



TOWN OF SHREWSBURY

Richard D. Carney Municipal Office Building
100 Maple Avenue
Shrewsbury, Massachusetts 01545-5398

Finance Committee

Minutes

March 26, 2022

Present: Mark Adler, Vikram Chhabra, Denis O’Connell, Rajiv Dayal, Lena Polito, Donna O’Connor, Carlos Garcia

Also Present: Kevin Mizikar, Town Manager, Kristen Las, Assistant Town Manager, Mary Thompson, Assistant Town Manager, Alexandria Martinez, Management Analyst

Absent: Allen Jarrell, Judy Vedder

1. Call to Order

Mr. Adler called the meeting to order at 8:30am.

2. Town Manager’s Report

Mr. Mizikar did not have any new business to report.

3. 8:30 AM – Department Budget Hearings

On a motion by Mr. Chhabra, seconded by Ms. O’Connor, the Committee unanimously voted to re-open the public hearing at 8:32am.

ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE

Town Accountant - 8:32am

Mary Thompson, Assistant Town Manager

Amy Li, Town Accountant

Ms. Thompson introduced Ms. Li as the new Town Accountant. Ms. Li was the former Assistant Town Accountant for many years. Ms. Li reviewed accomplishments in the current fiscal year, including a streamlined process to train new employees who manage accounts payable and payroll. The office also migrated to an updated version of MUNIS and switched to completely paperless payroll. The budget is level funded and includes salaries for three departmental employees: the Town Accountant, Assistant Town Accountant, and a Principal Department Assistant. The Assistant Town Manager position is posted and staff are going through the recruitment process to backfill the position.

Pension & OPEB - 8:40am

Mary Thompson, Assistant Town Manager

Ms. Thompson reviewed the FY23 budget for the pension system and Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB). Ms. Thompson advised that the Town is not required to fully fund OPEB, but it is a liability that needs to be addressed as a priority. The Committee discussed how pension and OPEB funding is determined each year. Ms. Thompson advised that the plan was to fund the

pension system first, and then work on OPEB. The Town is in a very strong position with the funding.

Town Clerk - 8:47am

Sharyn Thomas, Town Clerk

Ms. Thomas reviewed the Town Clerk's office budget. Ms. Thomas, having just finished her first year as Town Clerk, stated that the primary focus has been on training and cross training staff. The office implemented an online payment center through UniPay for vital records and dog licensing. Through March 6th, 2022, the office processed 898 transactions through the online system. Through working with the Animal Control Officer, an additional 165 dogs were licensed. The office also implemented the use of poll pads for check in at Town Meeting to eliminate paper records and streamline the process. The major budget changes include additional funding for training and conferences for both the Town Clerk and Assistant Town Clerk.

Elections & Registrations – 8:50am

Sharyn Thomas, Town Clerk

Ms. Thomas reviewed the Elections and Registrations budget. Re-precincting was a major recent project from the federal census in 2020. Ms. Thomas advised that 9 out of 10 precincts changed, and lines had to be redrawn and approved by the state. The Clerk's Office will work to notify voters whose precincts have changed in the coming weeks prior to the election. The budget increase is a result of F23 being a three-election year: the State Primary in September, State Election in November and the Annual Town Election in May. Ms. Thomas reviewed the capital budget request for new voting machines. The current machines stopped being manufactured in 2008 and it is getting harder to find parts for the machine and keep up with increasing maintenance fees. There are only two vendors with two different types of machines, so they are looking to get the most up to date equipment possible.

The Committee discussed if any of the polling places have changed as a result of re-precincting. Ms. Thomas advised that since the Old Selectmen's Room in Town Hall has been converted to office space for staff, Precinct 2 has been relocated to the Senior Center.

Assessors - 9:06am

Kevin Mizikar, Town Manager

Mary Thompson, Assistant Town Manager

Mr. Mizikar advised that Ms. Ruth Anderson, Principal Assessor, was unable to attend the budget hearing. Mr. Mizikar reviewed the budget request for the department. Primary budget changes include the funding of an assistant assessor position, and upgrades to the computer software system. Mr. Mizikar advised that there will be four warrant articles brought forth by the Assessor's Office on the Annual Town Meeting warrant related to tax relief programs.

