

Selectboard and Finance Committee Joint FY25 Budget Meeting #2 via Zoom
and in person at 334 Main Street Great Barrington MA
Wednesday, February 7, 2024

1. Call to Order - - Chairman Bannon opened the meeting at 6:00pm with Selectboard members Steve Bannon, Leigh Davis, Ben Elliott, Eric Gabriel, Garfield Reed and Finance Committee members Milena Cerna, Madonna Meagher, Anne O'Dwyer, Philip Orenstein present. Absent: Richard Geiler
Also present: Town Manager Mark Pruhenski, Assistant Town Manager Chris Rembold, Financial Coordinator Allison Crespo and other department heads as noted below.
2. Departmental Budgets
 - a. Conservation Commission – The budget was reviewed and there was no discussion.
 - b. Planning Board – C. Rembold presented stating the budget is level but for one minor increase.
 - c. Zoning Board of Appeals - C. Rembold presented stating the budget is level funding, but it varies year to year.
 - d. Planning/Community Development – C. Rembold presented stating the budget increase is due to the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission annual assessment being moved to this budget from another line and contracted services for outreach and education for Lake Mansfield which is required for a matching grant. He also noted another items stating that under the grant for BRPC consultants to work with the Cultural District, the Town is required to contribute towards the cost.
 - e. Buildings and Grounds – Joe Aberdale, DPW Superintendent presented noting increases in the budget for consulting services for Town cemeteries, equipment maintenance/repair, supplies, etc. He also noted unanticipated expenses from last year for the Town Hall elevator upgrade and other items. J. Aberdale stated the department would track expenses by building to help show needs and costs.
 - f. Highway – J. Aberdale presented noting a decrease in street light costs and some increased costs for new tools for repairs; police details; street maintenance and bridge repair. It was discussed how police details are determined.
 - g. Council on Aging – Joan Peters, Director, presented stating the budget is level other than standard salary increases. She noted the change in staffing for the MicroTransit Program and the increase in use by seniors. C. Rembold explained the increase from two to four full-time staff to cover increased hours and address staffing difficulties. He also stated ARPA funds were used to match the State grant for this program this year, but are no longer available so funds are included in the budget to cover the required match – but he noted the plan is to cover the cost through fare revenue and contributions for the service from other towns. He added the Town has also applied for a MassDOT innovation grant that could also be used to cover the staffing cost. He clarified that the program is in its pilot year and how costs are allocated to the participating towns over time is being evaluated.
 - h. Libraries – Dawn Jardine, Director, presented stating the library is increasing staffing and hours post-COVID. Regarding budget, D. Jardine noted significant increases in the cost and use of digital books/materials and she explained local residents get books much faster if purchased by the Town. She clarified that what is purchased is based on demand and popularity. She also noted budget items for additional technology; non-print materials such as DVDs and audio books and high value items such as kids toys that can be shared. Patrick Hollenbeck, Library Board, stated private funds are needed to offset increased costs.
 - i. Parks and Recreation – J. Aberdale presented noting budget increases for staff support; equipment repair and the Lake Mansfield swimming area/youth programming.
 - j. Wastewater – J. Aberdale presented budget increases for contracted services, mail and training. The use of retained earnings was discussed and it was noted that there have been some large, unexpected expenses which have been covered by retained earnings.

k. Capital – C. Rembold provided an overview of the capital budget by department and category of funding and a five-year capital plan. He noted the Town does not borrow for lower cost/shorter lifespan items as it is generally reserved for larger projects. He stated the total capital budget is \$12.9m and noted capital needs will be significant over the next few years. He also stated that \$10m was eliminated from the original budget request. The capital budget was reviewed by department with DPW having the most significant/larger scale projects. Highlights included Police Department Officer shields; Fire Department car replacement and partial funds for a new engine; DPW replacement vehicles and equipment; grounds/buildings architecture engineering evaluation/repair; and street, bridge and culvert annual maintenance/repair. J. Aberdale stated, based on the asset management plan, five key Town buildings have \$659,000 in immediate needs and he detailed the work to be done this year. J. Aberdale emphasized the importance of keeping up infrastructure and building repair/maintenance to avoid deterioration and higher costs in the future. Maintenance work on Route 183 was described along with a long-term plan for major work/repairs by the State and South Main Street road/sidewalk work was described as a Town rather than a State project to avoid additional design expense and delay. In addition, J. Aberdale described planned upgrades for multiple Town parks and the Wastewater pump stations. It was discussed that it was more logical to borrow for large Wastewater projects, but smaller/pressing expenses can be covered by retained earnings. Regarding Transit, C. Rembold stated there is a need for two new vehicles for the MicroTransit Program to cover when BRTA vehicles are out of service – but he noted the Town has applied for grants to cover 80% of the cost. He also clarified that operating costs are shared with the other towns in the program.

3. Citizen Speak Time

- a. Sharon Gregory asked what is covered in the FY25 articles - S. Bannon replied articles are voted on separately at Town Meeting and the proposed articles are included in the budget materials.
- b. James Garzon, 84 North Plain Road, suggested using retained earnings instead of borrowing and that the name of each department head should be printed on their budget.

4. Media Time – No media asked to speak.

5. Adjournment - Chairman Bannon adjourned the meeting by unanimous consent at 8:25pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow, Recording Clerk