March 31, 2021

Budget Meeting of the Finance Committee held on Wednesday, March 31, 2021 beginning at 6:02 p.m. in the Selectmen's Conference Room and conference call.

Please be advised that by Order of the Governor: Order suspending certain provisions of the open meeting law, G.L.c.30A, Sec. 20 which limits public access – this meeting will be conducted over conference call and recorded for public access. Eric Gregoire, Anthony Alves, Joan Cavallo, Richard Moskal and Kim Collins were present in the Selectmen's Conference Room. All other members attended by conference call. The recorded meeting will be publicly available through LCTV.

Members present: Anthony Alves, yes; Susanne Boyea, yes; Joan Cavallo, yes; Maureen Downing, yes; Christopher Ganhao, yes; Richard Moskal, yes; Beverly Tokarz, yes and Eric Gregoire, yes.

Members excused: Nicole Parker

Kim Collins was also present

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First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

At this time the committee met with Jodi Zepke, Director of the Senior Center to discuss her budget. Her FY'21 budget totals $425,000. The requests outside of the Level 1 Budget is $40,000 for Personnel and $24,000 for General Expenses.

Ms. Zepke said that there are two employees that retired and one employee out on workman's compensation. She is looking to fill the two positions. She can't give a true figure of how much money she will need. The doors are not open at the Center. She feels that they will be inundated with people when the Center opens. In order to handle 4-500 people a day, she can't do that with the staff that she has. The request was for an additional full-time person and increase the hours of the cook to full time. The cook is preparing 200 plus meals a day, using the staff. When the doors open, there won't be anyone to help her. There are two volunteers in the kitchen. Presently, the cook works 30 hrs. She would like to add 5 hrs. to bring her to full time. She doesn't know what the new position will be. She said that 90% of the calls that she receives are from people over 65 years of age. There are a lot of expectations. She doesn't know if there will be extended hours? She received approval to start to do tours indoors. They are extending the van to 5 days a week. The transportation has increased. With 1 part time driver, it's hard to schedule over 3 days so their increased to 5 days. They will open the fitness room, by appointment. The doors are not open. Their taking one activity a month inside to see how that will work. In May, if things are going well, she will expand the programs. Three days a week all staff is in the kitchen. She brought some of the volunteers back in to help.

Mr. Moskal asked what the new position would be. Ms. Zepke doesn't want to be overlooked for a new position. Mr. Alves said that the position would be based on the demand when the doors open. It's to keep up with the demand and being able to provide level services. Whether she

need is a kitchen helper, a part-time activity helper, she doesn't know until the doors open to the public.

Ms. Collins said that there isn't a good understanding of what type of position she will need. The reason Ms. Zepke was asked to come up with general expenses, salary money is because she will be stuck with the budget until June 30, 2022. Ms. Collins concern is, she doesn't want Ms. Zepke to be in a position with not enough funding. Ms. Collins suggested coming up with some amount for temporary help, so when the time does come when she would need part-time assistance with certain things, then she would have the funding. When she's ready to advertise for a position then the funding could be moved over. There have been some people that have requested additional positions, but they have to go through the Board of Selectmen for approval. Ms. Collins would like Ms. Zepke to break down what the $24,000 is for in General Expenses and verify the $5,000 to bring the cook to full time. Ms. Zepke said the cook receives $19.78 per hr. with benefits. As of now, the food budget is fine. If they have to prepare more meals daily, they will need more money to purchase food. Some of the food, supplies can be covered under the COVID relief fund. She will have a conversation with Ms. Collins about that issue. Ms. Zepke also stated that there is a bigger budget for the new building. Mr. Gregoire said there is an increase, but there is not a definite number because of the first year of operations. WestMass Eldercare is continuing with the same figure. It always went to the Selectmen, but now it's in her budget. She doesn't know the figure until it comes in; $2,991 is the figure that was given. Ms. Zepke feels there will be a cost savings because of the updated equipment, LED lighting etc. Ms. Collins explained to Mr. Moskal what the $50,000 would cover which will be added to her budget. There are no other funds set aside to help support the Senior Center. She doesn't know if the Selectmen would approve a LATOS position, if they don't know what it will be. That's why the extra money will cover temporary needs until she finds out what her position will be, then bring it to the Selectmen and get it approved and get a funding for next year's budget.

The committee discussed the Collector's Budget which is $268,313. There is a 1% total increase. There are only changes to Personnel.

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Ms. Collins pointed out that at last night's Selectmen's Meeting, they approved the HR position from part-time to full time which is already in her Level 1 Budget. She won't need any additional funds to cover the position.