Treasurer/Collector - 9:15am

Amy Perkins, Treasurer/Collector

Mr. Mizikar introduced Ms. Perkins, who joined the Town in October of 2021. Ms. Perkins provided an overview of staffing changes in the department, including the hiring of a new

Financial Assistant in January. Ms. Perkins advised that there is one open position, and the department is working to determine if that position is needed or if current staff are able to handle the workload.

The Committee discussed how bills are paid through the online system and associated fees. Ms. Perkins advised that the credit card fees are not controlled by the Town, and are set by the vendor. Ms. Perkins advised that the department is starting to see less payments being processed in person, and many more bills are being processed through ACH.

Town Counsel - 9:30am

Stephen Madaus, Town Counsel, Mirick O'Connell

Mr. Madaus reviewed current matters involving Town Counsel. Mr. Madaus advised that Counsel is currently reporting on three matters for litigation, including two land court matters and one superior court matters. Mr. Madaus advised that the two land court matters are appeals by abutters of the ZBA decision, and they are mostly monitoring those matters.

Mr. Madaus advised the Committee of general matters involving Counsel, including working with the DPW on water/sewer improvement projects, the disposition of the Beal School at 1-7 Maple Avenue, representing Shrewsbury Development Corporation on the sale of a parcel within Centech Park North, and reviewing and revising construction documents for the new Police Station.

Additionally, Counsel has been working with the Town Manager's office to terminate encroachments on Town owned properties. The Town is reviewing each property on a case-by-case basis to determine the best course of action.

Education - 9:47am

Jon Wensky, School Committee Chair, Dr. Joseph Sawyer, Superintendent, Patrick Collins, Assistant Superintendent

Mr. Wensky, Dr. Sawyer, and Mr. Collins reviewed a PowerPoint presentation on the proposed education budget. Dr. Sawyer noted that given the override and agreement between the School Committee and the Board of Selectmen, there is funding for a budget that doesn't require any reductions in service. The school budget proposes a 4.75% increase.

Dr. Sawyer reviewed the allocation of resources and distribution of the budget, noting that 83% of the budget is allocated towards salaries and wages. Mr. Collins reviewed the costs projections to maintain current programs, and provided an overview of recommended new investments.

Dr. Sawyer reviewed enrollment projections for FY23, noting that there is a decline that is being seen across the state. Dr. Sawyer also reviewed the decline in enrollment in vocational and technical schools and out of district special education students. Available slots in the vocational school have become more limited to Shrewsbury residents.

Dr. Sawyer provided an overview of recommended new investments, including special education and English language education services, staffing resources to address the student mental health crisis, and restoring student opportunities that have been cut in the past or where current requirements are a barrier to participate.

Mr. Dayal inquired if funds can be set aside year to year proactively to cover programs and services that may risk being cut again in the future. Dr. Sawyer advised that the school district does not have a “rainy day fund”, and since it is a part of a municipality, any leftover dollars at the end of the year would get turned back into the general fund.

Dr. Sawyer advised that the budget proposes to eliminate the activity fees for students to participate in co-curricular activities such as clubs, musicals and plays to reduce the barriers to access for students. Dr. Sawyer noted that student athletes are excluded from this. The cost of the elimination of activity fees is approximately \$110,000.

The Committee discussed the opportunity to reduce or eliminate student athlete fees. The cost to eliminate student athlete fees would be approximately \$500,000. Dr. Sawyer advised that there is a family cap for fees and the School Committee is considering future ways to reduce or eliminate all fees that families pay.

The Committee Members discussed the growing substance abuse issues in the school district. Dr. Sawyer advised that there are resources in place, but the addition of the proposed staff, including the mental health positions, will provide more services and resources to those struggling.

The Committee Members discussed opportunities for students who are unable to attend vocational schools. Dr. Sawyer noted that the department has tried to provide more classes and opportunities for students to take specialized classes that are similar to opportunities they may have at a vocational school. Partnerships with Worcester State University and Quinsigamond Community College are being explored to offer additional opportunities and internships for high school students.

