

**Joint FY21 Budget Meeting of the  
Great Barrington Selectboard  
& Great Barrington Finance Committee**

Town Hall  
Great Barrington, MA 01230

Minutes of **February 4, 2020, 5:30pm** meeting.

Attending were Selectboard Chair Steve Bannon, Vice-Chair Ed Abrahams and members Bill Cooke and Leigh Davis, Kate Burke - Absent; Finance Committee members: Chair Anne O'Dwyer, Vice Chair Michelle Loubert, Thomas Blauvelt Meredith O'Connor, Eugene Curletti; Town Manager Mark Pruhenski; and Town Finance Director Susan Carmel; Town Treasurer/Collector Karen Fink; Town Planner Chris Rembold; and Principal Assessor Shaun McHugh.

**1. Call to Order.** The meeting opened at 6:30 p.m. in the Conference Room, Town Hall.

**2. FY2021 Town Operating Budgets**

Chairpersons Bannon and O'Dwyer led the two committees through discussion of various budgets. M. Pruhenski indicated that each Department Head will be presenting their individual budgets.

- **Town Clerk.** Jennifer Messina, Town Clerk, spoke that the increase for her department was up \$ 2,110.00 (1.64%). The Assistant Town Clerk, is currently part-time, 19 hours a week; J. Messina is requesting for her to become full time starting July 1, 2021; M. Pruhenski is supportive of this request (given public requests), but is asking that it starts on January 1, 2021 to reduce budget increases. M. Loubert asked about records preservation increases, and why the increased costs for training and travel. J. Messina indicated that since she is new, and the Assistant Town Clerk had any professional training since her employment. She said that she believed that both she and the Asst. Town Clerk need to attend trainings in their new positions. L. Davis asked about the large decrease in office supplies; J. Messina indicated that in clarifying the budget, the office supplies for most Town Hall offices had all been in the Town Clerk's office, but now distributed more realistically in each department's budget line; S. Carmel observed, however, that the overall office supplies budget is down.
- **Conservation Commission.** This budget was presented – it is level funded, except for the removal of \$5,000, to pay for contracted services. Retained is the trail and maintenance budget.
- **Planning Board.** Chris Rembold, Assistant Town Manager, reported that the planning board is level funded for FY 21.
- **Zoning Board of Appeals.** C. Rembold reported that this board is level funded for FY 21, as well.
- **Planning/Community Development.**

- C. Rembold spoke, the increase in budget comes from his salary (as he was appointed to the role of Assistant Town Manager). M. Loubert asked for clarification on this increase, and C. Rembold indicated that this is currently funded out of a series of different budgets, so now all will be in this budget line (although is not an overall increase to the total budget from the current year).
- He also pointed out that he is making a recommendation for \$27,500 for **shared Economic Planner**, from Berkshire Regional Planning. This person is contracted 5 - 6 hours a week, from the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. This person, is doing work at a significant discount for the Town and is stretched out to what can be accomplished in those hours. This person's help is valuable to C. Rembold's office and to the Downtown Cultural Committee. T. Blauvelt asked about the Affordable Housing Stipend. Mr. Rembold replied, this is a staff person who works with the municipal Affordable Housing Trust. L. Davis asked if this was related to plans for the Housatonic School; C. Rembold indicated this amount did not include this project, but can include general grant writing. S. Bannon indicated that because no decision has been made on what to do with the Housatonic School, we cannot budget for it; C. Rembold did indicate we could use this consultant a little toward the Housatonic School, if we wanted to.
- **Buildings and Grounds.** Sean VanDeusen, DPW Superintendent, said that the Castle Street Firehouse Property lease is removed from Budget since town offices relocated to the Town Hall, and this is a decrease of \$35,000; but the Court House budget increased for maintenance projects, etc. in order to avoid any larger and more costly repairs later on. Also, gas and oil prices increased.
- **Fire Department and Emergency Management-** Chief Charles Burger said the FD budget is pretty much level funded, especially in services. One increase, is the firefighters salary line item; this is due to a person hired halfway through year. There is an MOU agreement with Sheffield for GB to provide fire inspection services. The appearance of a \$5,000 Communications increase is just moved from the Emergency Management budget. Thus, the net increase to this budget is \$13,000.
  - A. O'Dwyer asked about the OT budget line, which is increased (she notes the additional staffing—from 2.5 to 3.0). C. Burger indicated that with hiring the 3<sup>rd</sup> full-time fire-fighter, the department now has more back-fill capacity (so there is no time when no firefighter is working). Now, the Town is guaranteed one person on 6 AM to 10 PM, and two on-call from 10 PM to 6 AM.
  - Chief Burger said that the Town should see better services this year due to having full time firefighters (3), there is more coverage at the Station.
- **Building Inspectors.** Building Inspector, Ed May said his goal was to keep his budget level funded. S. Carmel noted that there is a slight decrease, which is due to the fact that there is one less day in 2021, and this results in (very) slight salary decreases.

