

**Advisory Committee Meeting
Town of Foxborough
Wednesday February 17, 2021**

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FOXBOROUGH, MA 02035

In Attendance: Larry Ooi, Bernard Dumont, John Mahoney, Daniel Peterson, Brad Palter, Paul Ivanovskis, Thom Freeman, Jack Martin, Dennis Keefe, Sharon Weiskerger, Brian Guild.

Minutes: Taken by Tony Colangelo

Town Representatives: Bill Keegan, George Samia, Paige Duncan, Jane Pierce, Tony Moussalli, Bob Cutler, Leah Gibson, Marie Almodova

7 p.m. Larry O.

Larry requested approval of the minutes for February 10, 2021. Sharon W. made a motion to accept the minutes, and Brad P. seconded. 10 members voted to accept, Paul I. abstained.

7:05 p.m. Planning Director Paige Duncan Presentation

Working on trying to get funds for affordable housing project planned for Walnut St. There are problems with trying to design signals at the intersection of Route 140 and Walnut St. We are about \$30,000 short of funding and would like to get it from the state since it is not in our budget.

Question: Larry O. Didn't the state identify this as one of the most dangerous in the state?

Paige D. Don't know if the state does, but for us this intersection is one of the most dangerous in our town and is very high priority. Commercial St. and Central St. location is also of concern but traffic there is at much lower speed. We need the money.

Comment: Bill Keegan; I didn't say no to this but I cannot just dip into our budget that easily. We should talk to the town board about this for their consideration. Paige does a wonderful job but we should look into it before approving.

Question: Larry O. Regarding some of your highlights about going to work with Wrentham and Plainville. Paige; yes, we are working with them to promote ourselves as a destination place.

Our towns received a \$75,000 grant from the MA Gaming Commission Consultant after they did an inventory of all 3 towns. Our Regional Destination Plan will include, Patriots Place, the Casino, and Wrentham Mall. We will also be developing a web design. Information is available at; www.choosefoxborough.com.

7:16 p.m. Larry O. – Welcome Conservation Manager Jane Pierce

Question: Leah Gibson How does the salary budget work, longevity, etc.

Bill K.; Salaries are a controlled with a contract program with the Union.

7:21 p.m. Larry O. – Municipal Buildings Director Tony Moussalli

Tony stated he takes care of the buildings and schools for the town. This past year had to provide a lot of plexiglass and a lot of protectant because of the pandemic. Budget is going up 2 ½% which includes everything, salaries, utilities, etc.

Question: Brian G. Budget line item for electricity went up and heating fuel went down?

Bill K.; We have more buildings using electric rather than fuel for heating. We received more solar credit than we were supposed to so we will be getting an adjustment in the coming year.

Question: Dennis K. Budget for line-item stipend, what is that for? Tony M.; That pays the salary for my assistant and a little for me. Bill K; what is it for? Tony M; it takes care of all the towns salary for my assistant and a little for me and for any overtime. Most of my salary is paid from the school budget.

Question: Bernard D. What does the budget for telephone pay for - \$45,000 for 12 months?

Tony M.; It pays for telephone service in 4 buildings and maybe a 5th, all the phones in the buildings. Larry O.; Is it for land lines? Tony M.; I think mostly land lines, maybe Verizon, but I'm not certain because I don't take care of this. I take care of mostly maintenance – not utilities. Bill K; a lot of internet connections too either Verizon or Comcast.

Question: Thom F. Is there a new line item for the phone/communications network @ SEMRECC? Bill K.; No, that has a separate budget and is handled by 4 managers from those towns. The town gets charged \$300,000 a year to be part of that – it did not go up from last year.

Question: Thom F. any other services provided such as plowing? Bill K.; No, services provided are paid for by the facility.

Question: Larry O. You don't seem to have any COVID expenses in the budget? Tony M.; no, you will only see what we get paid back. We buy what we need and then get reimbursed from the Federal Government.

Comment: Marie A.; I checked on our phone service and it pays for mostly land lines and internet service in those buildings. Also, we have received credit back for our Covid expenses in our budget

7:32 p.m. Larry O. – Welcome General Government TM Bill Keegan & FD George Samia

Selectman town budget has been flat since last year. Want to question if we are getting the best software for selectmen to use. Our software allows us to look at documents and eliminates a lot of storage of documents. We are paying \$12,000 for this for the board of Selectman to use. We want to the new version of this that is coming out and expand it to all the other boards. It may be less expensive when adding other users but would be an additional cost. But that would eliminate having to store all documents and using file cabinets. The budget is also flat for board members. They get a stipend for the year of \$5,400 for each member and some additional funds are use for some board members to attend conferences.

