



Town of Acton

Joint Finance Committee

And Board of Selectmen

Town Budget

Meeting Minutes

Date: January 5th, 2019

Town Hall Room 205 8:00 am

Amended January 14, 2020

Finance Committee members in Attendance:

Steve Noone, Jason Cole, Mike Majors, Roland Bourdon, Christi Andersen, Christine Russell, Sahana Purohit (associate)

Absent: Jeff Bergart, Tom Farley, and Dave Wellinghoff

Selectmen in Attendance:

Katie Green, Joan Gardner, Jon Benson, Peter J. Berry, Janet K. Adachi

Town Staff Present:

Town Manager John S. Mangiaratti
Veterans Service Officer James McRae
Highway Superintendent Dick Waite
Engineer/DPW Director Corey York
Council on Aging Director Sharon Mercurio
Memorial Library Director Danielle Savin
Land Use Economic Director Mathew Selby
Building Commissioner Frank Ramsbottom
Planning Director Roland Bartl
Information Technology/Emergency Management/Town Meeting Mark Hald
Police Chief Rich Burrows
Deputy Police Chief Jim Cogan
Municipal Properties Supervisor Andrea Ristine
Natural Resources Director Tom Tidman

Recreation/Celebrations Director Cathy Fochtman
Fire Chief Robert Hart
Health Director Sheryl Ball
Nursing Director Heather York
Transportation Director Doug Halley
 Finance Director Steve Barrett
 Town Clerk Eva Szkaradek
 Chief Assessor Brian McMullen
 Town Accountant Lisa Wojick
 Assistant Town Accountant Joanne Norton
 Assistant Town Treasurer Teresa O'Leary

Called to order at: 8:00

Public Participation: none

Overview

This is a level service budget. While there is a 2.69% increase in the operating budget, subsidies to enterprise funds have decreased bringing the overall budget increase to 2.54% over the FY19 budget. This results in a proposed FY20 operating budget of \$35,186,539.

Operating budget highlights:

No new FTEs (full time employees) were added.

Reliance on reserves was reduced compared to previous years.

Public safety advancements include a Taser program for the police force and an ALS monitor for the fire department.

OPEB funding continues to reduce that liability.

A long-term capital plan has been created.

Grants are being used where possible to offset costs.

The long-term capital plan will be used for:

Completing the Kelley's Corner design

Instituting traffic calming measures

Increasing sidewalks

Improving infrastructure such as expansion of the sewer system and replacement of an old building at the transfer station

Ambulance equipment such as new lift

Fire and Police safety equipment

This capital plan costs \$1.151m. \$372k will be funded by the associated enterprise funds where possible (i.e.: Ambulance Fund, Sewer Fund, etc.) \$675k will be used from free cash. The remaining \$104k is in capital requests in the operating budget.

Veterans Services – James McRae
Budget decreased by 6.29% to \$187,358.

The budget is based on the number of veterans served and their incomes. There has been a decrease in the veterans receiving assistance as well as a decrease in assistance from the state.

Looking forward, there are currently 800 veterans in town. The veterans in our community are aging. Most of the younger veterans and those currently serving are from the South and Midwest. There should not be significant increase in needs for these services going forward.

Transportation – Doug Halley
Budget increased 9.41% to \$342,400.

There are currently 4 vans used for the fixed route cross town bus, train station shuttles, and the Council on Aging. Trips have increased since the opening of the new Council on Aging building at 30 Sudbury. To help with this increased demand, operating hours for the senior van now run until 5:00 pm. Some shuttle expenses have decreased through a new leasing deal.

Acton Memorial Library – Danielle Savin
Budget decreased 0.6% to \$1,047,901.

This decrease will require a cut in operating hours. The current staffing levels are at an appropriate level to monitor the safety of the building and its users. The majority of the staff is part time and do not receive benefits so there isn't any particular savings to be gained there. The highest level of staffing is in the afternoon when students are present.

Heat and electric expenses are covered by the municipal properties budget.

Roof repairs have been completed.

Library budgeting is particularly complicated because it needs to follow state committee rules set by the state board of trustees.

West Acton Citizens' Library – Steve Barrett
Budget increased by .73% to \$62,866.

