents on development of the required Hazard Mitigation Plan with ten town residents in attendance. The final report will be officially submitted at the end of March. When accepted, Holland will be eligible for government grants to help mitigate areas of vulnerability. [This topic was discussed under Select Board Updates, although Clelland suggested that Andy provide the info.]

6. Roundtable comments.

No additional comments.

7. Next meeting – 3/9/23

Adjournment – Karen made the motion to adjourn the meeting and Cara seconded; approval was unanimous. The Chair adjourned the meeting at 8:19pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Peret