



OFFICE OF THE
Advisory Board
TOWN HALL
511 MAIN STREET
DUNSTABLE, MA 01827-1313
(978) 649-4514 x222 FAX (978) 649-4371
finance@dunstable-ma.gov

March 20, 2012 Meeting Minutes

Attending: Harold Simmons, Christine Muir, Dan St Jean, Dana Metzler, Joe Dean
Absent: Ron Mikol

Meeting opened at 7:00 p.m.

Cemetery FY13 Budget Request

Alan Chaney presented a level-funded (plus 1% COLA wage increase) budget request for FY13. The cemetery's total budget projection for FY13 is \$19,743 but some of these funds are from revolving accounts, not town money. Joe added the individual line item numbers to the spreadsheet.

Transfer Requests

There were no transfer requests to consider tonight. We were expecting to see Jon Crandall from Emergency Management with a request for funds to purchase a new laptop sooner rather than later.

Special Town Meeting Articles for May

Dana met with the Board of Selectmen and proposed the following STM warrant articles: to earmark a portion of the unspent Snow money for the design of a new salt shed since that is a snow-related expense; similarly, to earmark a portion of that Snow money for the construction of a salt shed. The BoS agreed.

Veterans' Benefits

Dana spoke with Peter Georges, VA agent, regarding the creation of a fund similar to the new unemployment benefits fund, in which money would be put aside each year in anticipation of any future claims for veterans' benefits. Currently, no one in Dunstable qualifies for the benefits but there may be some in the near future. Dana suggested using \$12,000 to seed the account and lowering the budget line item to \$15,000. Harold requested that we confirm with the Town Accountant that we are allowed to create this account.

Other Money Articles

At the BoS meeting last night, Harold said the selectmen discussed an article for the Fire Dept. in the amount of \$5000. It wasn't clear whether that article is the same one we have listed at \$7000, for a rescue tool upgrade, or if it is a new item.

Town Administrator position

The BoS is considering hiring an interim TA with significant experience, who can establish the position and its goals, then moving to a permanent TA with less experience and therefore, a lower salary. Dana suggested they consider a consultant or consulting firm for the initial position; this costs the town less in overhead such as health insurance. He does not think every department in town can contribute a percentage towards this cost, since most budgets are very tight. The fact that we are usually left with a

relatively small amount of free cash at the end of each fiscal year clearly demonstrates how closely people are budgeting their departments and how well they are living within the means.

Fire Chief

The BoS is not yet certain of the salary they want to offer the new fire chief, nor have they made any decisions regarding hiring for that position (interim or permanent).

Police Overtime

Dana brought up the question raised in previous meetings: when is it more fiscally responsible to hire an additional officer rather than pay overtime to current officers? One point to consider is that overtime funding does not require "loading" the number with insurance costs.

Dan raised the question of how to decide on funding for compensating firefighters for training as well as bringing on additional police officers. Both are important town functions and deserve respectable pay.

Fire S&W

This account will be depleted by the end of this month, so we need to consider how to fund the line item in FY13. The chief requested \$25,000 to cover \$2000 in wages each month. We had reduced that to just over \$19,000 but tonight agreed to put it back up to \$25,000.

Harold said he heard that FEMA is questioning the reimbursement of fire wages from the work done during the October snowstorm. He doesn't know the reason behind the questioning, but wonder if it's because we have a "call" fire department instead of a full-time department. We should look into how other towns with "call" fire departments handle their compensation.

FY13 Budget Review

Andy, town accountant, said that based on his conversation with the assessor's associate, Vicki, we should keep Abatements Requested at \$38,000 and New Property revenue at \$30,000. The unknown revenue values are abatements, cherry sheet, and free cash.

Andy also said that the Chapter 90 totals for 2012 was \$400,000; the board questioned whether this was the current account balance or expenditures in FY12. (Previous meeting minutes indicate that Highway thinks their current balance is \$90,000+ so this is likely to be expenditures during FY12, but this is not confirmed.)

Line items that were updated tonight include:

- Treasurer Certification fixed at \$1000
- Assessor wages fixed at \$300/each for a total of \$900
- Election wages increased to \$2100 due to presidential election year
- Veterans' benefits lowered to \$15000
- Veterans' agent salary increased to \$5000 for now (5 hrs/wk @ \$15/hr=\$3900)
- Health insurance left at \$185,500
- Town Hall server (article from 2008) removed from budget (\$2500)
- Town Hall PY Encumbrance removed (\$5000)

Dan asked Joe why the 2012 total in the spreadsheet doesn't match the total voted at Town Meeting. There were some accounting changes after town meeting, primarily related to the school debt, that create the discrepancy.

Harold mentioned that the BoS worked on part of their budget last night. Most items reviewed are okay to stay at current levels, although NMCOG membership dues may have increased from \$750 to \$1000. We hope to receive the final BoS budget this week.

Town Clerk Assistant

Dana had indicated to Carol Skerrett, Town Clerk, that the board would probably be willing to fund some kind of position to fill her duties when she cannot (jury duty, illness, vacation, etc.). We think it's necessary to have a clear job description for this person and an estimate on the cost. We decided to leave this issue open for a Town Administrator to consider.

GDRSD Stabilization Account

The board discussed the request from the School Committee and decided not to support the establishment of such a fund. Reasons mentioned include the issue of who controls the money (becomes a small subset of the total population of both towns); there are other methods for funding capital projects; children currently in school should benefit from all available financial resources and not be short-changed because of future spending goals.

Dan moved that the board NOT support the stabilization fund. Joe seconded. The motion was unanimously approved by the five members of the board present.

Audit

DOR is currently recommending a yearly audit so this is not a line item that we can eliminate to save \$10,000. The audit has gone out to bid.

Quinn Bill

In response to an article last week, regarding the State Supreme Court's ruling that cities and towns are not legally required to fund the Quinn Bill, Dan had questioned whether there might be any effect in Dunstable. We had already agreed to fund the Quinn Bill for our police department when the state first withdrew its funding, but the board agreed tonight that we should look into whether the current contract has any wording or language that commits us to that funding.

Dan Shea
Paul J. Michael
Harold K. Quinn
Joseph P. Dan
Dana Shea
Christine Muir