

Town of Needham
Meeting of the Finance Committee
1471 Highland Ave, Needham, MA
January 6, 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	Brian Nadler, Chairman of the Park and Recreation Commission
Chris Coleman, Assistant Town Manager	Margaret Pantridge, Chairman of the Board of Library Trustees
Elizabeth Dennis, Human Resources Director	Dan Walsh, Building Inspector
Denise Garlick, Selectman	
Ann MacFate, Needham Public Library Director	

Call to Order

Mrs. Zappala called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm.

Citizen Requests to Address the Finance Committee

There were no citizen requests to address the Finance Committee.

Building Inspector Operating Budget and Capital Requests Review

Mr. Rosenstock presented the Building Inspector's base budget request of \$461,601, noting that the salary line item in the FY10 appropriated budget listed as \$444,020 exceeds the \$435,243 allocated by Town Meeting due to a shift from the Settlements and Classifications line item to settle contracts for non-represented town employees. In response to a question from Mr. Zimbone, Mr. Walsh and Mr. Davison clarified that a request of \$15,750 for national accreditation of the department listed in the DSR-IV column on the budget spreadsheet is actually a DSR-V request, which is used to request a financial warrant article outside of the department's annual operating budget. Mr. Rosenstock noted that the Building Inspector's expenses remained stable at \$15,682, and noted the Building Inspector's one DSR-IV request of \$7416 to increase the weekly hours of the Sealer of Weights and Measures from 9.38 to 15. In response to a question from Mr. Reilly, Mr. Walsh stated that the fact that permits are down by 10 percent allows for more interaction of employees with those coming into the department seeking permits. Mr. Rosenstock noted that no other Building Departments in Massachusetts have the national accreditation Mr. Walsh seeks with the DSR-V request, however, Mr. Walsh believes that another set of eyes examining the process would be helpful and could be a selling point for the department. In response to a question from Mr. Borrelli, Mr. Walsh stated that Weights and Measures inspections do generate revenue although small amounts; Mr. Walsh

added that whereas building permits generally benefit the applicant, Weights and Measures inspections benefit all consumers and the department has been loath to using these inspections as a revenue-generating process. Mr. Walsh also stated, in response to another question from Mr. Borrelli, that the weekly two hours utilized by the Sealer of Weights and Measures for bookkeeping and processing paperwork could conceivably be done by an intern, however, it would be challenging to keep the same person doing the two hours of work each week. In response to a questions from Mr. Reilly and Mr. Lunetta, Mr. Walsh stated that the Sealer of Weights and Measures has issued fewer than half a dozen fines over the past five years, and stated that most violations are due to lack of upkeep and maintenance rather than fraud, i.e. failing to change the price of an item in the computer when it is listed for a lower price on the store shelf.

Public Library Operating Budget and Capital Requests Review

Mr. Taggart presented the Library's FY11 base budget request of \$1,338,026 and noted that the increase in the salary line item of the FY10 appropriated budget, listed at \$1,075,014 up from the \$1,049,991 appropriated by Town Meeting was, as was the case with the Building Inspector's budget request, due to a shift from Settlements and Classifications. Mr. Taggart noted that the Library's reports indicate it has seen significant increases in circulation and requests for materials since the new building opened in 2006, and is also experiencing significant increases in business due to the poor economy. According to Mr. Taggart the Library has seven DSR-IV requests, the first four of which (Children's Librarian, ten hours of part-time circulation desk help, 9:00 am opening funding, network transfer pick list page hours) the Trustees of the Library currently fund out of the State Aid Account. Mr. Taggart reported that the Library recently received a State Aid payment of \$14,788.49 and expects another payment of the same amount in May, and also noted that more is being spent out of the State Aid Account than is being received on an annual basis which is not sustainable in the long run. According to Mr. Taggart, State Aid payments are contingent on the Library meeting certification requirements by the State Board of Library Commissioners. In response to a question from Mr. Zimbone, Miss MacFate stated that the consequences of the library being decertified would include loss of the annual State Aid payments as well as not being able to exchange materials with other libraries. In response to a question from Mr. Creem, Miss MacFate noted that the Needham Public Library is still a net borrower with respect to exchanging materials with other libraries, the gap is being closed, adding that the \$25,000 appropriation the library has received for materials in each of the past four years has greatly helped the library's ability to acquire materials for which there is a demand. In response to a question from Mr. Reilly, Miss MacFate reported that any addition or reduction of hours is determined by the Board of Library Trustees. Ms. Pantridge noted that the 9:00 AM opening is very popular and expressed her belief that this has symbolic value as a standard of good service to the community. In response to a question from Mr. Lunetta, Miss MacFate reported that Sunday shifts are all filled by part-time staff. Mr. Coleman added that filling part-time hours can be challenging, and that the times part-time staff are necessary and available are on evenings and weekends outside of normal business hours. Mrs. Fitzpatrick added that Sunday hours were paid at time-and-a-half due to previous difficulty in filling the shifts. In response to a question from Mr. Borrelli, Miss MacFate reported that the Library cannot charge for museum passes as they are considered a normal library service by the State Board, which stipulates that for a library to receive state aid it cannot charge for normal library

services. In response to a question from Mr. Zimbone, Miss MacFate stated that there are currently two people working in the Children's Library and there had been a third person who has since left. Mrs. Fitzpatrick reported that the position has not been filled due to the Town slowing down all hiring. Miss MacFate also presented the Library's capital requests, one of which is \$25,000 in the fourth year of a four-year request totaling \$100,000 to upgrade the Library's materials collections. The other request presented, \$42,800 toward the Library's Technology Replacement plan, was recommended out of secondary cash by the Town Manager. Miss MacFate stated that this covers staff work stations, among other items, and noted that this is separate from other town requests for information technology.

