



Town of Bellingham

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

10 Mechanic Street

Bellingham, Massachusetts 02019

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Budget Workshop

February 24, 2024

The Selectboard meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM in the Arcand Meeting Room by Chairman Michael Connor. Actively participating in the meeting were the following Board members: Mr. Connor, Mr. Sahin, Mr. Hennessy and Ms. Odabashian. Also actively participating in the meeting was Interim Town Administrator Denis Fraine, CFO Heidi Chuckran and Administrative Assistant Hilarie Allie. This meeting was accessible to the public either in-person, via the Zoom online option or ABMI Cable TV.

Mr. Connor stated this meeting was scheduled as a budget workshop and the Board would be hearing from various departments relative to their FY25 budget requests.

Mr. Fraine provided a brief overview of the Town's finances. He explained that what is being presented to the Board is a balanced budget that protects all core services with no reduction in staffing or services that are provided to the community. He stated the general operating budget for FY25 represents an increase of 3.58% from last year and indicated no reserves were used in balancing this budget. The overall budget for FY25 is funded by the tax levy which increased by 4.5% (this includes proposition 2 1/2 percent and new growth). He stated the overall budget is also funded by state aid and local receipts. State aid increased very little in the way of just over \$9000. Mr. Fraine gave a brief description of what was included in the budget and pointed out that once again out of the 28 communities in Norfolk County Bellingham is still the lowest tax burden community for single family homes.

Mr. Connor asked if the estimated new growth number of \$1M for FY25 was conservative and Mr. Fraine stated it was and it will give the Town the opportunity to make adjustments in the fall.

Mr. Connor stated BVT will be coming to Town Meeting with a \$10M capital program and the Town would be responsible for their share. Mr. Allam of the Finance Committee asked if the Town had an estimate of that share. Mr. Fraine stated there is no estimate yet but will look into it.

Ms. Karen Dutil, IT Director, presented before the Board via Zoom to discuss the MIS/Information Technology FY25 Budget and stated the budget had a dramatic increase this year due to strict insurance guidelines for cyber security to protect against attacks. Mr. Allam of the Finance Committee asked if the Town meets the minimum requirements set forth by the insurance company and Ms. Dutil stated the Town not only meets the minimum requirements but exceeds them as well.

Ms. Josie Dutil, Senior Center Director, presented before the Board via Zoom to discuss the Council on Aging FY25 Budget and stated they will be adding a full time therapist to their staff. She stated that they have been unable to fill the position of the part time social worker that the Board approved in her budget previously. She stated the seniors are waiting close to six months for mental health visits and adding a full time therapist to their staff will eliminate these wait time. Mr. Connor asked Ms. Dutil if she knew the cost per senior and she stated she does not. Mr. Connor questioned whether or not the Town was spending enough.

Chief Fitzgerald appeared before the Board to discuss the department's FY25 Budget. Chief Fitzgerald presented a Power Point to the Board which can be obtained upon request. In reviewing the line items of his budget, he stated salaries are now competitive and in the ballgame of surrounding towns. He stated has been utilizing available grant funds to make up for shortfalls in the budget and the Board commended him for these efforts. Chief Fitzgerald stated he has his 34th position just starting in the academy and Mr. Allam of the Finance Committee questioned whether or not staffing is at the desired level. Chief Fitzgerald confirmed that the department is right where it should be. Chief Fitzgerald stated there is a placeholder for an article on the Town Meeting Warrant that requests that the Town leave civil service. He stated the union is in favor of this. However, he stated there is legislation on the governor's desk that if signed will allow the state to examine by subpoena the hiring practice of any department.

Library Director, Bernadette Rivard, and Library Trustee, Sue Garten, appeared before the Board to present the FY25 Library Budget. Ms. Rivard stated the library budget increased by 2.86% this year. She stated most of the increases have come from salaries but pointed out a vast majority of the employees are still underpaid. The State requires the library to spend 15% of its overall budget on expenses of books, periodicals and materials that are checked out. Ms. Rivard stated the children's program is slowly coming back to the place it was before Mr. Steve left and that they are very happy with the current children's librarian.

