



**Joint Finance and Capital Budget
Committee
Reports Subcommittee
BUTTERICK MUNICIPAL BUILDING
1 PARK STREET, Room: Conservation
Tuesday, Nov 21, 2023, 6:30 pm
Minutes**

Finance Committee (7):

George Handy (Chair)

Joseph King, Vice Chair (FinCom)

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

Capital Budget Committee (6):

Lynne Sheppard, Chair (CBC)

Liz Pape, Vice Chair (CBC)

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

Recording Secretary: Valerie Handy

I. PRELIMINARIES

- Finance Committee and Capital Committee Meeting called to order 6:30 pm
- Attendees: Lynne Sheppard, Liz Pape, George Handy, Mark Gauthier, Paul Austin, Ezequiel Ayala, Joe King
Motion to approve Minutes of October 26, 2023 as amended, seconded and unanimously approved.

II. AGENDA ITEMS

Sterling Investment Strategy and Execution Plans – Bill Caldwell, Town Administrator: Brokerage firm, Bartholomew is the predominant firm for Massachusetts municipalities. Our Treasury Department is the focal point. Christina Lashua gave a helpful description of how investment limitations as well as timing of incoming returns impact returns. Brief discussion ensued.

FY25 Budget Thoughts and Challenges - Bill Caldwell, Town Administrator: Upcoming budget cycle will follow policy. Anticipation of 3% increase for non-union employees, 2% for Department Head expense requests, 2.5% Library for some items. WRSD Retirement 4.2% last year impacted by Federal Medicare changes. Health Insurance cost increases are expected to be double digits. Bill noted that WRSD Schools make up 53% of the town budget. WRSD management has not yet produced any financial audit reports.

Sterling zoning consists of 88% residential. Forty percent (40%) of commercial zoning is currently used as residential, (allowable uses i.e., apartments), and or grandfathered. Forty percent (40%) of Sterling land is protected. Currently the performance zone is being investigated for rezoning to open-up usage.

Liaison Findings and report outs – All Liaisons: Reports provide some background on management issues that Department Heads face.

Mark Gauthier – Building Inspector: Discussed Omnibus budget. The inspector is salaried, and this expense is split with West Boylston. He has concerns regarding his own salary and is looking for an increase of \$12K over the next two to three years. “What is the Revenue collected from inspection fees (the local receipt portion),” asked FinCom. It was also brought up that a compensation study was done for the town two years ago along with recommended compensation adjustments.

Joe King – Cultural Council: No capital. \$4,500 budget line item the same as last year.

Joe King- 1835 Town Hall; No Capital. No expense in Omnibus budget expected.

Joe King – Worcester Regional School District: No information as yet.

Liz Pape – Council of Aging: New Executive Director. Recent freezer failure and food loss as well as the generator (for emergency shelter contingency) having problems. Generator responsibility split between Sr. Center and Facilities. The HVAC system is also having operating issues. It needs upgrades and annual maintenance. What financial responsibility will Facilities incur? It was noted that Lynn S and Mark G. are the FinCom liaisons for Facilities. Exterior grounds maintenance is contracted outside of DPW.

Lynn Sheppard and Mark Gauthier – Facilities: Department head is part-time, shared with West Boylston. Seven town of Sterling buildings are within Facilities charter. Capital request of \$5k for new Software package to assist with preventative maintenance planning. Expected budget should be approximately \$125k. Mark will try and get an idea of “what should facilities managers be doing.”

Lynne Sheppard - Town Planner: No Capital. No Omnibus budget yet.

Lynne Sheppard- Recreation: No capital. \$70k for Field Design to redo the recreation fields and add more fields. Sherri will work with the Town Administrator and DPW.

Mark Gauthier – Treasurer: No capital. Insurance and Retirement expenses. Health insurance is out to bid.

Liz Pape – Fire: No concerns. Air Bottles will be spread out over several years. Capital request per Liz’s report with no concerns.

Liz Pape, George Handy – Police: No concerns with new capital requests. Assets not yet updated. Police cruiser is an annual Omnibus budget request. A second Police cruiser is an every- other year Capital request. 14 new Tasers will be \$60k over a 5-year payment plan. Dispatcher issues regarding staffing.

Paul Austin – DPW: Defer out reporting. Truck repair, cemetery, lawnmower, Columbarium (\$50k), Swett Hill Drainage,

Paul Austin - Water Department: Town is floating bond and item costs should be consolidated for a single debt. This will include \$1.3M for water main replacement (there will be no tax rate impact and it will affect water rate). The Town needs a new town well. Currently there are three separate well locations. Two wells are functioning and the State of Massachusetts will not allow the re-opening of the third (3rd site Crowley Road). There is \$50 k anticipated for corrosion control and \$32k for small paver.

Ezequiel Ayala – IT: no concerns, computer upgrades.

Paul Austin – Economic Development Council: No capital. Small operating budget

Town Clerk: no capital or expense concerns

Historical Society: Capital for cemetery

Library: Capital for LED lighting

Liz Pape – Veterans: Liz has not yet met with Veterans.

George Handy - BOH: Has not met with BOH yet.

Brief Report out from the Reports Subcommittee – Lynn Sheppard led: The committee whittled down the required reports to six. Two of these reports currently exist and four will be a merging of existing reports. Paul A. and Ezequiel A. will meet with Fred Aponte, Town Accountant and Bill Caldwell, Town Administrator to present report samples, descriptions, and how the reports will be used. A request will be made as to how and when FinCom can obtain these reports.

Brief Discussion on the New Member Training Handbook – Liz Pape: A two-prong approach will be used. This will include links as well as Town of Sterling Specific information. Further discussion for next meeting.

Motion to Consider Mark Gauthier for Capital Committee vacancy (John Kilcoyne resignation): Motion made, 2nd and unanimously approved. The next step of Select Board approval is two weeks out.

Next Meeting TBD

No Public Session questions.

Motion to adjourn meeting at 8:20pm: Motion made, 2nd and unanimously approved.