



TOWN OF NORWELL
Norwell Town Offices, Room 112
345 Main Street
Norwell, Massachusetts 02061
(781) 659-8000

Norwell Advisory Board Meeting Minutes February 29, 2024

The Advisory Board was called to order by Vice Chair Bob Perniola at 7:30 PM. Also present were Town Administrator Darleen Sullivan, Town Accountant Christine McCarthy, and Board Members Brian D'Souza, Matthew Hanson, Thomas Sullivan, John LaCara, and Dane Hutchison (7:40 PM). Unable to attend were Elizabeth Hibbard, John McGrath, and Ed Maguire.

AGENDA

Ms. Sullivan advised that the Highways/Trees & Grounds discussion would be tabled pending finalization of the budget.

Motion by Mr. Hanson to approve the agenda as amended. Seconded by Mr. La Cara and unanimously voted.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Minutes

Tabled

Reserve Fund Transfer Requests

None

FY 2025 BUDGET OVERVIEW

Police Department - 210, 292

Chief Edward Lee characterized the Department's FY 25 budget as mostly level funded with some small increases due to inflation, contractually negotiated salary increases, and funding for computer software upgrades related to investigations, tracking, and scheduling. Funding for three new cruisers has been moved to the capital budget, but Ms. Sullivan would like to add them back into the budget if possible.

Member Sullivan asked about a spike in the FY 24 budget for equipment; Mr. Lee noted this was for a one-time purchase of laser gunsights. Mr. LaCara asked if the Department was appropriately staffed or any new hires were expected. Mr. Lee could see a need next year for an additional hire; he would also like to add a Lieutenant position to the org chart and has discussed this with Ms. Sullivan.

Mr. Perniola suggested that the Department plan for what will likely be increased calls if the Brightview Senior Living builds on the St. Helens property; Chief Lee noted they saw a similar increase when a new memory care center opened on Cordwainer Drive.

Member Sullivan noted that building maintenance expenses seemed to fluctuate recently; Chief Lee indicated this could be due to a first-year air conditioning repair. The budget as proposed will

cover normal maintenance and supplies. Ms. Sullivan is comfortable with the budget and works with Chief Lee at length to ensure the Department's needs are met.

Motion by Mr. Hanson to recommend the budget for Department 210, Police, in the amount of \$3,980,967.48. Seconded by Mr. La Cara and unanimously voted.

Animal Control - 292

Ms. Sullivan advised that this budget has been zeroed out. The Town had a cost-sharing arrangement with Cohasset previously, but the officer in question is now a full time Cohasset Officer, which has affected response times. Now a Norwell Officer is taking the free training to become an ACO, and Ms. Sullivan thinks having this role in-house will improve response times. This will cause no increase to the Police budget but the Department has submitted an \$89K capital budget request for a pickup to be used for animal transit; Highways provides some assistance with this. Mr. Perniola suggested that the Department look into possible grants for this expense.

Motion by Mr. Hanson to recommend the budget for Department 292, Animal Control Officer, in the amount of \$0.00. Seconded by Mr. La Cara and unanimously voted by roll call: La Cara aye, Sullivan aye, Hanson aye, Perniola aye, D'Souza aye, Hutchison aye.

Fire Department - 220

Chief David Kean present. The proposed FY 25 budget includes contractual salary increases plus an increase to 24 uniformed firefighters as part of a multi-year initiative to improve safety. They may need to further increase staff but will look for grants to offset the cost. The budget also includes contractually negotiated shift differentials which started in FY 24. General expenses have been level-funded with minor, mostly downward, adjustments based on historical spending. Member Sullivan asked if additional staff would reduce the Department's overtime cost; Mr. Kean noted it would, but this would also greatly increase the Salary line.

Mr. Hanson asked about the contractual educational incentive for staff. Chief Kean advised that staffers paid their own tuition, then received a 5% salary benefit upon receiving an Associate's degree, 10% for a Bachelor's, and 15% for a Master's.

The Department has submitted four Capital Budget requests for a Command/Staff vehicle, the balance on a pumper truck, an ambulance already on order due to a three-year backlog, and medical equipment; the latter two may be covered by ARPA funds. The Department has purchased a new air tank compressor as per the Board's discussion last year.

Motion by Mr. Hanson to recommend the budget for Department 220, Fire, in the amount of \$3,403,446.64. Seconded by Mr. La Cara and unanimously voted by roll call: La Cara aye, Sullivan aye, Hanson aye, Perniola aye, D'Souza aye, Hutchison aye.

EMS - 231

The FY 25 budget is mostly level funded, with some increases in Contractor Services due to new state mandates regarding monthly third-party quality inspections and live paramedic training. Longer warranties and the ability of staff to do in-house maintenance have helped control maintenance expenses. The Select Board has established 3% annual increases in ambulance billing, the proceeds of which go into the General Fund.

