

## **Natick Finance Committee**

Pursuant to Chapter 40, Section 3 of the Town of Natick By-Laws, I attest that the attached copy is the approved copy of the minutes for the following Meeting:

**Town of Natick Finance Committee**  
**Meeting Date: March 9, 2023**

The minutes were approved through the following action:

Motion:

Made by:

Seconded by:

Vote: 0 – 0 – 0

Date: X, 2023

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Wollschlager

Chair

Natick Finance Committee

## **Finance Committee**

Town of Natick

Minutes for the meeting of March 9, 2023

Meeting Location: Natick Town Hall, School Committee Meeting Room

And virtual by Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j88324467728>

Meeting: ID88324467728

Passcode: 906139

One tap mobile: +19292056099

Meeting may be televised live and recorded by Natick Pegasus. Any times listed for specific agenda items are approximate and not binding. Please note the committee may take the items on this agenda out of order.

### **AGENDA**

1. Call to Order
  - a. Pledge of Allegiance & Moment of Silence
  - b. Advisement of Pegasus Live Broadcast and Recording for On-Demand Viewing
  - c. Review of Meeting Agenda and Ordering of Items
2. Announcements
3. Public Comments
  - a. [Committee policy & procedures available via this link and also at the meeting location](#)
4. Meeting Minutes
5. Town Administrator's FY2024 Budget - Public Hearing
  - a. Fire Department budget
  - b. Facilities Management budget
  - c. Public Works budget
  - d. Water & Sewer Enterprise Fund budget
  - e. Water & Sewer Indirects budget
6. Committee and Sub-Committee Scheduling
  - a. Update on upcoming Committee and Subcommittee meetings
7. Adjourn

## **Roll Call**

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm.

Members present; Note R-denotes members attending remotely

Dirk Coburn  
David Coffey - R  
Larry Forshner  
Todd Gillenwater  
Grace Keeney - R  
Phil Rooney  
Patti Sciarra  
Linda Wollschlager  
Betty Yobaccio  
Daniel Zitnick - R

*Note:* Hossam Behery joined the meeting at 7:20 pm. Mr. Coffey left the meeting at approximately 7:50 pm.

**Announcements** - None

**Public Comments** - None

## **Town Administrator's FY2024 Budget**

Motion made by Ms. Sciarra, seconded by Mr. Coffey, to open the public hearing for the FY24 Town Administrator's Budget.

Motion was approved 10-0-0, all members present voting in the affirmative. (Note, Mr. Behery had not yet joined the meeting.)

## **Fire Department Budget**

Mr. Rooney reviewed the subcommittee discussion on the Fire Department budget. Highlights included:

- Chief is new, spent years as Deputy Fire Chief in Westboro
- Settlement of fire department's collective bargaining agreements impacted costs
- Implemented a new billing system for ambulance fees
- Planning a new program for ambulance fees, focusing on assistance for senior citizens
- Staffing remains an ongoing issue, particularly for the second ambulance
- Impact of Framingham Union Hospital on ambulance services discussed

- Introduction of a new system called "First Due" for scheduling, managing assets, and reporting incidents

Fire Chief Jason Ferschke clarified that the billing system vendor is the same, but the system has been solidified. The gain on our end is we still collect our revenue based on what they bill and they only bill us based on what we actually collect. There's no additional fees or additional costs to the town. Ambulance fees or ambulance fees were out of date. They have since been adjusted to match current standard practice in comparable communities. In addition, we continue to maintain a very humane billing practices for our senior citizens or those that are challenged to afford the ambulance billing.

The Chief also mentioned CPE (Certified Public Expenditures), a program which gives us the ability to seek reimbursement for the actual cost of delivering services. Medicaid only gives you a flat rate for an ambulance call, which is less than the actual cost. That program is in process right now.

Staffing continues to be an issue and we're at the mercy of the civil service process.

The Chief gave more information about First Due, which is going to allow us to streamline accounting for all our expenditures as far as overtime and categorizing and classifying. Right now, if you asked me a question on what I expended on overtime two years ago, it requires going through a bunch of paper manuals, and trying to come up with calculations. Now, it'll be done in real time. We'll have better accounting and better tracking.

Mr. Zitnick asked if there's a possibility that the department could leave civil service. Mr. Jon Marshall, Deputy Town Administrator Operations, said it would involve having conversation and getting agreement with the union.

Mr. Zitnick asked when the Collective Bargaining Agreements would be posted on the town website. Mr. Marshall stated that we don't have the final document with signatures yet.

