

Foxborough Advisory Committee

Wednesday, February 20th 2019

In attendance:

Susan Dring, Sean McCarthy, Bernard Dumont, Seth Ferguson, Larry Ooi, Sharon Weiskerger, Stephanie McGowan, Brian Guild, Jennifer Frank-Bonnet

MINUTES

7:05PM - Meeting called to order by Susan Dring to approve Minutes from January 30th and February 6th; Sean M requested holding until next week for more research. ADCOMM agreed. Sue D announced that Larry Stern has resigned and Brent Ruter has taken a Leave of Absence to run for the School Board.

7:07PM – Planning Board

Sue D – Why should we give you any money?

Paige Duncan answered by stating that she has 1 25-hour Planning Dept staffer who assists in vetting zoning and building issues. Now that the 40B housing minimum threshold has been met the town can focus on housing that is responsible to the needs of current residents who want to stay in town but may wish to downsize. There is a \$50K project in the works that will be funded 80% through a State grant if the town puts up the first \$10K.

Seth F – For the seniors who want to stay in town, is it taxes or rent that is making it unaffordable?

P Duncan – It's a supply issue of limited downsizing stock being built; these are concerns expressed at the Senior Center.

Seth F – What about the housing Authority?

P Duncan – Those are low-income housing units, some of which are not subsidized by the State.

B Keegan – We're working on The Common project with monthly meetings – continuously raising new issues/questions about what we want it to offer. There is a 'millennial' problem, whereby recent grads can't afford to buy in.

P Duncan – Additionally, they want 'community living' areas with convenient amenities which Foxborough's neighborhoods don't provide.

Stephanie M – many in Summerfield thought they would be buying 'starter homes' ... 15-20 years later, they're still there.

P Duncan – The budget proposed a \$400 reduction; Bill Keegan cut \$10K. there is another \$20K grant that requires the town to front \$5K in seed money to qualify. The town can qualify for FEMA grants by doing storm preparedness and inventory analysis for supplies and hazards.

Larry O and B Keegan spoke about National Grid issues, disaster stories and future mitigation.

Sue D – asked about the 3-year salary increase @ 14.64%

B Keegan – That relates to the backpay issue due to the Steelworkers contract.

Chris Laviolette – This is difficult to understand; this pertains to an ‘accounting’ bottom line – the \$189K was not exceeded ... it’s not relevant ... it’s not a tenable concern about salary. There is an employee ‘master file’. We won’t pay more than \$18,500 across 3 employees. There were position upgrades/redefinitions plus a pay upgrade.

Stephanie M – Can you describe the new STEPS and reclassifications.

B Keegan – It all averages out when the approved STEP scale was implemented; there were some ‘bump-ups’ when converting to the CBA.

Stephanie M – As we go forward, are they staggered; can we get to more parallel contracts? What was the longest time without a contract?

B Keegan – About 1 year has been the longest; there is no binding resolution on these contracts.

7:30PM – Conservation Commission

The Commission presented a ‘vanilla’ budget, down @ \$3000. It contains the same salary ‘funkiness’ – no surprises.

Sue D – What about grounds maintenance?

There was criticism of maintenance the past year; the Commission received \$10K to finish the Lane Property. The Cocasset River Park and Preserve was reclamation work. Upkeep of Conservation lands will be where most of the funds will go. The Commission receives lots of help from volunteers and Boys/Girls Scouts. Some projects do require some seed money.

B Keegan – They will need some money for maintenance but Seniors who volunteered help to save some funds. We’ve created new maps, both paper and on-line, in response to public comments.

7:40PM – Municipal Buildings

Tony M - The Director of Centralized Maintenance, which began in 2016, reported that the current year is ‘on budget’. The \$176K listed covers ALL buildings. The Public Safety building requires the most attention and services due to its 24/7 operation.

B Keegan – The Town Hall’s cleaning crews are outsourced and not part of the Centralized plan.

B Yukna – Service contracts cover extras such as: code-based services, e.g. elevators. The Department coordinates services to all needed facilities.

Larry O – What about security/alarms.

B Yukna – There has been a consolidation of security/alarms systems; they send messages to Tony directly.

Tony M – We have total control of the password codes and the ability to arm/disarm with my phone.

Sean M – How about the DPW?

B Yukna – Not yet. There are OSHA compliance issues, but nothing in the budget this year. Tony's department will oversee this so it will not be disjointed. Some fire systems companies are proprietary; we're looking for an 'open system' which we feel we can force in the bidding process.