Motion by Mr. Hanson to recommend the budget for Department 231, EMS, in the amount of \$125,260.00. Seconded by Mr. La Cara and unanimously voted by roll call: La Cara aye, Sullivan aye, Hanson aye, Perniola aye, D'Souza aye, Hutchison aye.

Emergency Management - 232

The budget is level-funded across the board; the majority of these funds pay for reverse 911 notifications and utilization of a local meteorologist for Highways and Fire.

Motion by Mr. Hanson to recommend the budget for Department 232, Emergency Management, in the amount of \$11,500.00. Seconded by Mr. La Cara and unanimously voted by roll call: La Cara aye, Sullivan aye, Hanson aye, Perniola aye, D'Souza aye, Hutchison aye.

Conservation Department - 171

Conservation Agent Will Saunders present along with Conservation Commission Chair Marynel Wahl and Vice Chair Bob Woodill. The FY 25 budget is mostly level-funded but moves \$5K from Engineering Services to Professional Services to allow for greater flexibility, as Professional Services funds can be used to pay for engineering but Engineering Services funds cannot be used to pay for other professional services. The budget also includes funds for a new electric service at the Donovan Barn, which is a nominal monthly cost.

Mr. Saunders has noticed a decrease in waste bag litter and gotten positive feedback from residents since dog waste stations were installed at several Conservation properties, and he has submitted a warrant article to continue funding the stations while he researches possible grant funding. CPA funds cannot be used for the maintenance of the stations.

All present discussed trail maintenance costs. Mr. Saunders noted that a trail crew comprised of senior volunteers performed basic maintenance, but they must be paid after their 100 volunteer hours are used up. This year they will have eight volunteers, and they have gotten additional help from the Eagle Scouts and Norwell Cares student volunteers; Mr. Saunders is planning additional outreach to South Shore Votech. Trees and Grounds workers help with more substantial work but they are busy during the summer.

Mr. Perniola asked about the delta between the Department-requested and TA-recommended salary for Mr. Saunders. Ms. Sullivan advised that she could not accommodate the requested salary increase this year. A third-party compensation study was ongoing, and she was willing to reconsider the request once it is completed.

Mr. D'Souza met with Mr. Saunders and noted that the new stormwater bylaw allocated stormwater reviews to the Conservation Agent, increasing his workload. The budget includes a stipend for this additional work.

Mr. Saunders indicated that, in addition to the dog waste stations article, the Commission had submitted a housekeeping article to transfer several parcels of Town land designated for Conservation but not officially transferred to Commission care and custody. Moving forward, Mr. Saunders would like to work out a method to regularly replenish the Conservation Fund bucket for maintenance, as the annual CPC allocation can be used for land acquisition only.

Motion by Mr. Hanson to recommend the budget for Department 171, Conservation, in the amount of \$158,254.82. Seconded by Mr. La Cara and unanimously voted by roll call: La Cara aye, Sullivan aye, Hanson aye, Perniola aye, D'Souza aye, Hutchison aye.

Highways, Trees & Grounds, Cemetery

Tabled

Assessors - 141

Ms. Sullivan worked with the Board of Assessors in formulating the FY 25 budget, which includes contractual increases for staff. A new Principal Assessor is being hired with an emphasis on public communication. Ms. Sullivan has budgeted this salary at \$120K, which may be the going rate for a strong candidate; this would be the maximum potential salary for the role.

All present discussed the recent property reassessments, with Ms. Sullivan noting that assessments had to be within 95%–110% of market value, and it had been several years since one had been done. Ms. Sullivan indicated the average market adjustment for single-family homes across the board was about 19% and average land adjustments were steeper. Board members noted that these adjustments had not been even, with some properties receiving a much higher increase than others. Ms. Sullivan agreed but suggested that ultimately property owners should feel good about the assessed value and those who did not should file for an abatement. The Department got more abatement requests than usual this year (70 as opposed to 30–50) but less than expected.

Mr. La Cara, the Board liaison to Assessor's Office, commented on the high tax rate in town; Ms. McCarthy noted that the tax rate had actually gone down but this had been offset by the general increase in assessed values. All agreed on the need to better develop the Town's commercial tax base in order to relieve the residential tax burden.

Motion by Mr. Hanson to recommend the budget for Department 141, Assessors Department, in the amount of \$251,669.34. Seconded by Mr. La Cara and unanimously voted by roll call: La Cara aye, Sullivan aye, Hanson aye, Perniola aye, D'Souza aye, Hutchison aye.

MISCELLANEOUS

The School Department budget presentation will be on the agenda for March 5. Ms. Sullivan reminded Board members to email Ellen McKenna if they have to miss a meeting.

FUTURE MEETINGS

3/5, 3/7, 3/12, 3/14, 3/19, 3/21, 3/26, 3/28

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Hanson to adjourn at 8:48 PM. Seconded by Mr. La Cara and unanimously voted by roll call: La Cara aye, Sullivan aye, Hanson aye, Perniola aye, D'Souza aye, Hutchison aye.
