

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, February 27, 2018

7:00 PM

Town Hall – Selectmen’s Meeting Room

Members present: Brad Cote, Ann Hurd, Ted Kirchner, Joe Myerson, and Brian Boyle

Members absent: Connie Benjamin

Call to order: Brad Cote called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. The entire meeting can be viewed by going to:

http://new.townhallstreams.com/stream.php?location_id=75&id=15789

Agenda Item #1: Discussion with Human Resources Director Donna Madden

- Health insurance budget (914)
 - We had previously put in a placeholder amount of \$525,000. This is a 10% increase over FY18. Donna informed us that we will need every penny of the \$525,000. In addition to an increase in health insurance premiums, we also have more employees who have subscribed to the plan (3 individual subscribers and 4 family subscribers).
 - With regard to health insurance, the town is going to consider an “opt out” or “buy out” plan. For example, if a family subscriber chose to obtain health insurance elsewhere (*e.g.*, through a spouse’s employer), the town would pay them \$4,000. If an individual subscriber opted out, the town would pay them \$2,000. This “buy out” would be of indefinite duration, meaning that the town would continue to pay \$4,000 or \$2,000 each year that the subscriber opted for insurance from another source.
 - Donna said she would be meeting with the town’s Insurance Advisory Committee to finalize the details for the opt-out program. We were supportive of moving ahead with the opt-out program.
 - Donna also mentioned that the town would be introducing an option to have a high deductible health plan paired with a health savings account (HSA). This option is being made available by the Minuteman Nashoba Health Group (MNHG).
 - According to Donna, about 90% of the town’s employees are on the Fallon health plan, which is the least expensive option available through the MNHG.
 - **MOTION:** Ted Kirchner moved to approve the following budgets:
 - 911 – Worcester Regional Retirement Assessment for \$408,654
 - 912 – Workers Compensation for \$29,982
 - 914 – Health Insurance for \$525,000 (Group Health) and \$178,357 (OPEB)
 - 915 – Life Insurance for \$1,400
 - 916 – Medicare Tax for \$46,000

- Seconded by Joe Myerson. **VOTING IN FAVOR:** Brad Cote, Ann Hurd, Ted Kirchner, Joe Myerson, and Brian Boyle. **VOTED AND PASSED. UNANIMOUS (5-0).**
- Human Resources budget (147)
 - Last year, Donna Madden retired from her position as Treasurer/Collector/HR Director. However, she continued to work part-time as the town's HR Director throughout FY18. She will leave that position at the end of June 2018, so then the town will need to hire someone as a new HR Director.
 - The town's plan for July 1, 2018 is to hire a person to work 12 hours per week to handle hiring, benefits, and writing of personnel policies. The proposed HR budget includes: wages (\$16,811), purchase of services (\$1,500), supplies (\$200), in-state travel (\$300), dues (\$250), and meetings (\$350).
 - **MOTION:** Joe Myerson moved to approve the Human Resources budget (147) as submitted, for a total of \$19,411; seconded by Ann Hurd. **VOTING IN FAVOR:** Brad Cote, Ann Hurd, Ted Kirchner, Joe Myerson, and Brian Boyle. **VOTED AND PASSED. UNANIMOUS (5-0).**
- Transfer Request
 - We reviewed a request for a transfer of \$15,987.50 from the Advisory's Reserve Fund to the Treasurer/Collector budget (145). This is to allow us to pay the salaries of the Treasurer/Collector and HR Director until June 30, 2018.
 - **MOTION:** Joe Myerson moved to approve the transfer request, for a total of \$15,987.50; seconded by Brian Boyle. **VOTING IN FAVOR:** Brad Cote, Ann Hurd, Ted Kirchner, Joe Myerson, and Brian Boyle. **VOTED AND PASSED. UNANIMOUS (5-0).**
- Parks & Recreation Coordinator Position
 - Donna met with Karen Regan (Chair of the Parks & Recreation Commission) to discuss the potential creation of a 12-hour per week Coordinator position. Parks & Rec is going to defer making this staffing request until FY20. Donna is helping them to work on a job description. In doing research, Donna learned that Lancaster has a 19-hour coordinator position. She suggested that perhaps we could approach that person to see if they are interested in working in Bolton as well.
- Fire Chief Position
 - In carrying out the Wage & Compensation study, Donna did some research regarding a potential Fire Chief position for our town. According to Donna, our "competitive universe" is Harvard, Lancaster, Stow, Boxborough, West Boylston, and Lunenburg. Of those towns, the closest fit to Bolton's situation is Lancaster.
 - Based on her research, Donna would recommend for FY19 a working full-time firefighter/EMT who serves as Fire Chief and also manages the ambulance squad. She also would recommend that the fire department's large capital requests be deferred so that the new chief can have input.

