

Final Minutes January 26, 2021 Finance Subcommittee Meeting Discussion with Jim White Board of Health Preliminary 2022 Budget

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 PM by Phil Rooney Chair of the subcommittee

Members present were David Coffey, Bill Grome, and Chris Resmini. Absent was Jerry Pierce.

Jim White had previously responded to questions submitted to him prior to the meeting and they are detailed below. At 7:10 Jim began the meeting by providing an overview to his responses.

FinCom Questionnaire Responses

1. The pandemic altered the entire way in which we performed our daily operations. Many of the nurse's clinical services were either reduced or suspended and replaced with COVID-19 reporting and contact tracing. The Environmental Inspectional Program was placed on hold for several months as the state closed down. As the state began to open slowly, the time was consumed with instituting the Governor's COVID-19 Executive Orders. The majority the consultations, investigations, and enforcement of those orders was placed upon the local public health departments. The workload was overwhelming and exhausting to the point where in early May I decided to have the office work in hybrid model. I could not have anyone or the entire office go down with COVID or any other illness. Everyone picked a partner and alternated 3 days on, 3 days off. The off days the staff worked from home. The only one that came into the office daily was myself. Every staff member was working over the 40-hour workweek, except the public health and myself, as it was 7 days a week and 80-100 hours. The office returned to full capacity in mid-June.

Starting in March of FY'20, spending in several of the operational expense line items were reduced due to the change in service priorities. A few examples are the Inspectional supplies and mileage expenses were not required as much of the work was conducted in the office. Much of the supplies needed for personal protection, hygiene, COVID related assistance and flu clinics for the department were purchased through federal or state grant funds. This practice has continued into FY'21.

2. Yes, I have fully participated in the preparing the budget and much of the additional funds requested were my request. The only concern about the budget as submitted is the amount approved by Town Meeting for an additional inspector's position is not sufficient to attract applicants with much needed experience.
3. During the summer months, the department was minus one full-time staff member due to maternity leave. Secondly, a very large factor was the loss of an experienced Sanitarian position during this past fall. Another challenge was finding additional

assistance for contract tracing of positive COVID cases. We were fortunate that the school nurses volunteered to assist the department beginning in late April through August. I had applied and received multiple grants in order to fund several of those nurses during the summer months on a per diem basis. Much of any overhead spending regarding the pandemic or to subsidize some of our typical operations has been funded by several various grants.

4. Our Public Health Nurse was scheduled to retire the end of March. She agreed to delay her retirement until June to continue to assist the department during the onset of the pandemic. That position was filled in June in a seamless transition. Secondly, the individual holding the Sanitarian's position resigned to take a similar position in another neighboring community for a higher salary. That position was vacant the last 2 months of calendar year 2020 and during the second surge in the pandemic. That position was recently filled beginning on January 4, 2021.
5. The additional monies included in the Salary Technical/Professional staff line item was for the position approved at Fall Town Meeting and for merit increases approved and issued in December.

There was no increase requested for the line item Salaries Management, which is my position. The amount of \$117,798 requested was to accommodate the merit increase approved and issued in December. So the actual budget change will be +2.5% and not (-6.1%). A revision have been made to show the actual proposed budget.

6. The information provided above in item #5 explains the personnel increases. The increase in the line item Household Hazardous Waste was requested for two reasons:
 1. The past 2 years the Collection Day ran over the allotted \$15,000. The amount of waste generated has noticeably increased.
 2. In the past several years, we were subsidized with funds awarded from our participation in the multi-community reciprocal hazardous waste collaborative and could cover the overage. This year there was a reduction in the number of communities that participated in 2020, due to the COVID pandemic, therefore a reduction in funds. We prefer to be self-sufficient and not rely on those funds, as they may not be available in the future.
7. Many of the impacts discussed and noted during the FY'21 budget process have not changed. Additionally, the COVID pandemic has stressed the department beyond fatigue. When the pandemic begins to wane, the town may see a larger increase in construction. May also witness a rush to fill the businesses that have closed because of the pandemic, i.e. food establishments.

Another factor that affect the workload on the department will be the training of the newly hired Sanitarian and the additional position, if/when the position is filled, as both

will have only minimal experience and require much oversight. As stated above, the salary required to hire an experienced individual would need to be reasonably higher.

Jim provided the following additional clarifications and information.

- Covid began to appear in March. By April it was in full mode.
- Covid closed many places where the department was required to conduct inspections (average of 20 inspections per week). This lessened the burden on the already stretched department.
- In June and July construction projects increased. The department is required to perform septic system and storm-water management inspections. There are approximately 1,500 homes in Natick with septic systems. Remodeling, rebuilding of these homes, the hot real estate market and overuse during the spring from the “stay at home” policy may impact septic systems.
- The school nurses assisted the department with contact tracing and continue to assist.
- The first ever drive through clinics for our annual fall flu vaccine program was very successful. Over 1,000 people were immunized. They will look and evaluate use of a similar model for COVID-19 vaccinations for the general public.
- The current immunization budget for the department is good. The department was required to pay more money for flu and other vaccines this year. However, they received more monies from insurance reimbursements.
- There is a concern over rising vaccine costs. The Cares Act is assisting to cover these costs. However due to the nature of the cash outlay and reimbursement cycle the department will request Town Meeting to increase the size of their Revolving Fund to \$55,000 or \$60,000.

Jim concluded his presentation and answering questions at 7:39.