

Town of Holliston
Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
February 2nd, 2021

The meeting was held remotely under the guidelines that were issued because of the emergency caused by the COVID-19 virus. All votes taken during this meeting were done as a roll call vote.

Mr. Szajda called the Finance Committee to order at 7:01PM. In attendance were Chairperson Ken Szajda, Vice Chair Dan Alfred, Sue Nersessian, Vincent Murphy, Michelle Zeamer, Tim Maxwell, and Clerk Mark Whittaker.

Other Notable attendees included Town Administrator Travis Ahern, Town Facilities Manager James Keast, Select Board Vice-Chair Tina Hein, Town Clerk Elizabeth Greendale, and Town Planner Karen Sherman.

Budget Reviews:

Town Planner Karen Sherman presented a Planning Board budget request of \$103,607, but the request was not the request approved by the Planning Board as it contained extra hours for the Town Planner that had not been approved by the board. The request presented represents a 1.79% increase from last year which stems from an additional \$1,776 associated with adding 5 hours a week to the Town Planner, and an additional \$50 associated with longevity increases. Dan Alfred inquired about whether fees could be increased to cover the additional hours, and whether the additional hours could translate into increased fee revenue. Karen Sherman said there was not a 1:1 correlation, and that the increased hours may not lead to increased fee revenue. The question was raised about a deputy town planner, and Travis Ahern suggested that it would be better to hire a Town Engineer instead. Mr. Szajda asked about the request for \$1,000 in the communication line when the run rate has been greater than \$1,000 and is on track to exceed \$1,000 again this year (the communication line is already \$571 expended halfway through 2021). This will be examined by the Planning Board before they vote on a final budget to be presented.

The Zoning Board of Appeals budget was also presented with a requested budget of \$10,925. This represents a .26% decrease in budget. Ken Szajda asked if the new litigation agreement with Town Counsel affects this budget, and Karen Sherman stated that it does, but not by much.

The Town Clerk budget was presented by Elizabeth Greendale with a requested budget of \$165,930. This represents a .29% increase. These increases are due to Longevity and communications increases. Elizabeth Greendale also stated that the town may have to redistrict because of the federal census and that would have an estimated cost to the town of \$2,500 to \$3,000 primarily due to postage costs associated with required mailings to all residents. Sue Nersessian asked if it was required to use US mail (instead of electronic means), to which Elizabeth Greendale said yes by law it must be done that way. Tim Maxwell asked about dog licensing revenue which appeared to be down this year, but it was clarified that it was due to timing since dog licenses must be renewed by April which is when most of the

dog licensing revenue is booked. Michelle Zeamer asked about whether there would be modifications to the nomination process given the pandemic—having people going door to door to gather signatures does not seem like the safest thing to do right now. Elizabeth Greendale stated that no considerations were being made but papers are now available. She went on to suggest that multiple copies could be used and submitted to send papers to people and have them return it but that 50 “wet” signatures were still required.

The Elections budget request of \$14,534 was also presented by Elizabeth Greendale. This represents a significant decrease of 62.67% due largely to the cyclic nature of elections (only the town election occurs in FY22). Sue Nersessian asked if mail in voting costs for the just-concluded election cycle were paid by the town or by the state or federal governments. Elizabeth stated that the initial mailer to request the mail in ballot was paid for by the state, but the postage to send the actual ballot was paid for by the town. She also stated that the ballot box outside town hall is a permanent fixture that will be used for future elections.

Travis Ahern presented the Sealer Budget of \$0. An increase to the revolving fund for the sealer for the sealer to purchase new instruments associated with the growing cannabis industry was discussed.

Travis Ahern also presented the Solid Waste Budget request of \$1,318,183. Travis explained the derivation of the number and the increase due to people staying home because of the pandemic (generating more trash for pickup). He also discussed that there was an increase in “white goods” pickup (bulk items) because of people doing home upgrades; however, it is expected that the state DEP will be making changes to the “white goods” requirements that may hit the budget in the future. Michelle Zeamer asked why we were paying for someone to take our scrap metal, when there are businesses that would pay the town for our scrap metal. Travis stated that this will be investigated. Ken Szajda asked about recycling costs given the recent revelation that most plastic is not actually recycled and that the recycling symbols on plastics was a marketing tool and didn’t mean that plastics were recyclable. With recycling now costing more per ton than trash, it makes no sense to tell residents to put certain plastics into their recycling bins if they are going to end up in the trash anyway. Travis stated that the sustainability coordinator will need to investigate it. Tina Hein also pointed out that there has been a significant impact on recycling based on increase of ecommerce and shipping packaging. Mr. Szajda pointed out that his point had nothing to do with recycling volume, that the concern was that the town (and residents) had been misled to believe that plastics were being recycled when they were not, and that it made no financial sense to pay higher costs to have some plastics in the recycling bin when they are not being recycled and should be in the (cheaper) trash bin.

Town administrator updates:

Travis Ahearn stated that there will be significant updates to the available CARES Act funds coming next week. He also stated that there will be additional budget meetings with the Select Board on Thursday nights to try to stay ahead of the budget season rush. Dan Alfred asked that the Finance Committee be more involved in the CARES Act spending decisions given that some of the expenses have follow-on costs that the town has to pick up; when CARES spending decisions are made there has to be proper planning for any follow-on costs.

Liaison updates:

Ken Szajda stated that the School Committee Budget Subcommittee will be meeting with the Finance Committee later this week and will set up a recurring meeting moving forward. Mark Whittaker reported that he and Ms. Nersessian had a meeting with the Parks and Recreation Director Mark Frank. Mark Whittaker also let the committee know about potential financial issues associated with getting Holliston residents that are 75+ to a COVID vaccination site. Possible use of CARES Act funds and FEMA reimbursement for the administration of the COVID vaccine were discussed.

Covid Financial Report:

Chief Cassidy was not present, but Mr. Szajda had been in touch with the Chief about COVID status. Chief Cassidy had relayed that the town is still in good shape. The Committee also noted that Holliston had moved from "red" to "yellow" on the state's weekly COVID report.

Dan Alfred made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Sue Nersessian. The motion passed 7-0 and the meeting was adjourned at 8:19 PM.