In the IT Department Budget, $2,941 was added to the Director's salary. He had a job reclassification that will be effective July 1st. That was also approved by the Selectmen.

Mr. Gregoire said that the HR Change from part-time to full-time is $19,000. It's already in her budget. The IT Department change in the Level 2 budget was $80,000 and went up to $82,815.

Mr. Alves had a comment concerning the FY'22 budget. When the process started, there were additional requests which some were approved by the Selectmen. He feels that the Selectmen are approving some of the requests without the whole picture regarding the Levy Limit. He doesn't like the idea of one department going up 25% in their budget while other departments only increase 2 % or level fund overall. That doesn't sit well with him when looking at the figures on

paper. Ms. Downing agrees with Mr. Alves. There has to be some merit as far as having some equality in making sure that if things are needed, they are done in an equitable way.

At this time the committee met with Chief Pease who is meeting on a conference call. The Chief said there is a 1% increase on the Personnel side. COLA increased 2% due to a retirement and another employee moving.

In General Expenses, there are two-line items that increased. One is the telephone which is software based. All Other Purchase Service are the blackboard devices software. The total increase was less than $1,000. Everything else can be level funded. Capital Expenses. Additional All Other – He is still paying $19,200 for the radio lease, to maintain the radio system while the new system is being built. He signed a contract on the radio system. He's hopeful that within a year, year and a half the system will be up and running at $15,000. Gear cost $4,000 apiece. He maintains a 12-rotation set when gear is being washed or is damaged. The gear is only good for 10 years. He has to recycle the gear out on a rotation. He purchases 4 sets a year. The remainder of the $15,000 is spent on hoses, appliances and everything else they maintain on the apparatus.

Ambulance – there is not a substantial increase on that side due to the retirement of his senior billing clerk. He hired someone new at a lower rate of pay.

General Expense – there was an increase in data processing and maintenance. He has separate software for State reporting. He expanded on that. There are 4 computers that use the PTR software. Every ambulance has a computer which talks to dispatch and the State and what was added, to make their routine more efficient, was an automatic feature which will send a report to the hospital so the EMT's don't have to stay at the hospital to complete their report. Ms. Downing asked how many runs he had during COVID. Chief Pease said there was a nosedive during the middle of March, April, May. Last time there was a 10% increase as far as ambulance transports. This time they fell short of last year because of COVID. This year for the first quarter of the year, things are coming back to normal. They are probably down 120 runs from the previous year as far as transports go. As far as revenue, because of the billing rate increase, revenue is up from the previous year. The provider refund gave $37,000 to help the effects of COVID. Ms. Downing asked if his budget, going forward, will cover his needs with the increase in the ambulance. He feels that it will. He gets reimbursed through the MA Health Medicaid calls. Last year he received $41,000, next year he will see over $60,000. A full year will increase by 40%. Projections for next year are a million and a half, when situations continue to improve.

Purchases of Services – The Chief explained that a portion of that goes to the claims agency who process all of their claims. The rates increased so their percentages increased. They increased that line item by $3,000. The Medical Supplies was increased because of increased costs. With COVID more bills were processed that were COVID related for ambulance supplies. Money was saved but they spent all the money for that purpose. The Chief watched the general overall budget which was slightly increased. He did have the FEMA money and CARES Relief Fund which was made good use of in the budget. That helped the budget this year. He feels that they're on the right path and situations will get back to normal with the vaccines being administered. It was not an easy year. He gives credit to his men and women who didn't stop

working through the pandemic. They were dealing with people who had Covid and were able to make it through. He's also thankful for the federal funds that came through. He spoke about Capital funding and his Subscription Fund creating revenue which supports the ambulances.

Mr. Gregoire continued the discussion with the changes made at last nights Selectmen's meeting. They make their decisions based on the information they received and how their prioritizing their decisions. He doesn't disagree with Mr. Alves in terms of profit. The Finance Committee could work with the Selectmen to design a better plan moving forward towards the future. He doesn't feel that there are other personnel changes that the Selectmen have already made in the process to adjust or approve further. He doesn't think the process in reviewing the requests is ideal (can't understand the conversion). Ms. Collins said that the biggest issues causing confusion is that all of the positions are usual approved at Town Meeting. With the introduction of HR, it all changed. The changes that the Board did approve was the IT Director who met with the Selectmen 3 times and the same with HR. Ms. Zepke does need the extra help, but she doesn't know what she needs at this point and didn't meet with the Selectmen at all. That is the difference. The Police Chief will also be meeting with the Selectmen about his requests. Either way, departments have to see both the Selectmen and the Town Accountant. There is not a perfect way to make sure that everyone is aware of what is going on because requests are not going through Town Meeting. Hopefully there will be better ways to move forward.