- **Highway.**
  - Sean VanDeusen reported to the committees a change in his original FY 21 budget request that is not in the current packet. The increase is in Highway overtime, as he anticipates that the union contracts for paid OT services will see an additional increase this year. M. Pruhenski pointed out that this already in the salary Contingency budget [discussed at the Jan 21 meeting].
  - There is also an increase due to maintenance of equipment repairs—as truck repairs are now computer-based, and this means trucks need to be sent out for repairs. He also pointed out that recycling and related hauling is going up, county-wide. He is also requesting an increase in the maintenance of potholes—as we have been running out of funds to do these repair in the spring. The price of asphalt material more expensive from year to year.
- **Health Department.** Rebecca Jurczyk, Town Health Agent, was welcomed back from her leave by the committee members. She directed committee members to the \$11,000 Contracted Services line, and suggested that this was not adequate--that will be more than \$11,000 in contracted work, which she expects will be going up. M. Loubert asked for clarification: the currently proposed budget will likely be going up, and asked for clarification on what are these contracted services. Ms. Jurczyk indicated this line includes a Public Health Nurse, the permitting contract with Full Circle Technologies, and the water testing with Housatonic Basin to test public beaches--these are three biggest contracts.
- **Community Services.** This budget funds local nonprofits in two payment increments, December and June. Beneficiaries include Berkshire South, Railroad Street Youth Project, Free legal Fund, CHP and it was allocated based on the number of people they serve in Great Barrington. M. Pruhenski, said that while this was difficult to do, this budget was scaled back from \$35,000 (FY 20) to \$25,000 (FY 21) – a decrease of \$10,000. E. Abrahams indicated that he would like to discuss this decrease further. L. Davis asked for a more detailed breakdown on this budget. S. Carmel added that there are other recipients on the list. E. Abrahams indicated that the criteria for funding was the number of residents served.
- **Council on Aging.** Polly Mann, Director, reported an overall decrease in the budget, with only few changes: increase in equipment, such as tables and chairs, and transportation costs for the elderly. State grant funds came in and helped to enable a budget decrease.
- **Veterans' Affairs.** S. Carmel presented this budget, and said it is up slightly, up by less than 2%. The increase is due to Veterans' retirement benefits (which is less than Ms. Carmel had anticipated, which is relief to the FY 21 budget). She also noted that while it appears that the lease/rent for the building is going down, the supplies for the facility used to be included in the lease budget line, and she broke this out (for clarity), so there is a new supplies budget line (e.g., for wreaths and flags). There were questions about what the Lease is for [to be taken up at next meeting].

