

TOWN OF WENHAM
Board of Selectmen / Finance & Advisory Committee
Joint Meeting of February 13, 2020
Buker School, 1 School Street

Pursuant to the Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. Chapter 30 A, §§ 18-25, written notice posted by the Town Clerk delivered to all Board members, a meeting of the Finance & Advisory Committee (FinCom) and the Board of Selectmen (BOS) was held on Thursday February 13, 2020 at 6:30 Buker School Multi-Purpose Room

Please be advised that this open meeting is being broadcast live and recorded by HWCAM for playback on Comcast channel 8 and Verizon channel 36. It will also be available for on-line, video on-demand viewing at hwcam.org. The listings of matters are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair 48 hours before said meeting, which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed. Items may be taken out of order and at times that differ from those listed below. Other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law. All audience members wishing to address the Board of Selectmen must go to the podium microphone and give their name and address.

Finance Committee Call to Order - With a quorum present Mr. Begin called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.
Committee present: Alex Begin, Chair; Michael Therrien, Vice Chair; Carrie Jelsma; Jim Purdy; David Molitano (A 725pm)
Also present: Chris Holak Interim Finance Director; Jackie Bresnahan, Permitting Coordinator/Special Projects Manager; Catherine Tinsley, Recording Secretary

Board of Selectmen Call to Order - With a quorum present, Mr. Wilhelm called the meeting to order at 6:30
Selectmen present: Jack Wilhelm, Chair; John Clemenzi, Vice Chair; Catherine Harrison, Clerk

FY21 Budget Discussion with Board of Selectmen

o Capital Budget Overview

Mr. Ansaldi began the capital budget overview with a total of \$400,351 less Hamilton's assessment of \$61,380 for a net capital budget of \$338,971.

He included the capital for the Iron Rail Revolving Fund \$25,000, Chapter 90 state aid \$150,000 and the Water Fund now at \$185,000. The estimate for SCADA increased from \$50,000 to \$150,000; this increase is to be reviewed by the BOS.

Capital budget pending issues included

Comp & Class Study - Mr. Ansaldi recommended withdrawing the Comp & Class study due Wenham participating in a peer review grant with Manchester and about 10 other local communities to look at operations and comparative analysis to make budget decision; this includes staffing. It is possible the results will provide the information for Wenham.

Master Plan - \$100,000

Rifles – \$7,000: The Police Chief proposed to purchase 5 this year & 5 next year

Ambulance – The Fire Chief has withdrawn the request for a new second ambulance

SCADA - \$150,000: (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) Wireless software program to monitor water due to copper wires no longer being used, or repaired. (Water Department Reserve Funds)

Discussion ensued on the remaining capital items. Mr. Ansaldi noted that capital items not approved would increase free cash and reduce the deficit. Capital Budget Pending Issues:

Master Plan - Mr. Begin reviewed there was meaningful support from the committee for the master plan with the thinking it will lay out a long-term vision/ plan for the town i.e. opportunities for development and guide the town's course of action. The committee believed the budgeted amount was steep for this year's budget and deferred to this meeting for discussion with the BOS. Mr. Therrien noted that a lot of committees/boards have currently completed action plans and questioned if it could be started with some funding this year and continued next year. This would depend on the company doing the project but the timing would be off, especially for community support. Ms. Harrison opined that the idea of master plan is to have an overarching group to pull all the reports together and informs a consultant with up-to-date data. She further questioned from a procurement point of view it is wise to split a plan over fiscal years. The last Mater Plan was written in 1960 and expired in 1980. Ms. Jelsma noted if \$100,000 investment is made would it yield economic development projects that would yield more than the \$100,000 investment.

Ann Weeks, Chair of Planning Board identified that she was a registered planner and worked for a city during rapid growth where there was a master plan to direct growth and attract growth and development. She noted that parts of the plan are done and the Master plan would wrap this together and deferring it would cost more due to not having current information plan that would need to be done and Wenham needs a vision for the future to attract economic development to keep the feel of the

community and not rely so much on property tax revenue and by not having a master plan Wenham is leaving money on the table. Ms. Weeks noted that staff applied for grant which was refused due to the town not having a master plan.

Tony Feeherry, Chair of Zoning Board Appeals responded that the Town “probably” is leaving money on the table by not getting grants and having a better handle on what the town should be doing with commercially zoned property in town and separate from economic benefits the town reacts to projects and the Master Plan would bring the community together to understand what changes the town would accept by getting more input and pulling it all together of what could be done over the next 10-20 years.

Mr. Clemenzi commented the town may not have an appetite to implement any plan, and stated he has not seen any interest in economic development and referenced the lost revenue from inability to bring economic development to the Mullen property as tax revenue.

Mr. Wilhelm noted the town is way over the levy limit and the school has a 9% increase in their budget and although desirable it is not critical for next year and \$100,000 for a master plan would be nice to have but not necessary considering the budget deficit.

Ms. Jelsma noted that given with increased budget pressures if there would be an appetite for economic development.

Mr. Feeherry noted the open space committee identified every parcel in town that could potentially be open space or developed and commented that something will happen with these properties and “even if the town decides to stand still it doesn’t mean the town can stand still.”

Mr. Begin cautioned that eventualities of things happening with potential development and be careful not to discount the work already done and noted it can’t go further without a master plan but that it is unknown if the Master Plan would increase revenue and it needs to be considered in its own merits and not as a solution to the budget.

Vote: The committee voted 1-4-0 to include the expenditure of \$100,000 for the master plan in the FY21 budget. The motion failed.

