

Selectboard and Finance Committee Joint Budget Meeting
Tuesday, February 1, 2022, at 7:00 PM

1. Call to Order – Chairman Bannon opened the meeting at 7:00pm; those present via zoom: Selectboard: Ed Abrahams, Leigh Davis, Eric Gabriel, Garfield Reed. Finance Committee: Tom Blauvelt, Michelle Loubert, Meredith O'Connor, Anne O'Dwyer, Philip Orenstein. Town Manager Mark Pruhenski. Assistant Town Manager Chris Rembold, Finance Director Sue Carmel and other department heads as noted below.

2. Budget Overview—Town Manager Presentation

M. Pruhenski presented an overview/summary of the FY23 budget. He stated priorities for the budget are: public safety and health; maintaining quality of life and providing exceptional public service; investing in public infrastructure; being a model employer; focusing on the future with investment in stabilization accounts; and being mindful of GB Master Plan. He presented slides showing revenue sources/estimates and noted an expected 4.7% increase this year. He covered highlights of FY23 anticipated expenditures; percent of spending by area; Town operations historical spend; spending by category and a 5-year view of the Capital Program - highlighting significant capital projects for this year; and special articles. He also stated the slides are available on the Town website.

S. Bannon stated there were 33 people at the meeting – majority are department heads, but also members of the public.

3. Selectboard/Town Manager

Presenter M. Pruhenski stated the budget reflects the standard 2% increase in salary and other budget items are level. M. Loubert asked if funding was sufficient for the committee clerk position to produce minutes. M. Pruhenski stated the delay was due to lack of staff, but current staffing is sufficient and we are catching up on minutes. He noted funds are sufficient, unless clerk services are expanded. M. Loubert asked about contracted services – M. Pruhenski replied, funds last year were for an HR consultant. This year it covers a PR contract and other consultants, as needed. A. O'Dwyer asked about the increase in legal costs – M. Pruhenski replied the budget is based on last year's actuals. P. Orenstein asked about a Finance Committee clerk - M. Pruhenski confirmed it is covered. P. Orenstein asked what is the advertising budget used for -M. Pruhenski replied, jobs, public hearings, RFPs.

4. Finance Committee/Reserve Fund

P. Orenstein asked M. Pruhenski to confirm this contingency was for salary adjustments. M. Pruhenski stated it is \$17,500 for mid-year salary adjustments during recruiting or for retention of current employees. P. Orenstein asked which reserve fund is budgeted here - M. Pruhenski replied this is a catch-all/cushion. Funds cannot be expended unless there is a specific request to the Finance Committee and can only be used only for unforeseen operational expenses in FY23.

5. Town Accountant

Presenter Sue Carmel stated the budget reflects the standard 2% salary increase and a new longevity expenditure. She pointed out the audit line item estimate for a new contract that will be bid out - either rehire current auditor or hire someone new. M. Loubert confirmed the contractor line item is for additional assistance, as needed.

6. Technology

Presenter Amy Pulver stated there were no organizational changes - she highlighted budgeted expenses for repairs/maintenance of internet access points; a new antenna for the Housatonic fire station; and contracted services for a third-party IT contractor. Other items included software, annual subscriptions, data services, and telephone. T. Blauvelt confirmed the IT contractor has staff as back-up in his absence. M. Loubert asked about

overall increases, i.e., software licenses – A. Pulver replied, there is an annual 5% increase in subscriptions and three new programs. P. Orenstein expressed his support for increased expenditures on new IT, but encouraged offset by a decrease in office supplies/paper/postage which he calculated adds up to \$65,000 for the year. A. O'Dwyer asked about the new phone system – A. Pulver replied, half of the lines were moved to the new system, the remainder are alarm lines and those costs increased. She noted the Town is looking into other, more cost-effective alarm options.

7. Assessors' Office

Presenter Ross Vivori stated there is a 6% increase overall related to contract services - the new assessing software the Town is required to install also needs to be tested in the field to ensure data is coming through – and that is contracted out. Everything else in the budget is level.

8. Collector/Treasurer

Presenter Alicia Dulin stated there are not many changes to the budget - items are either decreased or level. She noted the Assistant Treasurer position is now filled and the only other increase is postage.