The West Acton Citizens' Library may become part of the Acton Memorial Library. This would allow them to join the Minuteman Library Network at a much lower cost and would simplify operations.

The building's exterior is included in the town's municipal properties budget. It is targeted in that budget for painting.

Public Works – Corey York

Highway

Budget decreased by 1.22% to \$2,922,462.

Costs were down slightly in spite of the increased cost of fuel. A significant portion of the overall budget decrease came from lower costs of road salt.

The department buys fuel for all town vehicles. (The school district, being a separate entity, pays for the fuel for the busses.) They also handle all repairs and maintenance of town vehicles except for those belonging to the fire department.

Sewer

Budget decreased 4.7% to \$2,130,170.

The West Acton sewer survey is underway. The capital outlay for that project will decrease next year. Additionally, long-term debt payments have decreased.

Transfer Station

Budget decreased .9% to \$618,810.

The collection building is in need of repair or replacement. A feasibility study will be made for that. The cost of the feasibility study is offset by a decrease in the cost of disposal fees.

Municipal Properties

Budget decreased 1.57% to \$1,743,660.

Overall, energy costs have decreased thanks to improved energy contracts and the use of LED lighting. The cost of natural gas has decreased by 6.5% and there has been a 30% decrease in the cost of street lighting from the switch to LED bulbs. The solar farm project is paying off with a 9.5% decrease in electricity costs.

The year's budget includes painting the exterior of the West Acton Citizens' Library and repairing the walkways at the Public Safety building

Nursing – Heather York

Budget decreased 9.95% to \$499,947.

This decrease is largely driven by a decrease in per diem aide costs as well as cost savings from right sizing office supplies and postage line items.

The public health section of the nursing service provides services such as the town wide flu clinics and the concussion impact testing for high school freshmen. This is a service that the town offers to the school because it is important and the school won't pay for it.

Use of public health clinics has increased since the nursing service was moved to the same building as the Senior Center.

The home health aide section of the nursing service has had a 23% increase in admissions. 98% of the customers are Acton residents. The aides are per diem, so there is no cost incurred if they are not used. Their overall cost decreased as long time employees retired.

Land Use – Matthew Selby

The budget is effectively level with a .13% increase to \$1,822,416.

Board of Health – Sheryl Ball

Budget decreased 6.3% to \$112,919.

Projected hazardous waste expenses were reduced to reflect actual use. A \$12k grant was gotten to address substance abuse.

Building – Frank Ramsbottom

Budget increased 1.94% to \$243,789.

Based on inspections, the Insulet building project is coming along well. This is an important project for economic growth.

Land Use Economic Development – Matthew Selby

Budget increased 6.07% to \$292,460.

The budget increase is from increased professional development costs.

A manufacturing collaborative was created in town to promote jobs in manufacturing and with an eye towards creating a pipeline of skilled employees for local manufacturers.

The search for a project to effectively use the 348-364 Main Street (aka The Walker Property) is ongoing. Proposals are currently being reviewed with one to be chosen soon.

Natural Resources – Tom Tidman

Budget decreased 1.48% to \$889,093

The decrease comes from salary reduction and right sizing of the budgets for office and other supplies.

Upcoming projects at NARA that are not currently funded include \$100k to finish the bathroom building near the baseball fields and \$150k to finish a building in that area to be used as a snack bar.

Celebrations – Cathy Fochtman

Budget unchanged from \$8,900.

The majority of celebrations are funded by donations. This budget covers 1/3 of the cost of the 4th of July fireworks. The rest is covered by business donations. Additional celebrations are Patriot's Day, Veteran's Day, and Memorial Day.

Planning – Roland Bartl

Budget increased 0.7% to \$275,255.

This budget includes additional funding to complete the Kelley's Corner design.

There were design changes to minimize the amount of land that would need to be taken from the Bueno y Sano parking lot, the addition of a light at Charter Road to improve student safety and decrease traffic flow problems for busses leaving the AB campus, and the addition of a light at Community Lane and 111 to address traffic safety issues there.

The Minuteman Bike Share program has started. It remains to be seen how successful it will be.

The rail trail crossing over Route 2 is scheduled to start next year. Additionally, there is a move to create bike lanes connecting the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail to the Assabet Rail Trail in Maynard.

Kelley's Corner construction, if passed, will start in FY23.

