

## **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 14, 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 14, 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. 2023 Spring Annual Town Meeting Warrant - Public Hearing
  - a. Article 4: Personnel Board Classification and Pay Plan
6. Town Administrator's FY2024 Budget - Public Hearing
  - a. Town Clerk budget
  - b. Town Report budget
  - c. Board of Registrars budget
  - d. Community Development budget
  - e. Personnel Board budget
  - f. Board of Health budget
  - g. Affordable Housing Trust budget
  - h. Finance Committee budget
  - i. Commission on Disability budget
  - j. Cultural Council budget
  - k. Historical Commission budget
  - l. Historic District Commission budget
7. Committee and Sub-Committee Scheduling
  - a. Update on upcoming Committee and Subcommittee meetings
8. Committee Discussion (for items not on the agenda)
9. Adjourn

## **Roll Call**

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 pm.

Members present; all attending remotely due to Town Hall closure

Dirk Coburn  
Larry Forshner  
Todd Gillenwater  
Cody Jacobs  
Grace Keeney  
Toby Metcalf  
Richard Pope  
Phil Rooney  
Patti Sciarra  
Linda Wollschlager  
Betty Yobaccio  
Daniel Zitnick

**Announcements** – Diane Packer, Town Clerk, noted that the annual town election is scheduled for Tuesday, March 28. There is no early voting in person but there is early voting by mail. The last day to register to vote is Saturday, March 18, and the clerk’s office will be open from 9-3.

**Public Comments** - None

## **Town Administrator’s FY2024 Budget and 2023 Spring Annual Town Meeting Warrant Articles**

Motion made by Mr. Gillenwater, seconded by Mr. Forshner, to open the public hearings for the FY24 Town Administrator’s Budget and the 2023 Spring Town Meeting Warrant Articles.

Motion was approved unanimously 12-0-0.

### **Affordable Housing Trust Budget**

Ganesh Ramachandran, Affordable Housing Trust Chair, reviewed the Trust’s FY24 budget. The \$80,000 budget, which is unchanged from FY23, includes four main items:

- Consultant to develop a Strategic Plan, the first since the trust was founded
- Fund emergency housing vouchers through the Natick Service Council
- Consultant to monitor and maintain affordable housing stock
- Administrative expenses

He also noted that the Trust is in the middle of a public campaign to convince the Select Board to develop the 5 Auburn Street property for affordable housing. If successful, it will mean approximately 32 affordable housing units that will be deeded in perpetuity. Part of the strategic plan is to create 50 affordable units between FY24 and FY29.

Mr. Rooney asked about the Community Preservation Act (CPA), which Mr. Ramachandran described, noting that the Affordable Trust is not a mandatory member of the nine-member Community Preservation Committee. Mr. Ramachandran stated that CPA money cannot be used for maintenance, only capital expenses.

Ms. Wollschlager asked about the status of the North Main Street property. Mr. Ramachandran said the property is currently being used as a staging area for construction and we don't have possession of the property. We might help get the utilities hooked up to facilitate the transfer of the property from the town to the trust to Habitat for Humanity.

Ms. Sciarra moved to recommend favorable action on the FY24 budget of \$80,000 for the Affordable Housing Trust, seconded by Mr. Jacobs.

Motion was approved unanimously 12-0-0.

**Personnel Board Classification and Pay Plan – Article 4**

Steve Levinsky, Personnel Board Chair, stated that the Pay Plan covers the General Government non-union employees of the town or roughly 65 full-time employees. The part-time pay plan is unchanged. For the full-time pay plan, there are no proposed changes to salary ranges, but there are some changes to titles and some new titles were created:

Grade	New title & description	Modified description
6	Executive Director of Public Works & Facilities	
5		Director of Facilities Management Director of Public Works
4		
3	Assistant Director - Programs Assistant Director - Resource Allocation Assistant Director - Programs & Services Assistant Director - Services & Outreach Information Technology Manager	Business Manager
2	Case Manager	Payroll Manager
1	Assistant Superintendent - Golf Course	Animal Control Officer

Mr. Jacobs asked about the thought process to not change salary ranges in the proposed pay plan. Mr. Levinsky explained that this decision was based on a comprehensive 19 or 20 town salary survey and the results showed that these ranges were more than competitive. He further commented that Town administration has not notified the Personnel Board that the Town is having trouble hiring based on the salary ranges. Other factors may be impacting hiring, but it is not pay.

Mr. Rooney asked for clarification of what the survey was based on since not all jobs are being filled in all departments and the member thought it might be related to pay. Mr. Levinsky said that the survey was based on the examination of 19 or 20 other towns that are similar to Natick and have job positions similar to Natick. He stressed that the pay plan is specific to government positions and not private industry positions. Jon Marshall, Deputy Town Administrator Operations, also commented that some of the vacancies are due to the market and lack of applications. Many other communities are in the same position.

