

Town of Needham
Meeting of the Finance Committee
1471 Highland Ave., Needham, MA
January 27, 2010

Minutes

Members Present:

Lisa Zappala, Chairman	Rick Lunetta
Rick Zimbone, Vice Chairman	Dick Reilly
Matt Borrelli	Steve Rosenstock
John Connelly	Mike Taggart
Richard Creem	

Also Present:

Dave Davison, Assistant Town Manager
Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager
Patty Carey, Director of Parks and Recreation
Chris Coleman, Assistant Town Manager
Tony Del Gaizo, Town Engineer
Dave DiCicco, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Memorial Park
Amy Holland, Office Administrator, Conservation Commission and Board of Appeals
Jeanne McKnight, Chairman of the Planning Board
Rick Merson, Superintendent of the Department of Public Works
Louise Miller, Department of Public Works Assistant Purchasing Agent and Office Manager
Lee Newman, Planning Director
Kristen Phelps, Conservation Officer

Call to Order

Mrs. Zappala called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

Citizen Requests to Address the Finance Committee

There were no citizen requests to address the Finance Committee.

Trustees of Memorial Park Operating Budget Review

Miss Carey and Mr. DiCicco presented the Trustees of Memorial Park's operating budget request of \$750. Mr. DiCicco stated that he is working on a proposal to use donations to upgrade the concession stand in the Memorial Park building, and also hoped to replace the carpet upstairs in the building. In response to questions from Mr. Rosenstock, Miss Carey stated that the carpet work should perhaps be under the direction of the Public Facilities Department although the Trustees were hoping for donations, and that the flowers were purchased by the Parks and Forestry Division and not charged to Memorial Park although probably should be. In response to a question from Mr. Taggart, Miss Carey stated that the Town Engineer and Gale Associates were working on a plan to provide more netting around the baseball field although she did not know where the funding for this would come from.

Planning and Community Development Department Operating Budgets Review

Mrs. Fitzpatrick updated the Committee on a proposal to combine the Planning Department, Conservation Department, and Zoning Board of Appeals into one department and provided the Committee with an itemization of cost differentials. Mrs. Fitzpatrick presented the department's budget request of \$343,203 and noted that the combined department has a budget submission of only one dollar more than the three separate departments combined. With regard to budgeting Mrs. Fitzpatrick stated that the Zoning Board of Appeals and Conservation Department budgets would be combined into a Community Development budget with the Planning budget remaining separate, however, the proposal calls for one Director of Planning and Community Development to oversee both budgets. According to Mrs. Fitzpatrick the budget assumes the hiring of an Economic Development coordinator, provides for an Administrative Assistant in Planning for half-time and Community Development for half-time, and provides for partial funding of the Conservation Officer through Wetlands filing fees. In response to a question from Mr. Rosenstock, Mrs. Fitzpatrick stated that the Economic Development Coordinator has roles of both high-level planning and as a retail ombudsman working directly with merchants, as well as staffing the Council of Economic Advisors. Ms. Newman and Mrs. Fitzpatrick expressed support of the previous Economic Development Coordinator's work with tenants of the New England Business Center. In response to a question from Mr. Borrelli as to whether or not the commercial tax rate is inhibiting business development, Ms. Newman stated that committees are considering this. In response to a question from Mr. Creem, Mrs. Fitzpatrick stated that the consolidation of the departments with two separate budgets was a logical first step, especially to have one department manager supervising an office with one payroll. Mrs. Fitzpatrick added that this proposal dates back some time, stated that this is the model in several surrounding towns, and that the configuration of the Public Services Administration Building presented the opportunity to make the change now.

In response to a question from Mr. Borrelli, Mrs. Holland stated that the Conservation Commission would be voting on revised rules at its January 28 meeting, including having applicants billed for legal notices in the newspaper. According to Mrs. Fitzpatrick the filing fee for a residential applicant is \$150 and that currently half of that goes to legal notices. In response to a question from Mr. Rosenstock, Mrs. Fitzpatrick stated that the Economic Development Coordinator position had shifted classifications from NR-5 to M-1 due to its status on the management team of the Town, and added that the budgeted salary is for someone just entering the position. In response to a question from Mr. Reilly, Ms. Newman stated that the Dues and Subscriptions line item had increased as a result of the addition of the Economic Development Coordinator and associated memberships and participation in symposiums. In response to a question from Mr. Zimbone, Ms. Phelps stated that the Professional and Technical line item is budgeted at a required amount in case of an appeal requiring the contracting of outside counsel and expert witnesses. Ms. Phelps stated that these cases are not common but still necessary for which to budget. In response to a question from Mr. Reilly, Ms. Phelps stated that she needs a Blackberry device to access e-mail when out of the office, which she is required to be for plenty of hours in the field as Conservation Officer.