- **Libraries.** (T. Blauvelt abstained). Library Director Amanda DeGiorgis reported that her budget is going up, as various costs are going up, especially in the repairs and maintenance budget (e.g., copy machines), publishing costs, and paper and toner costs have also gone up.
- **Parks and Recreation.** S. VanDeusen reported there is an increase in management costs for the parks--with school kids getting out early, there should be funds to cover programming in these areas. A. O'Dwyer asked for clarification, and he described that last year there were fewer snow days, so more days of youth programming—and there was not enough money budgeted. He also anticipates that work to improve the Lake Mansfield swimming will be needed in the coming year.
- **Boards and Commissions** - C. Rembold and S. Carmel presented these together. The Historical Commission is level funded. The Historic District's budget is up slightly; the cost is to pay for services such as care of public monuments, the cost for planning for memorials. The Historical District is willing to take a decrease from their request, according to Town Manager, which is an increase from last year's amount. The Public Transportation Committee is a new committee, and has a request funds for printing information regarding the budget, as not everyone who needs/wants to take the BRTA bus has computer access. B. Cooke, a member of the Transportation Committee, requested an additional \$500 in this budget to support the Transportation Committee's efforts.
- **Celebrations and Events** - M. Pruhenski reported that there is a decrease to \$5,000, as the W.E. Dubois Legacy Committee has their own funding now.
- **Wastewater.** S. VanDeusen said the increase is due to increased electricity costs, due to the increased need of aeration in the treatment tank(s) to decrease nitrogen. The DEP has given the Town of Great Barrington specific direction on this need. Secondly, due to an aging system, there have been increases in blockages, staff has to remove the rags that being disposed of into septic system, costing more staff hours. S. Carmel directed the committee members to note that a significant portion of the approximately 2% increase in the Wastewater budget, is due to the debt of 4.8 million. DEP has been given the order to upgrade the Sewer System. Phase Two, the affluent from Sewer too high in nitrogen, DPW needs to make upgrades to get in compliance with DEP order. Pump station costs this year. Phase one was the electrical upgrades.

**3. FY2021 Capital Requests.** C. Rembold presented on these requests:

- For the Police Department: Two cruiser cars, six portable radios, and speed trailer.
- For the Department of Public Works, the request is for one DPW truck. He thanked, S. Carmel, M. Pruhenski, Fire Chief, Police Chief, DPW Superintendent, Highway Superintendent, Wastewater Superintendent, and Amy Pulver, IT., for all their help and work on this year's budget, especially in providing better estimates, good planning of special projects and when to take out loans.
- C. Rembold further observed that Building and Grounds and Street & Bridge Improvements are the driving force of the Capital budget. There is

a lot of infrastructure work, culverts, bridges, which are the more expensive projects for the Town to do. The fleet of cars and trucks get worn out, takes about a year to order them.

- T. Blauvelt asked about the Memorial Field Improvements of \$100,000. M. Pruhenski said that the developers, who had originally stated that they would invest in the Memorial Field are now suggesting that they may not, but would come back to the committees with more information about this item. M. Pruhenski said that there was no contract yet.
- M. Loubert asked about the very high costs for Repair to Mason Library steps. S. VanDeusen replied that they are a historical repair, the steps, railings, and the lawn will need to be repaired. C. Rembold, added that there might be a CPA Grant or Mass Historical Grant to offset the cost. M. Loubert also asked about the \$60,000 for park equipment, and that high cost, as well. S. Van Duesen said that Engineers are reviewing the park equipment and will be making suggestions of what needs replacing for safety reasons and what is out of code. The fence around the little league field also needs replacing. C. Rembold said that he put in a Mass Trails grant for the Old Route 7 Greenway Path and feels confident that there will be monies to offset the cost of the work on the trail.

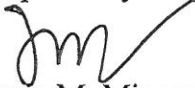
#### **4. Citizen Speak Time**

Eileen Mooney asked what is happening to the Town Hall Steps. S. Van Deusen said that the repair company is coming to see if steps can be scaled back, it would save \$100,000. Will start next year.

#### **5. Adjournment**

E. Abrahams made a motion for the Selectboard to adjourn, B. Cooke seconded. All in Favor. M. Loubert made a motion for the Finance Committee to adjourn, T. Blauvelt seconded. All in Favor. The Meeting adjourned at 6:43 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Jamie M. Minacci  
Recording Secretary