- Donna determined that the salary range for such a position is between \$75,500 and \$90,000.
- We also discussed the possibility of moving away from the current “strong chief” regime.¹ Town Administrator Don Lowe said that one “pro” of changing our regime would be that we would have a full-time professional chief reporting to a town administrator, not just the Board of Selectmen. The generic “con” would be the potential that a town administrator would micromanage the fire chief.
- Wage and Compensation Study
 - When Donna arrived in town in 2006, we did not have a formal Human Resources structure. In 2012, she met with all employees to re-write everyone’s job descriptions, and reconfigured the grade/step system so that we would have only 8 grades (instead of 16). Our goal is to have a compensation structure that is competitive within the market place.
 - Donna recently reviewed the Classification & Compensation Plan and shared with us her draft report, along with a draft of the Grade & Step chart. Based on her research, she is not recommending changes (or upward adjustments) of anyone’s pay grade. Donna mentioned that we have about half of our employees that are at Step 10 (the top step), and about half that are at Step 4-5 (middle steps).
 - Ted Kirchner asked about how the COLA (cost-of-living adjustment) is implemented. Don and Donna monitor what other towns are doing with respect to COLAs and try to remain competitive with them.
 - Performance reviews are conducted by a person’s supervisor, which in the vast majority of cases is Don Lowe. The goal is to conduct them annually. Donna Madden reminded us that non-union employees are not subject to performance reviews. Don Lowe also mentioned that he communicates on a regular basis with the town employees so that they are continually aware of how their performance is being viewed.
 - Lastly, Donna mentioned that we should consider having a placeholder item in the 2018 ATM Warrant to allocate some of our free cash to the FY18 Advisory Reserve Fund in order to get through the last six months of this year.

Agenda Item #2: Review of Fire Department and Ambulance FY19 budgets/articles

- Ambulance Director Margy Diaz and Fire Chief John Mentzer attended to discuss their articles and budgets. With regard to the air compressor system requested for FY19, Chief Mentzer informed us that the vendors no longer make 4500 psi compressors (which is what we currently have). He is therefore still seeking a 6000 psi system.

¹ There is an article on the current draft of the Annual Town Meeting warrant that would ask the Town to rescind its acceptance of M.G.L. c. 48, § 42 (the “strong chief” provision), and, instead, to accept the provisions of M.G.L. c. 48, § 42A (which would give the Selectmen the authority to appoint a Fire Chief and all members of the fire department).

