

Selectboard and Finance Committee Joint FY25 Budget Meeting #3 via Zoom and in Person  
at 334 Main Street Great Barrington MA  
Tuesday, February 13, 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.
- S. Bannon stated there will need to be another budget meeting and it was scheduled for February 20 at 6:00pm.
2. Departmental Budgets
  - a. Police Department – Chief Sorti presented stating the most significant increase is for ongoing six-day per week parking enforcement which has increased the number of tickets and revenue. He added that other increases are due to the accreditation process, vehicle supplies, software subscriptions, and other annual expenses. He also stated there is a new line for interpreter services. It was discussed the Department is down five officers, but three are coming on and two to be hired.
    - i. Eileen Mooney asked about the co-responder role and Chief Sorti replied it is now being covered by Community Impact funds.
  - b. Fire Department – M. Pruhenski and Chief Turner presented stating there are increases in full-time fire fighters, equipment and costs for repairs/maintenance. He noted new line items that were previously one line item under firefighting supplies.
  - c. Emergency Management – Chief Sorti presented stating there are small increases for the stipend and additional equipment.
  - d. Animal Control – It was stated the budget is the same as last year and there were no questions.
  - e. Community Services – M. Pruhenski presented stating these are mini grants to a wide range of nonprofits serving residents – he added funding has been cut by \$5,000 this year.
  - f. Veterans' Affairs – M. Pruhenski stated there was a request for an increase for the VFW lease, but level funding is being recommended. Tom Beasley, Director of Veterans' Services, clarified that costs for veterans' programs are apportioned to the Town and benefits depends on the number of vets helped in Great Barrington.
  - g. Boards and Commissions – M. Pruhenski stated there was a request for increased funding, but was scaled back to stay close to a level budget. Don Howe, Chair, Historic District Commission and Malcolm Fick, Chair, Historical Commission, presented on the multiple preservation and restoration projects and priorities lead by the Commissions as well as the work of the Historical Society. D. Howe stated the District is requesting \$26,000 to maintain key Town monuments and clarified its role in ensuring work is done appropriately and M. Fick stated the \$17,000 request from the Historical Commission is for additional monument preservation and archival work. It was discussed that the three historical entities work together, but have separate missions and areas of focus – with the Historical Society being a private group.
  - h. Celebrations & Events – M. Pruhenski stated the budget was reduced by \$4,000 this year requiring reductions in Town contributions to some local events.

- i. Berkshire Hills Regional School Assessment – Peter Dillon, Superintendent, Berkshire Hills Regional School District, presented an overview regarding changes in the District’s operating and capital budgets and stated the assessment to Great Barrington reflects a 3.54% increase. There was discussion about enrollment trends, planned vocational programs and staffing shifts. P. Dillon clarified that budget increases are predominantly due to salaries/benefits. He note there will be a public hearing on the budget on February 29 and that it is available online and in hardcopy at the library.
- j. Special Articles – M. Pruhenski stated there are 12 special articles and not many are recommended as they are funded by free cash. He continued to describe the five recommended articles:
  - Community Impact funding; vocational tuition/transportation for two students; emergency medical services; cannabis-related legal fees; courthouse upgrades.
  - i. Community Impact - Amana Timpane made a request for \$1m to be allocated from Community Impact funding for Railroad Street Youth Project for the addition of a second floor to house youth substance use and prevention counseling/programming. She confirmed there are rough plans for the project and total cost will be \$1.6m. It was clarified that this is a request to add \$1m to the budget.

M. Pruhenski confirmed there has been increased demand for funding and that how the Town is using Community Impact funds aligns with established criteria for its use. It was clarified that the Town Manager receives recommendations from the Community Impact Committee and he makes final decisions – and if funds are not used, it goes to free cash.
  - ii. Vocational Tuition/Transportation – It was clarified that costs have gone down due to the purchase of a van that is also used for the MicroTransit program.
  - iii. Emergency Medical Services – Kevin Wall presented providing information on operations and finances and the multiple challenges including retaining staffing, which limits expansion of services, and Medicare reimbursement. It was clarified that the State does not consider EMS an essential service so there is no State funding available. He noted the service model will need to change to make it sustainable. It was confirmed that the participating towns are all getting the same increase and that there has been considerable effort to raise funds through individuals and grants. S. Bannon stated the current model does not cover costs and this is a nationwide problem – he noted the Towns and EMS need to work together to address the issue. It was agreed that financial questions would be addressed at the next meeting.
  - iv. It was agreed the \$15,000 would be combined with Community Impact Funding and the amount would be adjusted.
  - v. Courthouse Upgrades – Joe Aberdale, Superintendent, DPW, presented stating that a new 10-year lease is being negotiated and the State has requested improvements as part of that process. He noted that over the lease term the cost of improvement will be recouped. He clarified the Town is awaiting the State’s proposal for the new lease rate. The nature of the improvements related to the lease were discussed in detail and compared to immediate needs identified in the building assessment. P. Orenstein asked to calculate the cost of upgrades vs the financial benefit of continuing to have the Courthouse in Town. J. Aberdale stated he would provide information on how the lease will cover the cost of the improvements.

- vi. Ramsdell Library – M. Pruhenski stated this article was not recommended. Pat Hollenbeck and Ruby Chang, Library Board, asked that \$150,000 be restored for Ramsdell capital improvements. They stated the library is also a gathering place for the community that provides access to resources. It was clarified that the \$150,000 would allow the library to apply for a State grant and there would be continuous fundraising efforts. It was discussed that there should be a comprehensive fundraising plan.

3. Citizen Speak Time – No citizens asked to speak.

4. Media Time – No media asked to speak.

5. Adjournment - Chairman Bannon adjourned the meeting by unanimous consent at 8:31pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow, Recording Clerk