

Town of Holliston

Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

March 9th, 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 Vice Chair Tina Hein of the Holliston Select Board, Chief Cassidy of the Holliston Fire Department, Chief Stone of the Holliston Police Department, Lieutenant George Leurini of the Holliston Police Department, DPW Director Sean Reese, and Town Administrator Travis Ahern.

Administrative tasks:

Revisions to the minutes from February 23rd and March 2nd were discussed. Approval was deferred until a new draft is circulated.

Budget Reviews:

Chief Stone of the Holliston Police Department presented the \$3,185,700 budget request for the Holliston Police Department. This budget request represents a \$163,957 or 5.4% increase YoY. These increases are mostly due to the addition of an officer which has been part of the 5-year plan for the police department, as well as a catch up from some FY19 favorability used to offset FY20.

George Leurini presented the \$13,902.06 budget request for the Holliston Auxiliary Police. This budget request is flat from the request of last year.

Sean Reese presented the \$1,482,607 requested budget for the DPW Highway Department. This represented an increase of \$16,570 or 1.13%. This increase was due to a few factors. The first was that temp labor has been brought back into the budget, second is an increase to Upbranch, third is an increase to the signs budget, and the final increase was due to Uniform cost increases due to current union contract requirements.

Sean Reese presented the \$2,513,721 requested budget for DPW Water department. This represented an increase of \$141,649 or 10.24%. The increase was a result of an increase in regular salaries (to cover the cost of a salary what was not included previously), the restoration of money for temporary labor, and increases in benefit costs.

Sean Reese presented the \$250,000 requested budget for Snow and Ice removal. This represented a flat funding request from previous years.

Chief Cassidy presented the \$932,454 requested budget for the Holliston Fire Department. This represented an increase of \$46,964 or 5.3%. This increase is due to an increase in clerical salary that the chief has been covering for years that was split into a different position and the addition of a fire inspector (which is currently being covered by Chief Stone).

Chief Cassidy presented the \$578,851 requested budget for Ambulance Service. This represented an increase of \$97,125 or 20.16%. This increase is due to an increase to the shift differential and an increase to the training line. The latter is to allow EMTs to advance their certifications, further improving service to the town.

Chief Cassidy presented the \$22,589 requested budget for Emergency management. This represented an increase of \$11,313 or 100.33%. This increase is due to a salary bump to the Emergency Management Director and an increase in the professional services line. The latter is to cover the required match for a federal planning grant. The grant application is still pending.

Travis Ahern presented the \$38,000 requested budget for the animal control officer. This represented a flat request from last year, as this is a contracted service from Ashland.

Covid Financial Report:

Chief Cassidy stated that one expense was posted to Munis, and the Select Board approved two other CARES Act Funding requests. Those two other charges were for new air filters at the Police Station, and a 3rd round of Mortgage/rental assistance. Chief Cassidy also stated that the town continues to be well stocked with PPE.

Town administrator updates:

Travis Ahearn gave updates on several items. Notable updates included:

1. Local Rapid Response Planning Program - LRRP – will not have grant funding but will be paid for by the state. This will have no impact on the May Town Meeting Warrant.
2. 3rd round of Rent/Mortgage assistance has been approved.
3. Capital Subcommittee has been meeting and will have updates presented by Tim Maxwell, but draft documents will be forthcoming.
4. The town has NOT opted into the PFML Act as this would represent a significant cost to the town.

Liaison Updates:

Michelle Zeamer shared the request of Town Clerk Liz Greendale to have a discussion on the agenda for an increase of hours for an administrative assistant.

Tim Maxwell gave a brief update from the capital subcommittee. The subcommittee will be meeting on Thursdays soon.

Ken Szajda shared that the School Committee budget subcommittee and the Finance Committee liaisons have continued meeting regularly to discuss the school budget request but that there was nothing to report yet.

Dan Alfred, and Vincent Murphy have been meeting with Travis and the town's financial officers to discuss retirement funding.

General announcements and FY22:

Senator Spilka and Representative Dykema met with the Holliston Select Board Monday night, and let the Select Board know that local aid funding should be like what the Governor has suggested to this point. This is due to state revenues recovering a bit more quickly than planned as well as the potential for new revenue sources included in the Governor's proposal (like sports betting). It was also noted that the Governor's budget uses almost \$2 billion in rainy day funds, so the state is not out of the woods yet.

Dan Alfred made a motion that the committee go into executive session under MGL Chapter 39 section 23B reason 3, to discuss strategy with respect to bargaining or litigation, from which the Finance Committee would not return to open session. This was seconded by Tim Maxwell. The motion carried 7-0.