Town Manager/Board of Selectmen Operating Budget and Capital Requests Review

Mrs. Fitzpatrick presented the Town Manger and Board of Selectmen's operating budget request of \$806,149, an increase of 1.2 percent over the FY10 allocated budget. According to Mrs. Fitzpatrick the increase is all in the salary line item and is due to a personnel change within the office as no cost of living adjustments were provided to any employees. Mrs. Fitzpatrick reported that the Town had received an award from the Independent City Managers Association for its response to the Citizen Satisfaction Survey, and stated that this survey will be conducted every two years. In response to a question from Mr. Zimbone, Mrs. Fitzpatrick attributed the increase in the salary line item over the past few years as due to the addition of an Economic Development Coordinator (which was later shifted to the Planning Department) and the addition of the Human Resources Director. Mrs. Fitzpatrick also noted that most money in the Dues and Subscriptions line item goes to the Massachusetts Municipal Association, which she expressed as being particularly important in difficult times to have that network to hear strategies used successfully in other towns. In response to a question from Mr. Rosenstock, Mrs. Fitzpatrick stated that the phone bill has always been in the Rental and Leases line item as opposed to Communications, probably dating back to when the equipment was leased from the phone company. With regard to capital, Mrs. Fitzpatrick noted the Senior Center for which \$400,000 is requested in FY11 in funds for a design for which a Request for Proposal will be issued.

Mr. Reilly pointed out that in many of the budget submissions the respective line items for FY11 simply carried forward the projected expenses for FY10. He observed that this raised a question in his mind about how rigorous the review process had been, and asked for Mrs. Fitzpatrick's thoughts in the issue. She stated that the budgeting directions had called for a level-service approach, stating that in many cases the Division heads had carried forward current numbers unless they had some clear indication that those numbers should be changed.

Park and Recreation Operating Budget and Capital Requests Review

Mr. Rosenstock presented the Park and Recreation Department's operating budget request of \$554,060, an increase of 0.4 percent over the FY10 allocated budget, noting that most line items were identical. Miss Carey noted that revenues were almost even, only down approximately \$2000 from FY08. In response to a question from Mrs. Zappala, Miss Carey reported that very few programs run at a loss, the only real exception being the Playground program which is designed to be affordable, however this is more than made up for by other programs. In response to a question from Mr. Zimbone, Miss Carey reported that most of the energy costs incurred by the department are at Rosemary Pool, including gas for hot water heaters and pumps and fans

needing to run around the clock while the pool is in operation. In response to a question from Mr. Borrelli, Miss Carey reported that the Town charges a Field Administration Fee of \$5.00 per child or \$45 for a block of time for adults and has since 1990, began charging a Field Maintenance Fee of \$5.00 per person in the mid-1990s, and also charges for use of the lights at Memorial Park, DeFazio Field, and Claxton Field. Miss Carey reported that bills are paid out of the 53D Revolving Fund, which cannot be used to pay benefitted employees. Several capital requests were noted as under the jurisdiction of other departments, however Miss Carey noted one request under the Community Preservation Act for which the Town has been in consultation with a landowner with regard to potentially purchasing an easement or the property. Mr. Nadler stated that the request to renovate the Cricket Field building was not placed in the Capital Improvement Plan this year due to current economic realities.

Snow and Ice Removal Budget Update

Mr. Davison presented the Finance Committee with a request to deficit-spend up to \$600,000 in the Snow and Ice Removal line item. According to Mr. Davison this is the same amount of the snow and ice removal overdraft requested at the same time last year.

MOVED: By Mr. Connelly, to approve the request under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 44: Section 31D, that the Town of Needham may make expenditures in excess of available appropriations for snow and ice removal up to the amount of \$600,000. Mr. Reilly seconded this motion, whereupon the motion passed by a vote of 9-0.

Finance Committee Updates

Mr. Davison presented each Finance Committee member with a copy of the Town of Needham's Capital Improvement Plan for FY2011-FY2015 and provided an overview of the document.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick notified the Finance Committee that she will recommend to the Board of Selectmen that the Town create one Veterans District with the towns of Dover, Wellesley, and Weston with the required full-time Veterans Agent covering the entire district. According to Mrs. Fitzpatrick, this will provide efficiency when the Town has to replace its Veterans Agent.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick reported that she will recommend that the Planning Board hold a public hearing regarding the potential consolidation of the Departments of Planning and Economic Development, Conservation, and Zoning Board of Appeals.

Mr. Zimbone updated the committee on the School Department budget process, reporting that significant cuts had been discussed and noting that there had been a meeting of the school liaisons with the School Committee's budget liaisons and the School Administration the previous day with another meeting approaching next week. As Special Education is a significant driver in the school budget, Mr. Zimbone reported that statistics on Special Education would be presented to the Finance Committee at the January 13 meeting.

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 9:51 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Taggart
Acting Secretary