Debt & Interest - 11:14am
Kevin Mizikar, Town Manager

Mr. Mizikar reviewed the debt service schedule. Mr. Mizikar noted that the water system improvements project will be satisfied in FY23 and the total amount of principal and interest will go down as a result. Mr. Mizikar noted that the Town has been diligent in structuring debt no longer than 20-year terms, and the same amount of principal is paid over the term. The debt service requirements decline over time, and the Town pays less and less each year and saves on interest.

The Committee discussed the account set up for principal and interest. Mr. Mizikar advised that they are budgeted separately and paid out of different accounts, which is why they are listed on separate lines.

Mr. O'Connell inquired how much debt the Town can take on. Mr. Mizikar advised that the maximum amount is 5% of \$7 billion.

Board of Selectmen - 11:23am

Kevin Mizikar, Town Manager

Mr. Mizikar reviewed the Board of Selectmen budget. The major budget change for FY23 is the reduction in separate appropriations. In FY22, funding was approved for multi-year strategic planning. The Board has initiated the strategic planning and engagement process through the National Community Survey. Looking forward, there will be general open sessions for the public to participate in, both in-person and virtual as the vision is developed for 2030 and the strategic plan to get there. Mr. Mizikar advised that there are additional resources and information related to the strategic planning process on the Town website.

Additional highlights of the department include the sale of Centech Park North, the Edgemere Diner, and 1-7 Maple Avenue. The Board of Selectmen also established the Community Preservation Committee and Affordable Housing Trust.

Mr. Samia, Chair of the Board of Selectmen, noted that the importance of the strategic planning process will be aligning Town resources with the communities desires. Mr. Samia noted that getting feedback from the community, including Committee members, is crucial to the development of the strategic plan.

The Committee took a recess until 12:30pm.

Break for Lunch

Parks and Recreation - 12:30pm

Angela Snell, Superintendent of Public Facilities and Parks

Ms. Snell reviewed the Parks and Recreation budget. Ms. Snell noted that Parks and Rec has traditionally been a part of the DPW, but for FY23 will be shifted out of DPW and managed under Human Services. A new division, Parks Maintenance, is also proposed for FY23.

The Department oversees the operation of the Donahue Rowing Center and is the local managing authority for two state -owned boat ramps and provide support to Parks and Cemetery Commission, Lake Quinsigamond Commission and the Shrewsbury Trails Committee

Ms. Snell reviewed departmental highlights and programs. The department implemented an online registration system for programs and there were 2,514 participants in various recreation programs.

The Committee Members discussed the break out of Parks Maintenance from Parks and Recreation and how best to determine an apples to apples comparison. Funding for salaries and wages has historically come out of multiple departments, including Parks and Recreation, Cemetery and Public Buildings. Staff discussed providing a comparison break down of how

salaries and wages were funded in FY22 and how they will be funded in FY23 for Parks and Recreation and the impact of the separation of the Parks Maintenance division.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

Parks Maintenance - 12:53pm

Jeff Howland, DPW Director, Angela Snell, Superintendent of Public Facilities and Parks, Kevin Esposito, Parks and Cemetery Division Manager

Ms. Snell and Mr. Esposito reviewed the Parks Maintenance department. This is a new division to be established in FY23 and will separate out the parks and grounds maintenance aspect of Parks and Recreation. Mr. Esposito reviewed the types of service requests the department fulfills, including storm clean up, monitoring illegal dumping, tree removal and ball field renovations. Mr. Esposito reviewed the capital requests for the department, including a new truck that will assist in field maintenance and can be used as a front line plow truck as well for assistance with snow and ice operations.

The Committee discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the department. Staff highlighted that trash is picked up at all fields and ball fields at least six days a week, and they did see an increase in how often bathrooms needed to be cleaned.

Cemetery – 1:11pm

Kevin Esposito, Parks and Cemetery Division Manager, Angela Snell, Superintendent of Public Facilities and Parks

Ms. Snell reviewed the proposed Cemetery budget and departmental highlights. In FY22, the department had 160 internments, 100 full burials, and 60 cremations. Sale of lots has been limited to immediate need only. Ms. Snell reviewed the expansion schedule and timeline for the next phase of the expansion project at Prospect Park. The budget proposes the addition of a full time cemetery coordinator who would be housed in the cemetery garage and would be able to assist with patrons on-site and be more accessible. This will enhance customer service operations, as currently a cemetery staff member has to leave Town Hall to meet customers at the cemetery garage.