Ms. Sciarra asked how many new positions were being added to the pay plan. Mr. Marshall confirmed that even with the changes in titles, there would not be any new FTE positions added at this time.

Mr. Zitnick asked about the elimination of the Social Worker Administrator position and if it was being rolled into another position. Mr. Marshall confirmed that it was being rolled into the Assistant Director - Programs and Outreach position.

Mr. Rooney asked what the total FTE and PTE positions were for last year and if the numbers are different this year. John Townsend, Deputy Town Administrator Finance, said that he did not have the numbers at hand, but that the numbers could be provided at a later time.

Mr. Jacobs noted that the pay plan dates are effective January 1, 2022. Mr. Levinsky clarified that the dates were not updated because the salary ranges did not change. This is a change from how we've done it in years past.

Mr. Coburn moved to recommend favorable action on the full-time and part-time Personnel Pay Plans (Article 4), seconded by Mr. Gillenwater.

In debate, members stated that due to the number of unfilled positions and difficulty in hiring, increasing the salary ranges should be considered.

Motion was approved unanimously 12-0-0.

### **Personnel Board budget**

Mr. Coburn moved to recommend favorable action on the FY24 Personnel Board budget of \$1,000, seconded by Mr. Gillenwater.

Motion was approved unanimously 12-0-0.

## **Town Clerk Budget**

Mr. Rooney reported on the General Government Subcommittee meeting with the Town Clerk Diane Packer and noted the following:

- Ms. Packer highlighted the impact of voting by mail and special elections on her office. The challenges of managing these processes were acknowledged, but the department is now fully staffed, with Laurie Shaw as the Assistant Town Clerk.
- Salary increases for election workers were addressed due to the rise in the minimum wage. This was necessary to manage the processing of early voting and voting by mail.
- Regarding capital items from the prior year: iPads have been acquired, while voting machines are expected in the next six to eight months.
- The Document Preservation Act, impacting multiple departments, was expected to cost \$750,000 to \$1 million, and although some funds have been spent, more will be needed to complete it. Collaboration among departments is necessary for its success.

Ms. Packer added that there are minimal changes to this year's budget. The clerk's office continues to add more technology: For the second year, dog registrations can be done online and marriage licenses, which were formerly typed up, are now in a PDF format.

Ms. Keeney asked about training and Ms. Packer explained it's not a separate line item. Most of the training is done through the Mass Association of Town Clerks. The Secretary of State's Elections Division has robust virtual training and there's also virtual training from the Office of Campaign Finance.

Mr. Gillenwater moved to recommend favorable action on the FY24 Town Clerk's budget with salaries of \$373,343 and expenses of \$62,000 for a total of \$435,343, seconded by Ms. Sciarra.

Motion was approved unanimously 12-0-0.

## **Board of Registrars Budget**

Ms. Packer noted that the number of registered voters has risen every year since 2018. Prior to 2020, there were only two ways to vote: absentee or in person. Now we have vote by mail for every state and federal election. The state will be sending a postcard to all voters asking them if they want to vote by mail. Vote by mail is a complex, multi-step, and cumbersome process, which requires many volunteers and election workers in addition to staff.

Mr. Jacobs asked about early voting for the town election. Ms. Packer stated that this is the first year it was even a possibility, but we didn't think it made economic sense because there is vote by mail. It also requires two people working at any early voting location.

Mr. Zitnick asked Ms. Packer if she was looking at hiring new staff to accommodate mail in voting. She replied that because it's a seasonal demand, it's far better to use election workers and volunteers rather than full-time staff.

Ms. Sciarra asked about how the registered voters tracks to the census records. Ms. Packer stated that we don't always know how many people are moving into or out of the town. Not everyone returns the town census, but they're still registered voters. If they vote in any two federal elections or state elections in a row, they will not be deleted, whether they return their census or not.

Ms. Sciarra asked if the undeliverable postcards sent by the state to registered voters could be tracked. Ms. Packer said that just because it's undeliverable does not mean that person doesn't live there. Some people may use a post office box and not get mail at their home. Or adult children may use an address but not live there anymore. We send out postcards to anyone who hasn't returned the census with a forwarding address. We often get many of them back saying we've moved. With those postcards, we can delete them from the voter list.

Mr. Gillenwater moved to recommend favorable action on the FY24 Board of Registrar's budget with salaries of \$73,850 and expenses of \$87,000 for a total of \$160,850, seconded by Mr. Coburn.

Motion was approved unanimously 12-0-0.

### **Town Report Budget**

Mr. Gillenwater moved to recommend favorable action on the FY24 Town Report budget of \$4,100, seconded by Ms. Sciarra.