Vote: The BOS voted 1-2-0 to include the expenditure of \$100,000 for the master plan in the FY21 budget. The motion failed.

Mr. Molitano arrived

Rifles - The committee previously voted to support the purchase of 5 rifles in FY21.

Vote: The BOS voted unanimously to accept the Police Chief’s recommendation to purchase five rifles in FY21 and five rifles in FY22.

SCADA - The estimate for the software program estimate increased from \$50 to \$150,000. Erik Mansfield, Water Superintendent, was not available for the meeting but communicated with the Town Administrator that he would continue working to reduce the cost.

Mr. Wilhelm noted concern that the price tripled and he was not comfortable supporting this without additional information.

Mr. Holak noted that the first quote did not include the wireless component of the upgrade.

Mr. Begin observed this was a proactive upgrade to avoid interruption if there is an issue with the copper lines.

It was questioned if there are any regulations to have this in place.

This will be on the BOS meeting agenda for Tuesday.

Use of Free Cash to balance the FY21 budget: \$539,705

Free Cash reserve \$250,000 reserve per policy

Free Cash used to supplement budget for one-time capital is \$164,000

Updated changes: Fiscal deficit override decreased from \$1,210,504 to \$1,095,504; as currently formatted with the school budget.

Total revenue and free cash \$20,580,539

- Pending Policy Decisions for Operating Budget

- Loose Leaf Pickup – Mr. Ansaldi reviewed that loose-leaf pickup was eliminated from the budget last year to cover the cost of the Federal Clean Water Protection Act mandated MS4 (Stormwater permitting.)

Going forward, the DPW director has indicated that in order to continue loose leaf pickup an additional \$45,000 is needed to be added to the FY21 budget. The MS4 testing has been deferred the past few years and the town would incur fines if MS4 testing is not completed. The Town saves additional funds by not doing loose leaf pick up i.e. contracted services and the committee asked for the net cost savings. The levy limit budget does not fund loose leaf pick-up but does fund bagged leaf pick-up.

- Pleasant Pond – Ms. Harrison noted that it costs the two towns about \$25,000. Sticker revenue is only \$3,000.

The Town of Hamilton has indicated they no longer want to subsidize the gap.

There have been ongoing discussions to have two gate keepers on duty each shift but no life guards and swimming would be at your own risk. Also increase the sticker cost and reduce hours the beach is staffed/ open have been under consideration.

Mr. Ansaldi is in contact with Regina Baker, Pleasant Pond Association to consult with the town.

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Pleasant Pond was fully funded in the FY21 budget; changes would reduce the line item. Mr. Ansaldi suggested to increase fees, and reduce hours and make a better plan for next year. This approach was supported by the committee. This would be revisited if Hamilton does not want to continue to share the Pleasant Pond.

- Indirect Water Cost – The Water Commissioners supported the payment for indirect costs to the town in the amount of \$94,000. It was noted that there would be an increase in the base rate and possibly meter rate fees.

Ms. Harrison suggested this information be made available for town meeting.

- Water Department Additional Staff – Mr. Ansaldi said the Water Department requested an additional staff position. There needs to be two people that are licensed. Currently there are two people that work in the water department. An employee of the DPW also has a water license. The BOS and the committee asked for additional information on this expenditure. The water department has about \$70,000 in debt rolling off and Mr. Mansfield would redirect this money to funding the new position. This is in the water department's proposed FY21 budget.

It was questioned if the SCADA would provide more access to the system and the additional employee may not be needed. The BOS and committee did not support adding a staff person to the water department at this time and perhaps mitigate the increase fee and add additional funds into the capital funds. It was noted most departments want more staff.

No action was taken at this time.

Mr. Purdy noted that the total overall general budget is up 7.1% and the BOS / FC need to be prepared to explain and what the major drivers were that contributed to this increase.

There was a side discussion acknowledging the legal fee budget line increase due to litigations and the budget figure reflecting closer to anticipated actual fees.

- Trash Fees – Trash increased 11% overall (\$45,000) \$440,000

Mr. Ansaldi introduced a discussion to “take the temperature” of town meeting regarding the possibility to initiate trash pick-up fees to relieve the budget.

Mr. Molitano responded that after calculating the proposed trash fee vs. an override, a trash fee is a good way to supplement the budget and in the long run, pending a resident's home valuation, may save the taxpayer money compared to the increased tax for the override. He estimated the cost of trash pickup at \$3-5 per week; trash fees do not compound with real estate assessments. He supported looking at anything that lowers the tax rate significantly.

Mr. Therian noted that this is an additional fee to the resident and the town would still require an override.

Ms. Harrison opined that (some) residents are not supportive of an additional fee that leaves the town more room in the budget to increase plus requires a weekly fee. This may be a burden for some residents and trash fees will most likely increase to keep up with costs. Ms. Harrison observed that an override permanently increases the levy limit which the town needs.

Mr. Begin believed the challenge was addressing the longer structural issues playing out in the budget and if this would resolve budget issues.

Mr. Molitano noted that the town is quickly reaching the maximum assessed tax rate and this is one way to free up the budget.

Ms. Jelsma supported trash fees however, with increased water fees, loose leaf pickup override and the town/school overrides, she was comfortable postponing trash fees to next year. Mr. Begin noted that trash fees are unfair structurally and it is not a clear solution but the existing “hybrid” system works with the one-barrel limit and the option to purchase extra bags at a fee. A straw-pole was taken and although it was not supported for this year, the majority were in favor of trash fees and to present this proposal at town meeting with as much information as possible to see how town meeting feels about the concept.

Adjournment – *The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.*

Respectfully Submitted By

Catherine Tinsley

3.10.2020