Human Resources - Marianne Fleckner

Budget increased 1.25% to \$444,854.

The majority of the increase comes from the Senior Work program. The wage has been increased to \$14.50/hr. from the \$14.00/hr. that it has been since 2015. Additionally, members of this program are now allowed to work 100 hours per year rather than the previous 90 hours.

Town Manager – John Mangiaratti

Budget increased 21.3% to \$1,818,905.

The significant increase is on the Compensation Reserve line. Compensation reserve money is for not-yet-negotiated contracts. This money will move to the appropriate budgets after the contracts are approved at town meeting.

Costs of office supplies, postage, and other supplies have decreased 68.5%. This decrease appears in budgets throughout.

Emergency Management – Mark Hald

Budget decreased by 4.33% to \$46,450

The budget was brought in line with actual usage.

The budget includes emergency shelters used during outages.

The Emergency Management building on School Street is currently used for storage. It would need to be brought up to ADA compliance to be used for anything else.

Information Technology – Mark Hald
The budget decreased 2.8% to \$1,606,073.

Security currently consists of filters, firewalls, and content blocking. There is also penetration testing to ensure that credit card systems are secure. There was a recommendation to periodically test employee awareness.

Town Meeting – Mark Hald
Budget increased 37.23% to \$36,800.

This is not a true increase to the overall budget. These expenses were previously present in a different part of the budget and have been moved here.

The town currently owns 1,250 clickers based on usage numbers from well-attended town meetings. Additional clickers and chairs for overflow rooms can be rented in times of expected high attendance. This budget is based on the expectation of there being 2 town meetings in FY20.

Council on Aging – Sharon Mercurio
Budget decreased .95% to \$355,068.

There were no significant changes to the budget.

The Council provides educational, recreational, and social services for town residents over the age of 60.

There has been a 27% increase in new participants since the opening of the new Senior Center. They believe that there is a significant benefit in being in the same building as the Nursing and Veterans Services departments.

Fire – Chief Robert Hart
Budget increased .27% to \$3,359,948.

October was the 125th anniversary of the Acton Fire Department.

Capital items in the budget are an ALS monitor to help determine where to direct patients based on their medical need, a lift for the ambulance, and body armor for the fire fighters. The fire alarm box budget decreased because there is new software allowing the dispatcher to get information directly from the box.

Supplies costs were brought in line with actual expenses in previous years. Radio repair costs were increased because of the age of the radios being used.

There is still a forecast need for 8 additional personnel regardless of whether the North Acton Station is built. With the new station, the goal is to add another ALS ambulance.

Police – Chief Richard Burrows
Budget increased 1.61% to \$4,713,959.

The department is fully staffed, but some people are out on injury.

This spring, they are getting the first of 4 new vehicles. These vehicles will be more fuel-efficient than previous models.

Many 911 calls can now be routed correctly based on cell location.

Most of the overdose calls have been opioid related. The amount of opioid use might be masked by the broader availability of Narcan (naloxone). They currently cannot tell what the trend in opioid use is.

Animal Control is level funded.

Finance – Steve Barrett

Finance Director
Budget increased 4.54% to \$7,984,977

The drivers for the increase were a required increase in payment to the Middlesex Retirement Trust and the short term borrowing costs for articles previously approved at town meeting.

Previous research into leaving the Middlesex Retirement Trust has showed that the town would need to create significant infrastructure to provide the same service ourselves. The finance department and finance committee are concerned that the history of large required increase, such as the 12.64% increase this year, are unsustainable.

Comptroller
Budget decreased 3.03% to \$334,834.

This department provides financial support to all other departments as well as facilitates audits.

Assessor
Budget increased 20% to \$354,345.

The increase in professional services costs is to cover a periodic department of revenue required certification.

Collector

Budget decreased 12.33% to \$147,731.

This is a level service budget. The decrease in cost is from a decrease in salaries.

Town Clerk

Budget decreased 0.70% to \$167,169

This is a level service budget.

A motion to adjourn was made by Dave Wellinghoff and seconded by Christi Andersen. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 12:37 pm

Respectfully submitted,
Christi Andersen
Finance Committee Clerk

Referenced Documents entered into the public record:

[*Combined Information Documents*](#)
[*FY20 Budget Saturday Presentation*](#)