

Town of Sterling



Joint Finance and Capital Budget Committee BUTTERICK MUNICIPAL BUILDING 1 PARK STREET, Room: 205 Tuesday, February 6, 2024, 6:30 pm MINUTES

Finance Committee (7):

George Handy, Chair (FinCom)

Joseph King, Vice Chair (FinCom)

Members: Paul Austin, Ezequiel Ayala, Mark Gauthier, Christina Lashua, Lynne Sheppard

Capital Budget Committee (7):

Lynne Sheppard, Chair (CBC)

Liz Pape, Vice Chair (CBC)

Members: Paul Austin, Ezequiel Ayala, Mark Gauthier, Joseph King, Christina Lashua

Recording Secretary: Valerie Handy

I. PRELIMINARIES

- **Attendees:** G. Handy, J. King, L. Sheppard, L. Pape, P. Austin, E. Ayala, M. Gauthier, C. Lashua
- **Other Attendees:** Shari Gonsorcik, Recreation Director; Alex Grebinar, Library Director; Maureen Cranson, Selectboard;
- Dick Maki.
- **Approved:** 1/30/2024 meeting minutes. Motion Lynne Sheppard. 2nd and unanimously approved.

II. AGENDA ITEMS (time permitting)

- **Review new and improved FY24 Budget vs Actual results through 12/31/2023 with department by department comparison to FY23 under/overspend:** Discussion looked at variances through mid-fiscal year 2024. As several department spending trends would tend to be seasonal, it was difficult to form a solid conclusion regarding current year spending.
- **Continue drill down discussions on FY25 Omnibus Budget from prior meeting to look for opportunities. Focus areas for next departmental discussions:**
 - **Library:** The Library Director, Alex Grebinar was in attendance to answer any outstanding questions the Finance Committee may have. The FC was satisfied with the submitted budget and explanations regarding any forecast increases.
 - **Recreation:** The Recreation Director, Shari Gonsorcik was in attendance to answer any questions from FinCom. There were questions regarding a municipal ice rink and drilling core samples at East Waushacum Lake to test for ice thickness. Shari pointed out that an outside skating rink, considering climate change, would be impractical at this point and core sampling may be cost prohibitive. The FinCom was satisfied with the current FY25 recreation projection for FY25 and had no further questions.
 - **Facilities:** The town is in discussion as to the future budgeting for town building maintenance and repair, and the individual who will oversee the budget dollars. A resolution should be forthcoming for the next fiscal year. At this point the FinCom is satisfied with the FY25 projections as currently presented
 - **Council Of Aging:** A minor reduction to the FY25 request was mentioned by Liz Pape as the liaison to the COA. The "landscaping" dollar amount would be struck as it will be a FY24 expense. The FC was satisfied including the modification, and with the COA projection for FY25.
 - It was also mentioned that in the FC rendition of the omnibus budget, the \$250,000 which was requested by DPW has been removed from the omnibus budget and reduced to \$100,000 and reflected in the Capital Budget. With the addition of the new funds for road work of \$267,000 allotted to Sterling from the Commonwealth via the "Fair Share" tax, and the road work capacity of the DPW of \$800,000/year, the new total for road work as reflected in the CBC capital budget format is \$451,000 from Chapter 90, \$257,000 from "Fair Share" and \$100,000 from the town.

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- It was brought up that the Town Administrator has recommended reducing the requested two new fire fighters to one and further reducing the requested “wage” line in the Fire Department FY25 by \$116,000 which includes the reduction and other wage adjustments.
- **Discuss WRSD and MontyTech vs Governor's Chapter 70 release*** [A Message from the Governor | Governor's FY25 Budget Recommendation \(mass.gov\)](#): George Handy led a discussion regarding the formulations utilized by DESE (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) to determine the Minimum Required Contribution each municipality must spend on their school system. Because the MRC for each municipality within a regional school district is calculated independently, each town will have a unique MRC. For FY25 the MRC/pupil for the WRSD follows: Sterling \$10,400, Princeton \$9,900, Paxton \$8,100, Holden \$7,200 and Rutland \$5,500. The MRC/pupil for Montachusett is Sterling \$16,648, Princeton \$15,930, Holden \$11,537, Paxton and Rutland do not have any attending students. A discussion followed and it was decided to continue the discussion until the next meeting and to discuss whether the Finance Committee should generate a letter to the school districts and local legislators seeking relief. Liz Pape will draft a sample letter.
- **Review updated Capital Request Financing matrix (CRFM) with results from CBC meeting just preceding this joint FinCom/CBC meeting.** The current CRFM was presented. A question was raised as to whether the CBC had any cause to be recommending funding sources or if that responsibility lay elsewhere. This will be researched and will be reported at the next meeting.
- **Next Meeting:** February 13, 2024. 6:30pm
- **Other/new/old business – None**

*We are proud that this budget fully funds the fourth-year phase-in of the Student Opportunity Act. The \$6.86 billion in this budget for Chapter 70 education represents a 4 percent increase over fiscal year 2024 budget spending. We are also growing Unrestricted General Government by 3 percent, and overall Local Aid to our cities and towns totals \$8.7 billion, a 3 percent increase.