Mr. Coffey asked if there are any short-term measures that can be done to facilitate having the second ambulance staffed. The Chief answered that there are specific provisions that we have to follow as far as hiring and provisional appointments. In the meantime, the quickest solution to solve it would be filling those positions with overtime. The Chief mentioned that we are doing a lot of recruitment.

Mr. Rooney asked the Chief to provide some background on the ladder truck that we ordered. The Chief noted that equipment prices and specifications are difficult to finalize due to constantly changing costs and longer build times. Equipment that used to take 12 months, is now taking upwards of two years to build. We had a piece of fire apparatus that we purchased after last spring's town meeting and they're just starting to build it now.

Ms. Keeney asked about vacancies and a timeframe as to when we will be fully staffed. The Chief answered there are nine vacancies now and it's difficult to know when we will be staffed as we are having a hard time finding qualified applicants.

Ms. Sciarra asked if it wouldn't make sense to contract out our ambulance service. The Chief said as much as we may be struggling, the private sector is struggling even more. Worcester, for example, used to be loaded with private EMS providers, but when the pandemic hit, the private EMS disappeared. The long-term sustainability of a private EMS is something that's volatile. I think we can do a much better job.

Mr. Forshner asked if the ambulance service was profitable. The Chief didn't have the data available but noted that last year we provided just under 5700 emergency responses in the community, of which 67% of that was EMS related. When you look at the net revenue, I think we were about \$1.5 million in revenue gain from our ambulance service.

Ms. Wollschlager asked for more info on the First Due software and if it interfaced with Munis. The Chief noted the following:

- First Due is a comprehensive software system that centralizes incident reports from all calls, making data extraction easier.
- The software will handle scheduling, accounting for vacation and sick time, and provide real-time call information to responders.
- It includes a fire prevention module for inspections and smoke detector tracking.
- The Community Connect Program will allow building owners and residents to update information in real time, providing valuable hazard information to the fire department.
- This is a standalone program but we're currently working with the company to be able to have a report that can export directly into Munis

Mr. Gillenwater moved to recommend favorable action on the FY24 budget for the Fire Department with salaries of \$10,494,245 and expenses of \$324,000 for a total of \$10,818,245, seconded by Ms. Sciarra.

Motion approved 10-0-0:

Hossam Behery - yes

Dirk Coburn - yes

Larry Forshner - yes

Todd Gillenwater - yes

Grace Keeney - yes

Phil Rooney - yes

Patti Sciarra - yes

Linda Wollschlager - yes

Betty Yobaccio - yes

Daniel Zitnick - yes

### **Public Works budget**

Mr. Coburn reviewed the highlights of the DPW subcommittee meeting, noting the following: growing regulations and mandates are significant drivers of operations, pandemic supply chain

costs, and staff turnover, which is a top priority. Mr. Coburn also mentioned that Snow & Ice expenses can be funded post facto, while the budgeted amount cannot be reduced below the previous year's appropriation. He stated that the filtration media for PFAS has been moved from the capital budget into the operating budget where it logically belongs.

Mr. Bill Spratt, Executive Director of the DPW and Facilities, reviewed the four main budget drivers:

- Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) negotiated increases
- Supply chain parts increases. As one example, Mr. Spratt noted that a set of tires that cost \$448 in 2021 is now \$748.
- Energy supply costs, which have doubled
- Changing PFAS and stormwater regulations

Mr. Rooney asked about mowing contracts. Mr. Spratt said that increased costs are a result of adding the Fire Station and Kennedy Middle School, which have been taken over after the one-year warranty from the landscaping services for the construction. Mr. Art Goodhind, Land Facilities and Natural Resources (LFNR) Supervisor, added that a lot of mowing is done in house. Some items are contractor services for irrigation maintenance, impact testing on artificial fields, mulching and fertilizing. Mr. Rooney opined that the budget line item title is misleading.

Ms. Yobaccio asked about an increase in the overtime budgets. Mr. Spratt stated that the department is short 7 FTEs now and we are doing everything we can to get to full staffing. In addition, the budget was adjusted based on historical trends.

Mr. Zitnick asked when the CBA agreement would be posted on the town website.

Ms. Wollschlager asked about unexpected challenges. Mr. Spratt noted that the staff is fantastic, and we are interviewing for a DPW Director. Facilities and DPW will continue to operate as separate departments but there are synergies: both have both have asset management, both have union contracts, both have lots of equipment and deferred maintenance. So being able to see both sides, I do see some opportunities come up. One of the major impacts to the plowing has been sidewalk plowing, being able to react and get on sidewalks quickly. One idea we had was to train and utilize second shift custodial staff so they could do sidewalks during the day.

