

TRIBOARD BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE &
CAPITAL PLANNING COMMITTEE
Meeting ~ Tuesday, February 28, 2023, 7:00 PM ~ ZOOM

In Attendance: Greg Johnson, Lauri Plourde, Justine St John, Natasha Rivera, Peter Campbell, Jillian Prendergast, Jon Larkin, Mary Brannelly

Mary made a motion to accept the minutes of the December 13, 2022 meeting; 2nd by Natasha; in favor Justine, Natasha, Mary.

Greg didn't have the minutes of the January 10, 2023 meeting available. We'll vote on those at our next meeting.

Lauri noted that the FY 23 Revenue/Expenditure overview is as of January 31, 2023. We are approximately 58% spent currently. Water expenditures are 63% spent; Sewer is 61% spent. Water department has a \$500,000 reserve; Sewer department has a \$250,000 reserve if needed.

- ❖ Revenue is a little lower than last year at this time;
- ❖ trash is down 51% for solid waste and stickers;
- ❖ investment income has come up significantly; Jen Welsh, Treasurer, has been investing where we will get the best return;
- ❖ the Opioid Settlement Funds of \$44,878 is a one time revenue;
- ❖ regarding Medicaid, the State may be stopping the auto enrollment so we may have to go back to manually enrolling

Fy24 Budget Development

- ❖ The Net Local Aid from House 1 is (\$18,818) vs Greg/Lauri's estimates. They had estimated a 2 ½% Revenue increase and 2 1/2 % Assessments, which was good. (Decrease in Chapter 70 funds contributed to the decrease)
- ❖ The Health Insurance cost is decreasing from 8% to 5.4%, resulting in an additional \$144,500
- ❖ The adjusted Revenue (\$18,818) less the additional health insurance funds of \$144,500 results in an additional \$125,682 to spend for FY24
- ❖ We haven't received the Assabet Valley Vocational Assessment yet ~ it should be coming any day
- ❖ Regarding PEG Access funds that total \$346,434 for a full year, Lauri noted that \$210,000 will come from PEG and the balance will be subsidized by the town to make up the difference (due to the Verizon contract being up for renewal as of December, 2024 and the town not knowing how payments may change/be reduced)
- ❖ There was discussion about Free Cash and why we end up with significant funds; Greg and Lauri said that 3-5% of the full budget is the norm.
- ❖ There was discussion about health insurance and the fact that it represents substantial \$\$; should we be studying alternatives to what is offered currently.
- ❖ There was discussion about Greg's proposal for how to spend the additional \$125,000+; Chief Stowers had been requesting a Deputy Fire Chief for 4-5 years ~ Greg was recommending that position as well as \$20,000 in additional funds for Library Technology. Peter noted that the Deputy Fire Chief position would not be well received by FinCom.
- ❖ There was discussion about the School Committee presenting our own budget at Town Meeting because of the cuts that will have to be made if we receive just 2.6%; in discussions with Brian and Wayne White, personnel positions will have to be cut at the individual schools based on the proposed budget. The needs of our students are increasing and expenses are also increasing (similar to that of the Town). Justine asked where the funds would come from to make up the additional funds we will be requesting. Options discussed were:

- The \$125,000 additional funds to try to retain positions vs adding another position in the Fire Department
- Free Cash
- Override in FY25 if we use available Free Cash
- Reductions from other budgets (ie Public Safety)
- The budget doesn't have to be balanced until the tax rate is set; potentially additional funds would be available by Fall Town Meeting
- Greg Johnson and Brian Haas have been meeting to discuss the return of the Special Education Circuit Breaker funds of \$257,599 that the School Department provided to the General Fund as funds not spent in 2022 so it became Free Cash in 2023.
- Greg shared his updated recommendation regarding Free Cash that showed the return to the School Department of the \$257,599.
- Justine expressed the concern of using funds from Free Cash for operating expenses (similarly with Greg's recommendation on the Town side)

Capital Planning (Jon Larkin)

- ❖ Mary asked if we can get an updated estimate on the individual household impact of the Green Meadow Project based on the average assessment based on the updated reimbursement being provided by the MSBA. Greg is trying to get that information together
- ❖ Justine is going to the Green Meadow Estimator meeting next Monday; we should have a much better idea of the total cost after that meeting.
- ❖ Alumni Field Bleachers ~ Jon Larkin asked how the process is going:
 - We're required to hire an OPM for any projects of \$1.5M or more
 - \$174,000 has been approved to use by Town Meeting ~ \$100,000 will be used to hire an OPM; the balance will be utilized to rent bleachers between now and installation of the bleachers
 - The bleacher project (bleachers, concession stand, bathrooms) is estimated at \$2M;
 - The CPC approved \$200,000 for the design to create a proposal that will be ready to go out to bid for construction (the standard is 10% of a full project for this phase) ~ an additional \$50,000 is coming from Free Cash
 - Some members of the Field Task Force will be working on the bleacher project
 - As soon as the CPC funding/\$50,000 is approved at Town Meeting, the OPM hiring process will begin

Scheduling Additional Meetings

- ❖ A meeting is being scheduled for the Select Board, Finance Committee and School Committee to hear the Green Meadow Elementary School Building Project presentation and to get questions addressed, especially as it relates to the decisions made about various Net Zero ready parts of the building
- ❖ Justine mentioned Saturday, April 1st with a meeting to start at 9 AM for 1.5 hrs to discuss Budget; followed by another 1.5 hrs to provide the boards with the updated presentation and an opportunity to ask questions based on the newest decisions.
- ❖ Natasha asked if the TA/Supt/SB Chair/SC Chair could start having regular meetings again. Justine will follow up with Jeff.

Next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 12, 2023, 7 PM via ZOOM.

Natasha made a motion to adjourn; 2nd by Mary; in favor Natasha, Mary and Justine.

Meeting ended at 9:45 PM.