Public Buildings 1:23pm

Keith Baldinger, Public Buildings Division Manager

Mr. Baldinger reviewed the budget for Public Buildings, and highlighted appreciation for staff that adapted and stepped up during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep buildings safe and accessible. Mr. Baldinger reviewed the capital budget requests, and noted that the largest project is the Oak Middle School window replacement, but that is a reimbursement project with the Massachusetts School Building Authority. The Town has to appropriate the funds, but will be reimbursed approximately 50%. The budget also proposes the addition of a senior custodian for half of a year who will be staffed at the new Police Station once it is open in late winter.

The Committee discussed the contract cleaners and the cost efficiency of hiring contractors rather than in-house employees. Mr. Baldinger noted that contract cleaning is a very competitive business and they don't see a large year to year change cost-wise.

Fleet Maintenance - 1:37pm

Joel Kimball, Division Manager

Mr. Kimball reviewed the Fleet Maintenance division budget. This is a newly proposed department for FY23 and is a spinoff of the Highway Department. Spin off from highway department. The division maintains all town vehicles, excluding the Fire Department and SELCO. There are 200 registered pieces of equipment or vehicles owned by the Town. The department currently staffs three personnel out of the highway garage on South Street and works with many departments to maintain equipment, mowers, chainsaws, vehicles, and more.

The Committee discussed the implementation of more hybrid and electronic vehicles. Mr. Kimball advised that the maintenance cost on those vehicles is less than traditional engines, but staff will need to be continuously trained on the ever-changing technology. Mr. Kimball advised that there are currently two mechanics, and in the future the department hopes to have a foreman. This will allow the division manager to step away from maintenance and repairs, and having more staff in the garage addresses safety concerns.

Public Works Administration - 2:00pm

David Snowdon, Business Division Manager

Mr. Snowdon reviewed the budget for the Business Management Division. The department provides support for all DPW departments in both administration and business functions.

Mr. Snowdon highlighted recent engagement efforts, including two contests. One initiative helped boost UniPay enrollment for online payments by 20%, and the other contest was a logo design contest that involved the youth community. Mr. Snowdon premiered the new DPW logo and noted that there were 10 submissions. Mr. Snowdon reviewed the efforts to streamline the division, and noted that staff are now divided by functional areas, rather than divisions. This has reduced duplicate efforts in areas such as payroll and accounts payable.

Mr. Snowdon noted that primary budget changes for FY23 include the funding of an Assistant DPW Director, who will assist the DPW Director and will be responsible for overseeing energy management, solid waste, public facilities and public grounds, and fleet maintenance.

The Committee discussed the increase in the OT line item. Mr. Snowdon advised that the funding is in place to have staff on call for code red alerts during non-working week day hours and on weekends.

Solid Waste – 2:19pm

David Snowdon, Business Division Manager

Mr. Snowdon reviewed the Solid Waste Enterprise Fund budget. Revenues are raised through the sale of PAY-T bags and are used to offset the cost of the program. Revenues cover about 50% of the program, and the rest is offset by the tax levy. Mr. Snowdon noted budget changes including improvement to yard waste collection and household hazardous waste, and the placement of a yard waste container at the highway garage. Mr. Snowdon noted that revenue projections are looking good, and the Town is earning revenue on recycling efforts.

Street Lighting - 2:26pm

Kevin Mizikar, Town Manager

Mr. Mizikar reviewed the street lighting budget. The budget remains level funded year to year.

Highway - 2:28pm

Nick Repekta, Highway Division Manager

Mr. Repekta reviewed the Highway Department budget. The department maintains 320 lane miles of roads and sidewalks and manages line painting, roadside mowing, and snow and ice operations. Mr. Repekta noted that primary budget changes include the creation of the Fleet Maintenance division and the separation of staff and operating costs. Major highway projects include paving, street sweeping, and enhanced snow and ice training. Mr. Repekta reviewed the capital requests for the department, including a new roadside mower and dump truck.