Motion was approved unanimously 12-0-0.

### **Community Development Budget**

Mr. Rooney stated that the CPA will require a full-time development and review planner, focusing on the implementation of the act. This position, which is partially funded for FY24, will expand existing planning efforts in areas like transportation, housing, economic development, and national resources. Hiring qualified personnel remains a challenge. The subcommittee discussed the Stonegate project, which has yet to pull a building permit.

He noted that efforts to improve communication with the community have been made, including hiring a public information officer and setting up community meetings. Building, plumbing, gas, and electrical permits can now be done through the online permitting system. A new database is being developed to identify vacant buildings and land for potential reuse.

Focus areas include Natick 2030 initiative, compliance with CPA and MBTA regulation, producing a biannual Community Development report, recodifying existing land use regulations,

expanding the online permitting system, and managing projects for the Golden Triangle and 135. Grants play a critical role in funding the CD department's operations and projects.

Amanda Loomis, Director of Community and Economic Development, added that since the subcommittee meeting, Stonegate has obtained permits to demolish existing structures at 45 East Central. Another achievement is the hiring of an intern, and work has begun on creating a commercial database, starting with the Natick Center area. This area is being prioritized due to its consistent zoning, allowing for easier formatting. The focus includes preparing for the CPA planner's arrival in January. Claire Rundelli has been working on the CPA bylaw and regulations. Peg Waters, the new office manager, is aiding communication efforts and managing the Open Gov viewpoint permitting system.

Mr. Coburn moved to recommend favorable action on the FY24 Community Development budget with salaries of \$1,076,670 and expenses of \$120,058 for a total of \$1,196,728, seconded by Ms. Sciarra.

Motion was approved unanimously 12-0-0.

### **Board of Health Budget**

Mr. Rooney highlighted the following items from the Subcommittee meeting with the Board of Health:

- There are 10 positions in the Board of Health. The sanitarian position is currently vacant and has been challenging to fill due to salary constraints.
- A per diem nurse position is needed to assist the staff nurse, especially with vaccination efforts in schools and other initiatives.
- Inspections are a significant portion of the workload, covering various areas such as food service sanitation, building inspections, soil samples, environmental compliance, and responding to resident complaints. The number of inspections is approaching pre-COVID levels, driven by ongoing building modifications and new construction projects in Natick.
- The town has adopted biological research regulations, with the Board of Health determining permit fees and processes. Facilities subject to inspections under these regulations are required to cover the costs of hiring experts for the inspections, which reduces the burden on the Board of Health.
- Cross training has been implemented within the department, particularly for inspections and soil tests, resulting in positive outcomes.
- Grants have supported projects like a substance abuse outreach program, though some grants, like the one for the outreach program, may have expiration dates.
- The cost of cleaning and replacing inspection staff's damaged and contaminated clothing is now recognized and funded.

Michael Boudreau, Director of Public Health, stated that 2022, which was his first full year as director, had many personnel changes due to retirements and resignations. Finding public health nurses has been an issue statewide. The substance abuse program's grant funding expires, but



ongoing opioid settlement funds could sustain it. Extensive inspections for food services, swimming pools, summer camps, and septic systems remained a core workload. Notable accomplishments included the development of biological safety regulations approved in January and effective from May. Outreach to existing biological research facilities aimed to ensure a smooth transition as they adapted to the new regulations.

Ms. Sciarra asked about the Opioid Settlement Funds. Mr. Townsend stated that we are waiting for guidance from DLS, but we are treating this as grant funding going through the Select Board.

Mr. Gillenwater moved to recommend favorable action on the FY24 Board of Health budget with salaries of \$633,099 and expenses of \$79,850 for a total of \$712,949, seconded by Ms. Sciarra.

Motion was approved unanimously 12-0-0.

### **Budgets for: Finance Committee, Commission on Disability, Cultural Council, Historical Commission, Historic District Commission**

Mr. Coburn moved to recommend favorable action on the following FY24 budgets: Finance Committee \$32,800, Commission on Disability \$2,750, Cultural Council \$700, Historical Commission \$750 and Historic District Commission \$550, seconded by Ms. Sciarra.

Motion was approved 11-0-1, with Mr. Zitnick abstaining.

Motion made by Mr. Gillenwater, seconded by Ms. Sciarra to close the public hearing passed by unanimously by a vote of 12-0-0.

### **Committee Discussion**

The committee discussed upcoming subcommittee meetings. Ms. Wollschlager will send information on how to volunteer to write up warrant articles.

### **Adjourn**

Motion to adjourn made by Ms. Sciarra, seconded by Mr. Jacobs approved unanimously 12-0-0.

Meeting adjourned at 9:53 PM.