Mr. Spratt noted that we haven't looked at how we manage trash in a number of years. When we do look at it, we want to look at the full 360 view. How much does it cost to maintain our trash trucks? How much does it cost to get rid of our waste? When we originally did the study, recycling cost and recyclables were valuable. Now they're not. So I think data has changed and we have to keep up with that changing data.

Mr. Spratt stated that we have some asset management software, but we don't have a unified work order or asset management program. We have lots of trucks and vehicles and loaders and every one of them is very expensive to own and maintain. How will we look in the future? We want to make sure we're utilizing all of our pieces of equipment to the best of their ability.

Mr. Rooney moved to recommend favorable action on the FY24 budget for the Public Works Department with salaries of \$4,791,379 and expenses of \$6,053,137 for a total of \$10,844,516, seconded by Mr. Coburn.

Motion approved 10-0-0, all members present voting in the affirmative.

### **Water & Sewer Enterprise Fund and Indirects**

Mr. Coburn noted that W&S budget is very much CBA-driven and is also affected by mandates and supply chain issues. Town Administration was asked if the appropriate requirements and standard for allocating indirect expenses was followed and the answer was yes.

Mr. Rooney asked if there are any potential regulations on the horizon regarding water. Mr. Spratt stated that the EPA may be issuing PFAS regulations which could be stricter than we currently have, which would mean more filtration is needed over time. Mr. Rooney asked if any regulations could potentially mean more tearing up of the roads to replace pipes. Mr. Spratt replied that regulation changes typically would be on the filtration side, although there are some lead and copper rulings for the gooseneck that goes between the main and the house. When that has to be changed, we already have a program for that.

Mr. Coburn moved to recommend favorable action on the FY24 Water & Sewer Enterprise Fund (*inclusive of indirects*) with salaries of \$2,632,021 and expenses of \$17,344,300 for a total of \$19,976,321, seconded by Mr. Rooney.

Motion approved 10-0-0, all members present voting in the affirmative.

Mr. Coburn moved to recommend favorable action on the FY24 Water & Sewer Indirects totaling \$3,443,771, seconded by Mr. Rooney.

Motion approved 10-0-0, all members present voting in the affirmative.

### **Facilities Management Budget**

Mr. Rooney noted that Mr. Spratt has been reorganizing management as part of a three-year plan. Mr. Spratt is now the Executive Director of DPW, and Facilities. Reporting to him will be a director of DPW, and a director of facilities; those positions are yet to be filled.

Mr. Spratt noted that this is a relatively straightforward budget, driven by CBA primarily. Under the new contract, we are able to hire part-time staff on a full-time basis. Someone can work less than 20 hours a week, but they're a permanent employee. Last fall, we were approved to add an electrician and a floating second shift custodian, which will help us reduce overtime costs. The relaunched FacilityDude software provides work order management and comprehensive tracking. He noted that as we continue to fund repairs in our capital budget, this has an impact on the operational budget with fewer maintenance calls needed.

Mr. Forshner asked about work orders. Mr. Spratt replied that about 80% are generated internally by tradespeople. He would like to see that skew more towards users over time. Mr. Forshner asked about doing a project externally vs. in house. Mr. Spratt said that we do a lot of work in house, especially on the HVAC maintenance side. For longer duration and larger projects, we don't have the staff capacity to do in house. When something is less time sensitive, we can spread the time out and do the work ourselves.

Mr. Rooney moved to recommend favorable action on the FY24 Facilities Management budget with salaries of \$3,516,394 and expenses of \$992,800 for a total of \$4,509,194, seconded by Mr. Forshner.

Motion approved 10-0-0, all members present voting in the affirmative.

Motion made by Mr. Gillenwater, seconded by Mr. Coburn to close the public hearing passed by a vote of 10-0-0, all members present voting in the affirmative.

### **Committee Discussion**

Mr. Gillenwater stated that the first Education and Learning Subcommittee meeting was held last night. The next meeting is Monday at 7pm on Zoom. Wednesday will be the each of the libraries also at 7pm on Zoom.

Mr. Rooney stated that the General Government Subcommittee has three more meetings to go. Police and IT are scheduled for Wednesday the 15<sup>th</sup> and the Administration meeting is not yet scheduled.

Ms. Yobaccio stated that a Capital Subcommittee meeting is scheduled for the 14<sup>th</sup> at 5pm.

Mr. Coburn noted that the DPW Subcommittee will have a meeting to approve minutes before the Finance Committee meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

### **Adjourn**

Motion to adjourn made by Mr. Coburn, seconded by Mr. Gillenwater approved by a vote of 10-0-0, all members voting in the affirmative.

Meeting adjourned at 9:03 PM.