Bernard D – Regarding 'solar credits': didn't the town make an investment? Have we seen a return?

B Yukna – No, it's run through a 3rd party – credits are based on power production. The last 2-3 years, the town was charged \$185K ... now, only \$145K. FY2019 is the first full year of receiving credits. Now, how do credits get applied (only get grants from N Grid).

B Keegan – Take note that the town is making use of land that cannot produce anything (while posing a liability).

Stephanie M – Is there anything that you did not expect that is in the budget?

Tony M – The Public Safety building has an ongoing humidity issue. The building always has challenges due to its multi-purpose nature. At the next chance, we may seal the floors rather than replace carpeting.

B Keegan – The Public Safety has air conditioning problems due to the bays and frequent door openings, it's the biggest problem in the town. With regards to LED lights, we've only been fully on-line for 12 months and we are seeing improvements.

B Yukna – There have been multiple problems with the controls on the compressor unit. They are under warranty but require increased vigilance; it's important to have people in place who are familiar with those systems.

Sue D – Like the library, are there automatic environmental controls?

Tony M – Yes, we do for most buildings which can be controlled by cell phone.

B Keegan – The insurance policies can be very expensive but precautions can be financially beneficial through things such as: turning up the heat on cold nights to avoid frozen pipes. The people who run the buildings make a call to Central Maintenance then can get back to work – services aren't managed by each building's staff.

B Yukna – Simple maintenance (routine filters, etc.) have a longer lasting operational benefit. The costs spent on continuous maintenance extends life and is less than replacements.

8:00pm – General Government

Sue D – What's with the \$125K for software?

B Keegan – That represents the Admin portion of the town-wide system.

C Laviolette – This includes licensing cost associated with the MUNIS software. As for employees: Mike Johns' salary is down 6.8% from Mary Beth's and there is a longevity component factored in. The HR Asst is on a 2% + 2% schedule.

Sue D – Why is there an increase of 14% in 2018 for the HR Asst?

B Keegan – There was an increase in hours for the HR Asst position

Sue D – I'm rather disappointed about the position; they were hired midyear FY2017 and not in that budget – then the salary goes up and wasn't approved.

B Keegan – There was a need in operations; the position was approved in FY2018. I was not expecting this line of questioning. We did not exceed the budget.

Stephanie M – But then something budgeted was not needed. The purpose is to come here with set needs; we're not telling you how to spend it.

Seth F – We can't reallocate expenses. OK, so 2017 is covered. 2018 was approved and not over budget. Now, how are positions aligned? Does that go to Town Manager for adjustment?

B Keegan – This was all approved at Town Meeting.

Stephanie M – Here's the point: it defeats the purpose of looking at the budget with designated positions – was there ever money not needed?

B Keegan – Things come and go during the year – we filled a need. I find it offensive this line of questioning. If you had a question you could have come and asked me.

Sue D – you're saying that you're hiring someone -we're looking at this as the decision has already been made.

B Keegan – You're asking me not to manage. This town suffered without HR for many years, then with this new system, we need to manage that system. You are trying to trip me up on this issue from 2 years ago. I'm not asking for more money.

Sean M – I was the lead on this budget. The expense line decreased dramatically. Someone was hired at the end of the cycle, that's not on us.

B Keegan – I find it puzzling that you are bringing this up tonight. What is your motive? The budget is level into 2020. Why didn't you come to me ahead of time?

Sue D – Are you saying I'm not interested in the salary/wage line?

Stephanie M – I bring this up every year. These questions should be expected of me. I look at the bottom line as a taxpayer and a resident and there is a \$230-250K difference here. We have a Town Manager and I do not see the need for an Asst TM. For 3 years you've been telling us that the town needs to offer good salaries to attract good people ... and now we have more people (employees). MaryBeth: yes, the town needed someone when it did not have anyone. Why does the Asst need to come here? It shouldn't be Mike Johns. I've read MaryBeth's credentials in the papers (since she took the job in Wrentham); he has none of her's (creds) and for \$121K – that's more than MaryBeth's salary just 3 years ago. We had no HR Director – then we did – then we didn't ... can we get a handle the increasing salaries? It's just so hard to wrap my head around so many large salaries.

