

TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON
BOARD OF SELECTMEN/FINANCE COMMITTEE
GREAT BARRINGTON FIRE STATION
37 STATE ROAD, GREAT BARRINGTON, MA
MINUTES
FEBRUARY 12, 2014
6:00 P.M.

PRESENT:

BOARD OF SELECTMEN:

SEAN STANTON, CHAIR

DEBORAH PHILLIPS

STEPHEN BANNON

DANIEL BAILEY

ANDREW BLECHMAN – ABSENT

FINANCE COMMITTEE:

SHARON GREGORY, CHAIR

WALTER ATWOOD

MARK LEFENFELD

LEIGH DAVIS – ARRIVED LATE

THOMAS BLAUVELT – ABSENT

TOWN MANAGER: JENNIFER TABAKIN

I. The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. **FY15 Budget Overview by Town Manager**

Jennifer presented the cover letter dated February 12, 2014 to the Members of the Select Board and Finance Committee, the summary of the proposed budget plan and Questions and Answers on Town Projects. Jennifer congratulated Lauren Sartori because the town has the highest bond rating and it reflects the excellence in management that Lauren has given the Town over many years and she has been an amazing teacher and patient along the process. The budget book was prepared by Jenn Baily and she did an amazing job.

The proposed budget outlines the operational means of the Town of Great Barrington beginning July 1, 2014 (FY15) which are estimated to cost 10.8 million. We have the document that proposed the level of services, anticipated revenue sources and highlights new initiatives and identifies the areas for policy decisions. The initial budget was reduced by \$128,221 excluding money which is set aside to address labor costs. The budget includes an updated multi-year Capital Program Plan and projects that may qualify for the new Community Preservation Act funding. The budget incorporates objects of the approved Master Plan and FY15 Policy Statement. It was noted that the financial structure and operation plan for the Town is one that is sustainable for the long term. In the next 4 budget meetings we are going to be looking at priorities and at the same time evaluate the sources of revenue, the proposed school budget, following the Governor's budget process and negotiating the 3 year labor contracts.

SUMMARY OF THE FY15 PROPOSED BUDGET PLAN

Anticipated Revenues – The budget assumes that the majority of the budget will be from local property taxes. The projected revenues are 18.5 million. It assumes a slight increase in anticipated revenues from local receipts up \$30,000 from 2014 to 1.3 million. State receipts are projected to be the same as the prior year at \$991,093. We have assumed less money in grants this year which is \$447,600 down from \$617,000 in 2014.

The Proposed Spending Plan- The operating budget for the Town of Great Barrington totals 10.8 million for the General Fund and 1.84 Million for the Waste Water Treatment Enterprise Fund. For Planning, we assume the BHRSD will remain the same level as in FY14.

New Initiatives – The three year union contracts for the Police, DPW and Library expires on June 30, 2014 and we are currently in negotiations. The prior three year contracts offered salary increases of 2% per year.

Volunteer Fire fighters – Increases in the stipend system to support the Town’s volunteer fire fighters is proposed. This reflects a strategy to attract new volunteers and for the ability for current volunteers to report to incidents during business hours.

Electronic Permitting – The web-based permitting system makes it easier for local contractors and property owners to apply for and track permits in the Building and Board of Health Departments.

Improved Communication – We will be working to improve project and department reporting which is known as “citizen-centric reporting.” We will be asking everyone for an e-mail address so Town notices may be sent electronically which will save paper and postage.

Energy Efficiency – The Town started emergency efficiency upgrades at the Dewey Court House last month which will generate future savings in electricity and heating costs. The Town has implemented additional energy efficiency project to comply with the Green Community Grant program. We are going to look at power purchase agreements and solar power projects.

Jennifer asked that everyone review the Question and Answers on Town Projects informational sheets included in the budget books.

The Town’s Wastewater Treatment Plant is fully funded by user fees. Town cemeteries generate fees to partially offset the cost of burial and maintenance. The Town sells stickers for the transfer station to offset the cost of the operation. The Building Department costs are covered by permit fees.

Beginning with the Budget Introduction (B) is the Mission Statement, Budget Policy, and Government Funds and Capital.

A. Select Board/Manager:

There is an increase of \$14,000 and that consists of continuing the Town’s participation in the 6 River Clean-up Coalitions which is the 6 towns along to river to make sure we can do what we

can to get GE to clean up the Housatonic River. The second part in the increase is the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Brownfield Remediation Program of \$4,000. It provides technical assistance for property owners to do testing on lots that may have environmental contamination and what they need to do to put a plan together. It gives them assistance to see if they are eligible for grant funding, etc.

Jennifer explained that Line Item 4b Wage/Comp/Contracts was added for union/nonunion increases. It was also explained that the Select Board/Town Manager budget covers the salaries for board meeting coverage.