Review of Budget Follow-Up with Department of Public Works

Mr. Merson provided follow-up information from the Committee's questions on the Department of Public Works budget when presented on January 11. Mr. Merson stated that he had analyzed the Department's fuel consumption, noting a range of 9000 gallons of gasoline and 30,000 gallons of diesel fuel, and revised the prices to \$2.75 per gallon for gasoline and \$3.10 per gallon for diesel fuel to result in a \$10,000 reduction from the original submission. Mr. Zimbone and Mr. Merson discussed the Department's relations with NStar. In response to a question from Mrs. Zappala, Mr. Merson stated that the \$10,000 reduction of the Municipal Lighting budget was due to the conversion to high pressure sodium streetlights and added that billing is based on sunrise and sunset times according to an almanac. Mr. Merson also noted a \$30,000 reduction in asphalt due to favorable bid prices set for 2011, and \$15,000 eliminated from the Highway Division for disposal now performed at the Recycling and Transfer Station. Mr. Merson also stated that a \$50,000 reduction from the Drains budget could be achieved through new equipment accomplishing work that would have previously been put out to bid. In response to a question from Mr. Borrelli, Mr. Merson stated that fuel is not allocated across divisions and therefore not reduced across divisions, although fuel used in snow and ice removal is charged to the Snow and Ice budget when tracked. Mr. Davison added that a snowstorm during the business day does not result in fuel being charged to the Snow and Ice budget as the vehicles are expected to be operating regardless.

FY11 Budget Update

Mrs. Fitzpatrick presented the Town Manager's proposed budget for FY11. Mrs. Fitzpatrick and Mr. Davison discussed the Governor's budget proposal and its potential impact. In response to a question from Mr. Borrelli, Mrs. Fitzpatrick and Mr. Davison stated that the estimate for State Aid of \$6,507,351 would be the floor number as it would be difficult for the Legislature to cut during an election year, and that this was close to the FY03 number. Mrs. Fitzpatrick noted reductions in energy costs, restructuring group health insurance plans to result in higher deductibles and higher co-payments, and no cost of living adjustments for employees. In response to a question from Mr. Connelly, Mrs. Fitzpatrick stated that the proposed budget did not fund any DSR-IV requests and that the HVAC Technician requested by the Public Facilities Department was accomplished through reclassification of an existing position. In response to a question from Mr. Rosenstock, Mrs. Fitzpatrick stated that a full-time Conservation Officer was necessary. Mrs. Fitzpatrick alerted the Committee to proposed financial warrant articles, and stated that no appropriation was proposed for the Compensated Absences Fund. In reviewing changes from departmental requests, Mrs. Fitzpatrick stated that the Reserve Fund was reduced to balance the budget and proposed that any savings from the Minuteman Regional High School assessment be placed in the Reserve Fund. Mrs. Fitzpatrick also noted a proposed increase of \$221,000 to the School Department, expressing concern over the use of one-time revenue and stating that this amount of one-time revenue could be used for School Department capital, freeing up cash capital money for Department of Public Works core fleet requests. Mr. Davison noted items listed as Performance Budget in the book were not funded. Mrs. Fitzpatrick distributed to the Committee a proposal for a single Veterans District for the Towns of Needham, Dover, Wellesley and Weston. Mr. Davison reported that he expects a Reserve Fund transfer request from the Town Clerk in February, however, Snow and Ice was sufficient for now.

Accept Minutes of Prior Meetings

Mr. Lunetta requested that his recusal from the discussions of the Personnel Board and Diversified Community Social Services budgets be noted in the Minutes of the Meeting of January 25. No action was taken.

Finance Committee Updates

Mr. Zimbone distributed documents presented by the Superintendent to the School Committee the previous night, with itemizations of changes from the Superintendent's original proposed budget to the School Committee's voted budget. Mr. Zimbone noted that the changes included the retention of a Pollard administrator and a high school teacher, and stated that the School Committee would like to add back another high school teacher if money were available.

Mr. Rosenstock stated that he was uncomfortable with the Town Manager's proposed reduction of the Reserve Fund and expressed a belief that the Town Manager's budget should not be a fait accompli from the Finance Committee.

Adjourn

There being no further business, a motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting, whereupon the meeting was adjourned by a vote of 9-0 at 9:17 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Taggart
Acting Secretary