B Keegan – Why are you asking about something that is not on the line today? You are criticizing me for doing my job. Administrations prior to mine were not working well. Mike Johns was not hired just for HR.

Stephanie M – Few towns of this size have Asst TMs. You are one of the top paid Town Managers in the state. I know you get what you pay for, but if you are the top talent, where is the need for an Asst TM? Is it worth the increase on the incoming position without demonstrating the competence/value? It's hard to buy into the need for an Asst TM but the town is in a better place now; it's not like we're resetting the table. I do apologize for elevating the stress level tonight.

B Keegan – We all do a little bit of each other's positions. There are more aspects that we all can't be experts in. The expectations of the taxpayers are very high; the demand for more services is also high – we should respond to those needs.

Sean M – On paying a HR Director, what is the priority of benefitting another increased part-time position in respect to costs on the chart for the next 10 years.

B Keegan – “If we stand still, we get run over.” This is a good community and people will pay a premium to move here.

Sean M – I have lived in Foxborough all my life and there is a strong public voluntary input to make it what it wants to be.

B Keegan – We just try to make the numbers work. We cut \$600K from the budget requests; every department wanted more. We did budget a 6% increase for Insurance but it came in at only 1% higher.

Sean M – Salaries are forever, meanwhile, CIP requests are a one-time expenditure.

B Keegan – We benchmark salaries but different towns have different levels of service.

Sean M – How do we compare to other towns budget-wise?

C Lavolette – An equalized valuation is what drives a comparison – population or tax rates aren't valued ... look at the operating budget. Bellingham, where I'm from, is the poorest town in Norfolk County. In 10 years, the schools' enrollment has shrunk from 4200 to 2000 – families are getting smaller. Research with cleargov.com for comparables.

Sean M – We've discussed this over and over: the town is high in operating costs, healthcare and pensions due to more hiring. The pensions being the fastest growing and having the longest impact.

8:45pm – Town Clerk

Sue D – So Bob, 5 years ago

Bob Cutler – The salary increases are due to negotiated contracts; my own has only risen by the same 4%. The election workers' compensation has risen to \$12/hour with the State's increase of the minimum wage. Other than those items, it's a rather static budget.

Sue D – How did Early Polling work?

B Cutler – It worked well; it brought new people into the building and helped to cut down on OT for vote processing.

Sue D – What percent of voters voted early?

B Cutler – 2016 = 28% and 2018 = 25%

Sean M – Is there any funding for election aid?

B Cutler – Due to early voting, we received \$1800 for weekend hours and early hours. The State funded 3 hours for 'extended polling hours'.

Bernard D – How many Census forms have been returned?

B Cutler – We're still looking for 2500. It is a State requirement that we conduct the count annually.

Bernard D – How many of eligible voters vote?

B Cutler – Around 3000 or 25%; for Presidential elections it can get up to 85%. There was no difference in total voter turnout with the early voting option.

Sue D – What about dog licenses?

B Cutler – We've completed about 90%. Sue Thibodeau, who is retiring, was a great asset in assisting by even going door-to-door.

Jennifer F – What about pest control?

B Cutler – That is handled by the Animal Control officer which is now managed by the Police Department. The Clerks office merely distributes the dog tags.

8:52pm – Finance

Sue D – About salaries and wages – is this \$46K for a new position?

B Keegan – We will trim that – it pertains to the Water/Sewer position which the town won't need until Q4 in 2020 and then only budget it for ¼ the money.

Stephanie M – If there is no additional billing by the Water/Sewer Department, wouldn't this be a complete cut?

Seth F – Our only course of action, for those against the new position, is to not fund it. Approving the position is implicit if we don't also vote against the Water/Sewer position too.

B Keegan – The Water/Sewer position is paid through Water rates.

Stephanie M – It doesn't look like we're going to approve the Water/Sewer position; it's a one-for-one on an approval.

Sean M – Where is the costs associated with the temporary Finance Directors (Chris + Chris)

B Keegan – It won't be from Free Cash; we will request an end of year Transfer. With offsets due to vacancies, it should amount to \$30K.

Sean M – What about the Legal expenditures?

B Keegan – Those funds will come from Reserve but also seek an EOY Transfer for legal expenses. We will look to offsets. People leave and there are unexpected charges.

Stephanie M - \$93K -> \$105K -> \$110K for the Primary Clerk? Is the Chief Assessor in the union?

Brian G – Why the increased costs in Appraisals?