Question: Jack M. As you keep all of these records on file in technology base will they still exist in a retrievable format after many years or if you change systems? Bill K.; yes, we will still have a hard copy on file as required by law. Leah G.; Minutes will all still be posted and available in our meetings archives as they currently are.

Comment: Larry O; at work we have been using similar Board portal software for the past 10 years and it works well, and we keep an electronic copy of all reports on our internal network.

Bill K.: Town Managers Office. Everything goes through this office --Policy guidance and enactment for the Board of Selectman, administrative office purchases, HR, etc. We also provide general access to our public information. We coordinate with all departments responsible for hiring all town employees. We also have a very active safety committee in town. This past year has been very difficult because of the pandemic. We were able to become fully functional and provided services again in July. Most other towns were not able to do that. We have 4 ½ employees in our department. Our overall budget will go up very little, 2.4%. We have had budget question re: Mike Johns, Assistant Town Manager. However the numbers in the book are the correct numbers for this year and next.

Question: Dennis K. One issue on \$5,000 for office equipment maintenance and \$4,000 for FY'22, but so far this year we have already spent \$7,000 for this? Bill K.; Can't recall exactly what that was for but I know it was a one-time issue.

Marie A.; That was for a new HR on Boarding Software.

Question: Bernard D. What is support for 2 special line items? Bill K.; We provide money for special events, the largest which is Founders Day, and also Child Sexual Abuse Committee.

Leah G.; What about Christmas Breakfast. Bill K.; No. Mike J and I pay for that personally.

Question: Brad P. When we are having these COVID times, why does your budget have to go up a bit? Bill K; Realistically we could not do zero. Most of the increases are fixed costs such as insurance, pensions, etc. Wages are contractually obligated. Our employment market is very limited and its usually very difficult to get people to apply for positions when taking experience and salary level into consideration. Foxborough is right in the middle or our County from a cost and expense standpoint.

Comment: Brad P. I agree with you. Foxborough is doing great from a budget standpoint.

Bill K.; We are trying to keep all costs in-check. Dennis K.; You would really have to be in a crisis to go to the Union and have them do give backs to reduce the town budget.

Comment: Leah G.; You have the largest salaries in town besides the Fire Department.

Bill K.; that goes back to market conditions. We are not the highest salaries in our county but competitive. Technical support we get is not more than other towns. There are only 12 employees in these types of positions. 90% of our employees are Union.

Comment: Leah G.; Not saying it's anyone's fault, but just something we should look at, COLA, longevity, etc. Since the 3 years I have been here it hasn't been discussed.

Comment: Larry O. Last year we were not notified of any errors in the budget. I think we should be notified of any payroll errors subsequent to the Annual Town Meeting. This will make the Advisory Committee is aware of payroll errors instead of waiting until the budget review season.

Bill K.; Marie has set up a new process to look at this going forward. It's a process they used in Concord for their budget process and it works well.

Question: Jack M. The town has to remain competitive with other towns. When is the last time the Board has reviewed our salaries.

Bill K.; The last time was in 2015-2016. Good thought, we should look at this again including Union positions.

Question: Thom F. COLA came up last week – is it linked to some standard survey?

Bill K.; yes, survey with other towns, We do not use Social Security benchmark. It is a different market. We are competing with other towns and we lost one of our employees to another town.

Comment: Dan P.; I agree with what you are saying but can you share with us where you are getting the info- is it e-mail, a website, etc?

Bill K.; HR does a benchmarking survey every year. We compare to 13 other communities.

Dan P.; Is it truly only given to HR people?

Bill K.; Yes, only HR people get it.

Leah G.; I've been looking at a benchmarking pay plan where I work. It is HR Consulting World.

Bill K.; I only get to adjust the 2% COLA and then the Selectman budget and approve.

Question: Larry O. When was last time Wage Board had a meeting? AdCom personal wage board?

Bill K.; There is the personal Wage board and Selectmen. They don't have anything to change or approve now.

Comment: Jack M. I was on the wage board many years ago and we were the towns Personnel Dept. Now I think they only meets quarterly?

Leah G.; should they not meet quarterly or as needed?

Bill K.; We have to have a reason for them to meet. Town Manager now approves the wage plan. The Town decided this a long time ago.

8:20 p.m. Larry O. – Town Audit Bill Keegan & George Samia

Bill K.; This is done annually to review the towns expenses – it has been a flat budget.

George S.; In prior years the state of MA use to do an annual audit of towns. Since about 1985

Each town has to get their own auditor. Every year we have to provide disclosures everyone is looking for to insure that nothing bad is going on.