Finance Committee:

Increase of \$50.00 for dues and publications.

Town Accountant/Financial Coordinator:

No Changes in the budget.

Technology:

The new Building/Board of Health software maintenance has been added in the amount of \$14,250.00. \$1,334.00 has been added for the CWMARS Library system maintenance. \$2,190 is for general software maintenance, program updates and support. Lauren advised that the Fire Department received a grant for \$2,700 for 9 tablets which will be replacing 4 of the old ones. \$2,400 is for disaster recovery and cloud back-up. The only software increase in the capital budget is to replace the fire station software and hardware in Great Barrington and Housatonic. It will be 5 years old in the fall of 2014 and we try to replace our systems every 5 years.

Assessors:

\$4,000 for consultant services to fully measure exterior and interior tax lot parcels to meet the FY 2019 compliance to update building and lot information. This has to be done once in a 9 year cycle. This is required for DOR to certify our tax rate in FY2019. We will be upgrading the digital tax maps specifically putting boundary line measurements on the tax maps. The initial request was approximately \$10,000. Mass GIS had put out a notification that they were going to fund communities who are seeking to do this type of work. Principal Assessor, Chris Lamarre said that he put in for funding for that and we should hear sometime in March. That could be a \$10,000 savings for us.

Treasurer/Collector:

The postage rate has gone up - \$1,974 increase. There will be a tax lien auction this spring on properties on the tax title list. A courtesy letter will go out this month to everyone on the list even though they might not be eligible to have the properties go for sale. Letters will not be sent to people in bankruptcy or individuals that there is a payment agreement with. After a time period, a second letter will be sent out on how much is due at the time of sale. Currently, we agreed the sale would be held the 18th of April. Last year we collected just over \$200,000 just on the courtesy letters that went out. The money that was collected was from people who had mortgages on their properties. Sandy advised there are approximately 30 properties.

Town Clerk:

\$1,700 has been added to update and publish the Town Code and to format it for on line search.

Historic District – Line 58 and 60:

This could potentially be funded by CPA. Line 58 is to put historic markers on properties on Main Street and pedestal repairs to the Winged Victory statue. Line 60 is the software license renewal for their walking tour app.

Planning Board:

It was noted they have no increases.

Zoning Board of Appeals:

Zero Increase

Office of Planning/Com. Development:

There is \$103.00 increase which is a fee increase from the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. The \$1,000 is the grant for digitizing property records.

Misc. (Insurance, Retirement, etc.)

Jenifer advised that the health insurance rates have increased. We are part of the Berkshire Health Systems Group. There is a 9% increase this year. That increase reflects two things. It reflects the free cash that was used in the prior years to subsidize what would have been an increase is no longer available. This year, they can't deplete that amount because they have to keep enough cash in reserves for potential large claims. The Town pays 80% of the employees' health insurance cost of the HMO. The town is absorbing the rate increase of \$70,000. Jennifer negotiated with MIIA on a two year renewal on our insurance and it resulted in a 0% increase in worker's compensation and public safety insurance for 2015 and no more than a 2.5% increase in 2016. A detailed breakdown of employees covered in various categories is listed on Page: H-02 of the budget.

Retirement Funds – Line Item 235 - \$688,658 – Mass is a non-social security state for municipal workers. Municipal workers all pay into the regional retirement system instead of paying into the social security system. The town also has an assessment which is for both active people and for retirees.

Leigh Davis asked about the energy costs of the public buildings. Jennifer said we have an ongoing grant to achieve better efficiencies. Joe Sokul said in 2012, we became a green community and we had in place a 5 year energy reduction plan, and we received a grant and with that plan, we prioritized all areas that need to be addressed. The Mason Library is the largest user for energy costs. The energy management was put in place but never commissioned. There were a lot of things not connected. The lighting system was reconfigured wrong. The west side of the building there are windows that are not insulated with storm windows. It is the same thing with the Ramsdell Library. The contractor went out of business and did not pay their subcontractors. The Town went to court to resolve it.

Misc – H-01 – Debt service – Hold for discussion until 2015 Capital.

Unfunded Employee/ Benefits/OPEB Benefits – It is almost over funded. It is proposed to take the \$30,500 and establish an OPEB Trust this year. It would demonstrate to the bonding people as a community that we recognize the responsibility and are addressing it.

We are not putting the \$500 into the Conservation Commission Land Acquisition Fund – for the purchase of open space because this is proposed to be part of the CPA. Steve Bannon thought the money should be put back because we can't depend on the CPA money.

MOTION: Steve Bannon to adjourn

SECOND: Deborah Phillips

VOTE: Motion passed

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,



Carolyn Wichmann
Secretary