- Margy reminded us that the next ambulance is scheduled to be purchased in 2020. Town Accountant Ninotchka Rogers said that our Ambulance Receipts Reserved fund is on track with expectations.
- Chairman Cote noted that no decision has yet been made about how to fill Chief Mentzer's position when he retires, and this issue will be addressed by the Board of Selectmen with input from Don Lowe and Donna Madden. Given this open question, Brad said that he is personally inclined to defer big capital projects and major staffing decisions until a new chief is in place.
- Chief Mentzer and Margy Diaz both responded that the need for the additional EMT/Fire Fighter staffing exists presently, and it will exist regardless of when the chief's position is filled.
- Don Lowe noted that we have staffing challenges for both Ambulance and Fire. Even assuming that we are able to fully renew our student Cadet EMT program, we will still have staffing challenges.
- Donna Madden noted that the Town of Bolton does not schedule its on-call fire fighters or EMTs. If we tried to schedule them, we would incur some additional costs known as "stand by pay."
- Resident Mark Giunta observed that we do not have a very large roster so perhaps we are experiencing an issue with recruitment and retention.
- Margy Diaz noted that the Ambulance and Fire departments share about ten employees, which means that if there is more than one call at a time, it is extremely difficult to staff those calls.
- Don Lowe provided an update about the status of our town's Cadet EMT program. The national standard for ambulance programs is to have EMTs that are at least 18 years old. In our Cadet program, we have EMTs that are 16.5 years old and who have passed all necessary certifications. Don told us about a December meeting in Bolton of key stakeholders, including the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Public Health and the Director of the Office of Emergency Medical Services (OEMS). Don and Representative Kate Hogan felt that the meeting went extremely well, and we received another 1-year waiver to keep the program running.
- In response to a question, Chief Mentzer confirmed that he is recommending the following staffing plan: (a) a full-time fire chief, and (b) two *per diem* EMT/fire fighters to work during the day. If accepted, this staffing arrangement would increase our daytime coverage from 1 full-time person to 4 full-time people. He would like to ensure that a minimum of four people can respond to fire calls during the day.
- Selectman Bob Czekanski mentioned that he is aware of another town that is seeking a part-time fire chief to work with a full-time fire department administrative assistant. He wondered whether such a model might work in Bolton. Margy Diaz noted that we already have a similar arrangement, because our one full-time firefighter/EMT performs administrative functions for both the fire chief and the ambulance director. Chief Mentzer noted that he typically works 15-20 hours per week.
- Ninotchka noted that although the fire department staffing decisions are pending, we still need to put placeholder numbers into our budget. After some discussion, we

agreed to use placeholders based on Chief Mentzer's request for one full-time chief (at approximately \$90,000) and two *per diem* fire fighter/EMTs (at approximately \$90,000), for a total departmental increase of about \$180,000.

Agenda Item #3: Advisory Committee business

- Ninotchka told us that she plans to update the budget to incorporate the placeholders from tonight's discussion. She will also update the Nashoba Regional School District assessment placeholder after they hold their public budget hearing.
- Ninotchka also provided an update regarding sources of Other Available Funds based on unused funds from prior warrant articles. Funds from the following articles will be released for use in FY19:
 - Fyfeshire Dam Repair (\$36,000)
 - Wasterwater Treatment Facility Repair (\$19,724)
 - Wilder Road Culvert Engineering (\$7,938.97)
 - Berlin Road Culvert Engineering (\$10,350.34)
 - DPW Office Expansion (\$1,647.48)
 - Unemployment Settlement (\$166.93)
 - Still River Lights (\$24,530)
 - Police Cruiser (\$34.93)
 - Wilder Road Culvert Repair (\$36,850)
- We also had questions about whether \$2,360 from a prior article regarding "Boiler Replacement FSS" could be released. Ninotchka said that she would ask the school for clarification about all of the prior articles related to capital projects at the school.
- Brad informed us that we would be meeting with the Capital Planning Committee next week to discuss their recommendations.

Adjourn: **MOTION:** Brian Boyle moved to adjourn at 9:22 PM; seconded by Joe Myerson.
VOTING IN FAVOR: Brad Cote, Ann Hurd, Ted Kirchner, Joe Myerson, and Brian Boyle.
VOTED AND PASSED. UNANIMOUS (5-0).

Documents Referenced

Departments' FY19 budget submissions
Draft of warrant for May 2018 Annual Town Meeting
Draft of Classification & Compensation Plan Summary Report
Handout regarding Salary Survey with information regarding pay grades and steps
Handout regarding Ungraded Positions in the town
Handout regarding proposed Grade & Step chart

Approved by the Advisory Committee