Larry O.; This is pretty straight forward and we all understand.

Comment: Dennis K.; I think it's customary after every 6 years with the same auditor, to check out and see who else is out there and can they do a better job.

George S.; We talked about that when we got started, but we had a lot of turnover in the finance dept. – ½ the staff. So, in order to keep a little stability we stayed with the current auditor but we will look at it later.

Question: Bernard D.; Mission Box- required audit of the school year. Does 1 audit provide all the different required reports?

George S.; I have been here for 1 ½ years and the last 2 audits having been coming back pretty good. We had some questions but nothing serious – clean bill of health. The same company which includes schools and other audits.

Larry O.: George, let's move to Finance

George S.; We are made up of 4 separate entities under one roof. The Town Accountant Office, the Treasurer, the Collector, and the Board of Assessors. Each office is governed by a certain duty to perform for the state. On the expense side our budget is up 2.39%, on the salary side it is up 2.54%. Overall, total budget is up 2.5%. We hold a town wide program re., Munice Program used for 90% of financial programming for the town – serviced by the IT Department. Also, Clear Government Program is another town wide program

Question: Bernard D.; looking at budget it is 70% salary and 30% other expenses, including purchased services, etc. These look like non-traditional finances?

George S.; if you look at municipalities as a whole 70% - 30% or 75% - 25% is the way service oriented business municipalities budgets are.

Comment: Bernard D.; look at footnote 11; other IT Service Contract has to do with financial software for the entire town and in school. Budget competition will always be the same, contractual or needed.

Larry O.: Advisory Committee Budget George S.

Budget is very straight forward and flat. There is a line item for a Reserve Fund. That is not used routinely, it is saved and used only for emergency transfers.

Larry O.: Legal Services Bill K.

It's been a pretty good year. No increases. We try not to do a lot of litigations.

Question: Thom F.; Have other communities seen activities due to Covid-19 liabilities?

Bill K.; No. Not much been going on yet – maybe a bit too soon. Most of our office staff have come back to work.

Question: Dennis K.; Labor and Special Council expenses have gone down. Why?

Bill K.; We haven't had any major labor crisis. If you have a couple it will go up quickly. We do look into investigations, civil service questions, etc

Larry O.: GIS System George S.

That's a separate program that we can use for people to pay with credit cards, etc. It is a separate line item contractual program.

Bill K.; It was separated so we can monitor this IT cost more easily.

Question: Thom F.; IT service contracts have gone from \$5,000 to \$33,000 to \$41,000. Is that combined from other departments?

George S.; Yes we have combined them from other departments all into one line item. That's why it looks like it's going up.

Bill K.; the only thing that's new is that we purchased a new communication tool called Rainbow. It's for using voice over IT system instead of using Zoom. Used for internal communication and conferences. Recommended by IT as being more cost effective. Also controls all the cell phones connected to it all the time even if out of office.

Larry O.; So are we paying for applications that the town is using for software? Bill K.: Yes.

Leah G.; Bill you mentioned \$5000 - \$4,000. How does it work HR on boarding software? It's not new?

Marie A.; Goal is to combine all IT programs in one budget.

8:52 p.m. Larry O. -- Town Clerk Elections & Registrations – Town Clerk Bob Cutler

The Town Clerk Election and Registration departments both have flat line expenses. Salaries 2% for the assistant workers and up 4% for the manager (Bob) because it was voted on at the town meeting. Note; it was calculated by Marie A. in the accounting office. I am putting a request in for CIP – New election equipment which is needed and will be addressed in the Town Meeting.

Larry O.; Will the state pay for the new voting machine? Bob C.; No, the state will not. There are 2 vendors that have machines available that we can use and we have to go with one of these.

Question: Thom F.; What pest control services are you providing? Bob C.; we do not provide that, that is taken care of by Animal Control. Our budget line item is for the Clerks office portion of pet licensing.

8:57 p.m. Larry O. – Debt Services Bill K & George S.

Debt services are from annual payments from bond issued. We make our payments bi-annual. Very similar to people taking a loan out for their home then having to make monthly payments. We use these to repair or build large buildings, piping repairs, etc. Ours is down by 2%; as you move along with payments there is less interest, etc. Ours is about the same as last year.

Question: Thom F.; Can we see a page that shows us the towns 20 year out debt?

George S.; Yes, we can send a copy to Larry O.

Bill K.; We will see a dip in 2024-2025, when we finish with bonds for our middle school. Then we can look at other projects that may need to be done. From a budgeting perspective it is

considered a best practice to keep a flow of projects so that you don't have peaks and valleys in your debt service.