Forestry – 2:35pm

Nick Repekta, Highway Division Manager

Mr. Repekta reviewed the Forestry budget. There is an increase in operational expenses to cover tree removal and clean up. Mr. Repekta advised that funds are also being put in place for the Town's first tree planting program.

Weights & Measures - 2:45pm

Jeff Howland, DPW Director

Mr. Howland reviewed the Weights and Measures budget. Mr. Howland noted that the budget primarily consists of a stipend for John Knipe, the Sealer of Weights and Measures, and necessary supplies.

Engineering - 2:46pm

Andy Truman, Town Engineer

Mr. Truman reviewed the Engineering Department budget. Mr. Truman noted that the Engineering Department designs and procures all roadway improvements and water main replacements. Capital requests include a plotter and scanner that will be used for document scanning and shared with other departments including Building, Planning and Conservation to continue efforts to go paperless. Mr. Truman noted that the Town recently upgraded to a new GIS platform. A major upcoming project will be the replacement of the Toblin Hill Bridge that will utilize funds from the sale of Centech Park North.

Conservation Commission – 3:00pm

Andy Truman, Town Engineer

Mr. Truman reviewed the Conservation Commission budget. The budget has been simplified in FY23, with operating expenses being aggregated under the Public Works Administration department.

Stormwater – 3:01pm

Andy Truman, Town Engineer

Mr. Truman reviewed the Stormwater Enterprise budget. The budget includes funds to continue cleaning catch basins, street sweeping and comply with functions of the stormwater permit. Mr. Truman reviewed capital requests for stormwater, including a catch basin cleaner and drainage projects.

Water and Sewer - 3:10pm

Dan Rowley, Water/Sewer Superintendent

Joe Kenney Assistant Water/Sewer Superintendent

Mr. Rowley reviewed the Water and Sewer Enterprise Funds. Mr. Rowley noted that the Town completed the first full cycle of unidirectional flushing and meter replacements. The department is seeking to add one additional water/sewer laborer position who will act as the environmental and regulatory safety coordinator. Mr. Rowley introduced Joe Kenney, the Assistant Water/Sewer Superintendent. Mr. Rowley reviewed departmental highlights for both water and sewer, including water main replacements, sewer pipe cleaning and construction improvements.

Town Manager - 3:34pm

Kevin Mizikar, Town Manager

Mr. Mizikar reviewed the Town Manager's office budget. Mr. Mizikar noted that many staffing changes have been made to achieve a satisfactory level to provide a high level of customer service to residents. In total, the FY23 budget proposes an increase of 13 FTE staff. Mr. Mizikar noted that the most significant budget change within the Town Manager's office is the reduction in staff due to the separation of the Human Resources department.

Human Resources - 3:42 pm

Kevin Mizikar, Town Manager

Mr. Mizikar reviewed the Human Resources department. Mr. Mizikar noted that most of the management of the COVID-19 pandemic has been done by the HR staff. The department is responsible for the hiring and recruitment of employees, and also implemented the first performance based appraisal system. The department will consist of a Human Resources Director, Human Resources Coordinator, and Benefits Coordinator.

On a motion by Mr. O'Connell, seconded by Ms. O'Connor, the Committee unanimously voted to close the public hearing at 3:48pm.

4. Review Meeting Schedule

- a. **Thursday, April 14, 2022 – Public Hearing on Town Meeting Warrant Articles**
- b. **Thursday, April 28, 2022 – Public Hearing on Town Meeting Warrant Articles**
- c. **Thursday, May 19, 2022 – Pre-Town Meeting**
- d. **Saturday, May 21, 2022 – Annual Town Meeting**

The Committee reviewed the upcoming meeting schedule.

5. Other Business

- a. **Review and discuss Finance Committee Report for May 2022 Annual Town Meeting**

The Committee will review the Finance Committee report at the April meetings.

6. Adjourn

On a motion by Ms. O'Connor, seconded by Mr. Garcia, the Committee unanimously voted to adjourn at 3:52pm.