C Lavolette – The Finance Administrator and Payroll Administrator had rate increases. There is a 3-year re-evaluation; this is an interim adjustment to capture new development.

Stephanie M – The revenue Officer rate increased from 2018 -> 2019; now for 2020 it is decreasing: replaced by a lower rate?

C Lavolette – There are 2 positions on the non-union pay plan – 2 years ago they were place-savers.

B Keegan – We try to treat people fairly: Step increases get 2% and a COLA is 2%. If they are at the top Step then they only get the COLA.

Stephanie M – Why would any town employee get 6%?

C Lavolette – The increase from 2017 (\$170K) to 2018 (\$178K) was \$7700 or 4.3%

Larry O – What about the Revenue Officer / Accountant?

B Keegan – The new Revenue Officer actually has a lower salary.

Sue D – Any changes to Legal?

B Keegan – I want to address expertise. We try to have someone here at every meeting. We pay OT for both Chris and Christine to be here – it's a challenging time for all of us. We try to address questions prior to meetings.

Sean M – You're in a tough spot. We've all been conditioned to Randy's process. We're volunteers and we're at a deficit.

Bernard D – On our own time we e-mail to help give feedback to the board. Do we go after the BOS or Bill Keegan? The frustration voiced by the voters indicates we need an assessment.

B Keegan – We haven't had strategic discussions in a long time. Last year we resolved to create a stabilization fund rather than lower the tax rate.

Sean M – We should have a budget summit wherein we could compare positions.

B Keegan - \$100K in a \$75M budget is insignificant; there is value in those costs.

Sean M – Not in all positions. We asked Randy for 'all-in' numbers. The COA director presented his budget this way. This process needs a mindset of 'total costs.'

9:40PM – Debt Service

Bernard D – I had extensive back and forth with regards to Dept 710 on principle / interest and received a balance sheet in email from Chris L.

C Laviolette – We have a scheduled meeting with a bond preparation company. We have already counted \$3.4M of \$16.5M debt -> borrow @ \$13M. Future debt services: short term for \$325K interest for cashflow on the Burrell project. Randy had no plan to borrow. By June 2020 the town must be in a position for final bonding and pay all project bills.

B Keegan – 2020 – 2021 presents challenges to the town. In 2022, debt will roll off the books.

Sean M – Don't get blinded by the Burrell project when DPW and Fire want CIP projects.

Bernard D – Don't get married to Average Annual Rate of Return – the market fluctuates.

Sean M – Stabilization funds are a safeguard against the market.

10:00pm – Healthcare

B Keegan – We estimated a 6% increase for healthcare costs and the real rate of increase was .8% which saved money which could offset losses in other areas.

Sue D – How many retirees were added in?

B Keegan – 6

Sean M – what happened to the plan to borrow the money at low rates to pay off the town's OPEB obligation.

B Keegan – Randy and I checked into that plan and found it wasn't as feasible as first thought.

Sue D – Can we grandfather in current employees, then close it off to new employees.

Stephanie M – By law, municipalities must offer health insurance coverage.

B Keegan – Section 32B acceptance precludes getting out and it would kill any incentive to attract good new hires.

10:13PM – Liaison Reports

Sue D – Next week we have Police and Fire Departments.

Seth F – Central Dispatch analysis: \$500K charge plus coverage of the station. The options: 6 pedestrian employees or 3 Patrolmen (@ \$80K), the latter increases cost effectiveness. Of the 3600 hours for the 3 officers, there is known hours for coverage via OT or straight time: 400 – vacation, 400 – sick, 400 – training/education. Is there an OT problem? the OT budget is an incremental \$50K, but it is not itemized per officer. The Chief asked for \$110K – B Keegan lowered that request to \$50K.

Sean M - While officers are in the office – vacation is covered on OT. 90% of the calls go through the business line.

Seth F – I don't understand how we are obligated to pay for overtime.

Stephanie M – I want to know why the Police Chief is getting an 8% raise.

10:30PM

Seth F – made the motion for Adjournment

Stephanie M - 2nd

Vote: 9 – 0 – 0

Minutes approved by Vote of the Advisory Committee.

Date of Meeting: 20 February 2019

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink is written over a horizontal line. The signature is cursive and appears to be a name with a large initial 'D'.

Signature of Chairperson

A smaller, handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal line. The signature is cursive and appears to be a name with a large initial 'M'.

Signature of Vice Chairperson