Ms. Downing said the timing should matter. Whether it's done through HR and the Selectmen or through Town Meeting, it all needs to get done through the budget. A notification was sent out that any new hires or additional hours requests should be put in the new budget. She feels it's not the change to HR, it's a matter of everyone getting on board with the timing. The process needs to start much earlier and encompass this issue.

Mr. Alves understands the process with HR and IT who met with the Selectmen. There should be more than just meeting with the Selectmen. The decisions can't be made in a vacuum. The whole picture of all requests should be in mind of those making the decisions. Ms. Downing agrees 100% with Mr. Alves. She feels that there needs to be a little more oversight as far as timing and then communication to the departments. Before the Finance Committee sets their budget, they send a letter and that letter contains all the issues they should know before their meeting. Maybe a letter going out from HR before budget time to consider their needs in personnel, has to be done by a specific time, so the Selectmen are able to schedule their meeting to accommodate the budget issues. Mr. Gregoire agrees as well. He thinks that there needs to be opportunity to demonstrate to the Selectmen that this is not working. This could be an opportunity for the Finance Committee to get more involved, to start the budget process earlier, to find out department needs and to gather their requests earlier in the process. The Selectmen have priorities based on their positions, but they need to be informed about the broader context and well versed on a much longer plan than just 1 year.

Ms. Downing suggests that on one of the Agendas after Town Meeting, before summer, the committee could discuss and analyze what their feelings are about the process and make suggestions that could be presented at a meeting with the Selectmen. Mr. Gregoire agrees with the suggestion.

TOWN CLERK
2021 MAY 10 PM 12:30
TOWN OF BELMONT

Town Clerk's Budget - The department's budget is $135,941. There are changes to Personnel salary in accordance with the LATOS Contract and Step increase. There is a decline in elections. There were three elections last year and one this year and the following year.

Conservation Commission – Their budget is $26,474.

Planning Board – Their budget totaled $150,516. It's a 2% increase.

Board of Appeals – Their budget is $5,146 which is level funded from last year.

Building Inspector – Their budget is $231,826. There is a 1.1% decline. The part-time inspectors are now being paid through a Contract. The amount was removed from the General Expenses in the amount of $5,102.03. Other Professional Services line item is at $63,000. There is money there to pay the contractors.

Board of Health - Their budget is $363,257 which is a 3% increase. The budget is based on a nutrition, leaving of a position. They replaced the head nurse, put it in a different position for posting. That is a change in the department. There is an increase in Longevity, Vacations and Others. Ms. Collins said the head nurse left and they no longer have a Director of Nurses. They have an Outreach Position. Didn't affect any of the funding, it affected the offset. There is a Board of Health Agent, an Office Manager and Nurses under the Board of Health. Ms. Cavallo asked if they dropped some of the full-time nurses. There is a reduction in the nurses, but an increase in the part-time appointed line item. The head nurse is paid out of the nursing line item. Now they have an Outreach Coordinator being paid out of full-time employment. That is why their budget only went up 3%. They moved the funding from one line item to another.

Mr. Gregoire said most of the outstanding department have been scheduled. He asked Ms. Collins if she heard from the DPW, Golf Commission and Recreation? Ms. Collins said she talked to the Golf Commission. They have their revenue budget set. The DPW are working on the Sewer Budget. She provided them updated direct costs and a spread sheet and information on how to set up their revenue budget. They are ready to meet with the committee. Ms. Tokarz will schedule meetings with them. Mr. Gregoire would like to meet with either Recreation or Golf Commission next week.

Materials that will go to Town Meeting through the Clerk's Office is April 23rd. The Board of Selectmen will be meeting on April 20st and looking at the Finance recommendations. We will be meeting on April 14th. Mr. Gregoire would like to add another meeting to finish department conversations and start voting on certain departments and work through recommendations. The committee agreed to meet on Monday, April 12th. Reach out to departments to meet. Ms. Collins asked if the committee would like an updated budget to include the Level 2 amounts when voting. Mr. Alves and Ms. Downing would like the approvals from the Selectmen and an updated number on the Public Buildings total. Everyone is happy with the spread sheets that Ms. Collins prepared for them.

Moved by Ms. Downing, seconded by Mr. Alves to adjourn the Finance Committee Meeting at 7:48 p.m.

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Mr. Alves, yes; Ms. Boyea, yes; Ms. Cavallo, yes; Ms. Downing, yes; Mr. Ganhao, yes; Mr. Moskal, yes; Ms. Tokarz, yes and Mr. Gregoire, yes.

Ludlow Finance Committee

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