9. Human Resources

Presenter M. Pruhenski stated this item was moved out of the Town Manager/Select Board budget. The position has been conceived as a shared role with other towns - at Town Meeting \$75,000 was approved. He stated there have been extensive efforts to fill the position, but a qualified candidate has not been identified. He confirmed the search would continue, and grant funding will be extended to June, 2023 – as a result, \$10,000 can be trimmed from the budget. A. O'Dwyer asked about the interview process – M. Pruhenski stated it is a difficult position to fill due to need for HR and municipal experience. He also clarified that 43% of cost is GB and the rest distributed among the other towns. P. Orenstein confirmed that budget covers costs over the \$75,000 grant – expense will depend on whether we hire this year. P. Orenstein also confirmed the allocation of time among the towns can be adjusted annually. M. Loubert asked how the position has been advertised – M. Pruhenski replied, on Indeed, MMA, MM-HR, town website, social media - and only one candidate had the requisite experience. He also clarified that the person would be a GB employee, and while benefits would be allocated to each town, post-employment benefits would be the Town's responsibility. M. Loubert objected to GB providing post-employment benefits. M. Pruhenski stated he could foresee in the distant future needing to employ a full-time HR professional in GB as the field is getting increasingly complex. T. Blauvelt asked why the position is needed and what would be the responsibilities – M. Pruhenski replied, work is being divided among multiple departments and should be centralized. E. Abrahams stated the Selectboard meets with M. Pruhenski every two weeks and personnel matters come up frequently – in addition, he is not the first Town Manager to make this request. M. Loubert expressed her support for hiring an HR professional to ensure personnel matters are handled appropriately and consistently. L. Davis expressed support for shared HR staff to maximize efficiency. P. Orenstein asked if the \$75,000 grant is year-to-year – M. Pruhenski replied, it is a one-time grant.

10. Town Clerk

Jenn Messina stated salaries as budgeted reflect the standard 2% increase, but highlighted an increase for election workers as there are three elections in FY23. The increase is due to an increase in minimum wage and the need for extra election workers for cleaning voting booths due to COVID. She also stated the wardens would have an increase as well. She also provided background on the importance of the Assistant Town Clerk role and that last year it went from part to full -time, though salary had remained at the part-time rate. She emphasized the additional responsibilities that were taken on to support the salary increase. She reviewed an additional increase for equipment maintenance/repair due to the poll pads for Town Meeting. P. Orenstein praised Assistant Town Manager, Kathy, for her help in his onboarding and confirmed the budget for election worker this year is higher than in FY21 due to COVID cleaning requirements and the minimum wage increase. J. Messina also stated she passed on new equipment to have additional salary for the Assistant Town Clerk.

Chief Sorti expressed his support for a raise for Kathy. A. O'Dwyer asked if the Assistant Clerk position was part of the salary survey – M. Pruhenski stated recommended increases as a result of the salary survey have been adjusted. M. Loubert asked to receive a copy of the salary survey and stated the discussion highlights the need for an HR professional to advise on salary adjustments. S. Bannon reminded the group that salary increases be based on the position not the person. M. Pruhenski further clarified that by charter, salaries are adjusted by the Town Manager not through the budget process or Town Meeting vote.

11. Building Inspectors

Presenter Ed May stated the budget is level-funded, but with an increase in salary for a new hire in order to attract a strong candidate. P. Orenstein asked what is schedule for reviewing fees the Inspector's Office charges for permits to determine if they are at an appropriate level? E. May stated it was last reviewed in 2011. P. Orenstein suggested reviewing the fees as other related costs have increased. S. Bannon stated he will add to a Selectboard agenda to discuss.

12. Health Department

Presenter Rebecca Jurczyk stated the only increase is for the Health Inspector's salary for an additional \$11,000. She proceeded to share details about the position and recent increased duties/responsibilities such as getting FDA Food Inspector Certification which ensures the highest level of food safety for restaurants; monitoring COVID-related regulations at food establishments; permit renewals/new application management; and barn inspections. L. Davis asked what is the role of the Health Agent – R. Jurczyk stated Title 5 inspection, permits for septic systems, soil evaluations, well plans, housing inspections, health-related complaints, lodging/food inspections and COVID response. L. Davis asked about handling inspection requirements under the Short-Term Rental Bylaw - S. Bannon responded it is hard to suppose what will pass and if it did, implementation would not be until the next year. M. Loubert asked for a copy of the Health Inspector job description and asked how often job descriptions are reviewed. M. Pruhenski replied, they are reviewed when hiring – though annual review would be part of the HR position responsibilities. P. Orenstein asked that the Selectboard evaluate fees for inspections and permits. S. Bannon stated the Selectboard will look at all fees in the town and who is responsible for approving.

16. Citizen Speak Time

17. Media Time

18. Adjournment – Chairman Bannon adjourned the meeting by unanimous consent at 8:32pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow
Recording Clerk