Mr. Tim Aicardi, Building Commissioner, appeared before the Board to present the BOH, Building and Planning Budget for FY25. He pointed out increases in the BOH stipends with the anticipation the Board will increase from 3 to 5 members this year. Any other increases that were due to contractual obligations. He stated the Planning Department has been deficient since Mr. Kupfer left but the Town will be going out for a Town Planner soon and will be funded in this budget. Mr. Aicardi stated as far as maintenance is concerned the library will be having both of the boilers replaced and that will be funded primarily by ARPA funds. He stated he will be meeting with the Senior Center the first week in March to get going on the new appliances for the kitchen as well as the walk in freezer. He stated he has started the process of the signboard that will be displaced in front of the Town Hall. The goal is to have the base installed in the next month or so and

then the actual board to follow. Finally, he stated the DPW administration building is moving right along with the foundation almost complete.

Mr. Jesse Riedle, the DPW Director, appeared before the Board to present his department's FY25 budget. He stated he has a lot of departments and line items to cover and would be highlighting the biggest changes but welcomed the Board to ask questions along the way. He stated all increases in salaries presented in the budget reflect settled union contracts. Reflected in these increases are four new promotional (elevated) foreman positions within Parks, Infrastructure, Facilities and Mechanics. He stated a new G.L. has been added to his budget for an on call and standby position. Mr. Riedle is requesting that one of the seasonal parks positions become full time. Mr. Fraine pointed out in the highway construction budget money was taken out to balance the budget but will be added back with free cash at Town Meeting. Mr. Connor questioned why the Snow and Ice budget was increased by 8% if the Town was allowed to deficit spend. Mr. Fraine stated it would be better to chip away at it a little at a time as opposed to having to make it up at Town Meeting. Any surplus would be used to buy salt for the salt shed. Mr. Allam of the Finance Committee stated it would be helpful to see the actual cost of Snow & Ice over the last 10 years to really decipher this budget. Mr. Connor questioned the price per gallon of gas that Mr. Riedle used to calculate the budget and whether or not we pay state taxes. Discussion on what mechanism was used to recoup the taxes paid at the pump was had and Mr. Fraine stated he would follow up with Fin Com with the answer to that question. Mr. Collamati from the Finance Committee asked why the parks foreman position was not in the parks budget and stated he would like to see that before Mr. Riedle met with them. Mr. Fraine stated he would be sure this happened. With regards to the Trash, Sewer and Water budgets, Mr. Connor explained that there is currently a rate study taking place and that there is a potential of increases coming in fiscal year 2025. Mr. Fraine stated that the budget as presented today does not require rate increases, however the water treatment plant to address the PFAS issues will be the variable for future increases. The Board discussed the impact of the various projects being erected in Town and the impact they have on water supply. They agreed that this, along with the MBTA communities mandate, is something that needs to be considered in the Town's water supply. The Board thanked Mr. Riedle for his time and the work he put into his budgets.

Award Administrative Services for CDBG Grant

On an Odabashian/Sahin motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to award the Community Development Block Grant administrative services contract to Community Opportunity Group at the rate approved by the state and fully funded by the grant.

Minutes of February 24, 2024

Page 4

Zoning Article Amendment

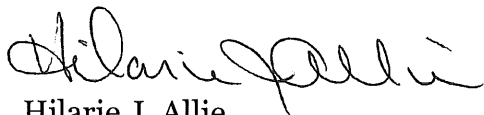
On an Odabashian/Sahin motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to send the "Amend Zoning By-Laws Chapter 240, Article VI" back to the Planning Board for review in accordance with M.G.L. c.40, Section 5 and the Planning Board Procedural Rules Section 2.1.

Memorandum of Understanding – Paramedic Program

On an Odabashian/Hennessy motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to authorize the Chairman to sign the Memorandum of Understanding for the Paramedic Program.

On an Odabashian/Sahin motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to adjourn the meeting at 11:10 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hilarie J. Allie". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Hilarie J. Allie
Administrative Assistant