Larry O. - Pensions Bill K.

Our budget number for pensions we got from Norfolk County Official Pension Board. Usually this goes up about 10% but now is only going up 5% - mostly because of our investments.

Comment: Paul I.; Norfolk County Pension is only 63% funded right now, though Foxborough is in a better position. We do need to recognize that pensions actuaries sometimes underestimate funding levels.

Question: Jack M.; We are one of the larger of about 20 towns. What if other towns don't meet their commitment, - what are our risks?

Bill K.; They are obligated to make those payments – and some cities towns redirect these funds and use for other things rather than pensions. Norfolk County does not do this.

Dennis K.; in budget highlights pensions are going up 8% - but now is at 5.5%.

Bill K.; Yes – we will adjust that.

Larry O. – Unemployment Compensation Bill K.

Mike J. takes care of this. Interesting line. We don't think this will increase more than 2 ½ %. Our claims were reimbursed by Federal Government. We only had 1 employee file for unemployment. We had some fraudulent claims which we flagged and removed.

Larry O. – Group Insurance Bill K.

Budgeted for a 3% increase but it will only be a 2.6% increase. We think we will be getting some credit because of a 2 week holiday payment. Also, we will have a 2 week holiday payment in Sept. and expect a 1 month holiday for June or July which will drive the number down this year.

Larry O. – Risk Management Bill K.

We are funded at 1.32 million and expect a 2 ½ % increase for FY'22. Actually, we will come in at about \$800,000 – our workers compensation numbers have gone down. Should stay there for this year too.

Question: Bernard D.; From a revenue standpoint, will this savings help balance the budget.

Bill K. & George S.; Yes, if we save – we should use it 1st for the budget.

Comment: Dennis K.; The town appears to have a very experienced work force – work injuries have gone down or do not last long. Strong workers compensation program.

Bill K.; Our savings from health insurance – employers and town will not have to pay for a month.

Larry O. – Reserve Fund Bill K.

We have had the same line item reserve fund of \$75,000 for the past couple of years. We don't use unless we really have to.

Larry O. – Salary Reserve Fund George S.

We are putting money aside, a bottom line of the budget, until contracts are certified and it is needed. This is just a budget tool.

Comment: Jack M.; Cleaner account way of doing things – eliminate having to go to town meeting for approval.

Bill K & George S.; Each contract has its own article which has to be approved or disapproved at the Town Meeting.

Larry O. – State and County Assessments George S.

Marie A. has entered this line item. We called this the cherry sheet – the front side are charges and on the back side is credits.

Comment: Larry O.; We seem to charge a flat amount for charter schools?

George S.; We don't know what we will get on the cherry sheet.

Larry O. – Sewer Capacity & MS4 Bill K.

We purchased extra sewer capacity from a development in Foxborough at a low price of \$4.00 per gallon. Now we can sell it for \$40 to \$42 per gallon to a development in Sharon that is looking to purchase the excess capacity from us.

MS4: Federal & State Governments have come together to monitor the cost of water runoff into brooks and streams. Sewer water utility being developed and looked into for Foxborough,

Question: Jack M.; I heard someone say it's going to cost \$500,000 – how realistic is this?

Bill K.; It is basically a maintenance program for water – replace catch basins – separate water from oil, fix existing water ways. Average cost is based on size of our community.

Thom F.; want to express an idea if this should be a multi town coalition?

Bill K.; It might be possible- it's a good thought. It's a reality – just need to look into it.

Dan P.; I think you are going to see changes in this over the next few years. New standards, etc.- - it's going to keep on changing.

Bill K.; Yes – I agree.

Thom F.; I was a liaison to the Water/DPW – the EPA/DEP continue to increase their contamination standards to smaller and smaller acceptable percentages which requires contracting outside vendors to take and measure samples periodically for mandated FED/State compliance.

Dan P.; I agree and it's probably going to be business opportunity for others.

Larry O. -- I want to thank everyone from the Town Management for coming to our meeting.

Larry O discussed the departments presenting next week. The Committee then discussed in depth the BOS attending our meeting. The consensus is that we recognized the benefits of BOS members attending our meetings as they are able to offer different perspectives.

10:22 p.m. Larry O. – Request motion to adjourn. Thom F. made motion to adjourn the meeting. Larry O., Bernard D., Sharon W., Jack M., Dennis K., Dan P., Brian G., John M., Paul I. and Brad P. all stated aye they were in favor and it was voted to approve 11-0-0.

Larry Ooi