

## **BILLERICA FINANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES**

**March 10, 2022**

A meeting of the Billerica Finance Committee was held on Thursday March 10, 2022, at 7:00 p.m. in Room 210 in the Town Hall.

Present: David Gagliardi, Chairman; Mary McBride, Secretary; Donald Damon, Member; Rino Moriconi, Member; Cheri Gargalianos, Member; Philip Newfell, Member; John Mulloy, Member; Doug Fogerty, Member; Patrick Logue, Member; Kelley Sardina, 1<sup>st</sup> Associate; Sharon Healey, 2<sup>nd</sup> Associate; Town Accountant, Paul Watson, Ex-Officio; and Joyce MacMillan, Recording Clerk.

Excused: Douglas Meagher, Vice Chairman, and John Kleschinsky, Member

### **CALL TO ORDER:**

Chairman David Gagliardi called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

No one came forward.

### **BUDGETS:**

#### **Animal Control – Christine Gaultieri**

In 2021 there were eighty-four intakes (domestic animals), fifty-two of the intakes were a combination of owner surrenders, strays, and court appointed custody. It was twenty-one dogs, twenty-seven cats, four birds, two guinea pigs and one bearded dragon. There are yearly barn and coop inspections, there are seventeen barns and fifty-two coops to be inspected. There are ten indoor/outdoor kennels and inside smaller kennels for smaller animals. The kennel is showing its age.

Mr. Curran stated the budget has gone up 3.59%. The only thing impacting this budget is longevity. The expenses are level funded and everything is pretty much the same.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. How are the fuel costs, is the budget enough? The fuel at the kennel is propane and the budget should be sufficient for now and will probably be adjusted at the Town Fall Meeting. Does Tewksbury still pay for an employee and Billerica pays for one and half employees? Tewksbury is paying for one full time person whereas last year they were paying for a part time person. How are the building conditions? The building is not insulated enough, it is a cement block building on a slab. It gets very cold, and the cement is crumbling. It is a safety issue for the animals. How big is the property, is it big enough to expand? Not sure on the size or if it could be expanded.

Mary McBride, seconded by Don Damon made a motion to recommend the Animal Control Budget in the amount of \$137,758.

It was voted:

11 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

#### **Emergency Management Agency – Bill Laurendeau and Town Manager John Curran**

Mr. Laurendeau supplied the committee was given an informational handout prior to this meeting. Town Manager John Curran stated all expenses in this budget are level funded. The hours for Bill have increased. Bill Laurendeau stated that the state of Massachusetts has passed Police Reform bills that, among other issues, will deregulate any auxiliary departments. Nothing the community can do about it. Many of the Emergency Management team are there

to help the community, and they are volunteers. Bill is hoping to still be able to utilize them, but he will not be able to use them in the same capacity. He is rewriting their mission statement and has another meeting in a week with the state. Through COVID Bill worked with the state and federal government for resources needed.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. Bill's salary has changed, how did the Town come up with this number? The number of hours he has put in, working on grants, helping the Ambulance dept chase down FEMA recovery money, etc. They get about \$15,000 in grants from the federal government annually. The FEMA monies are about \$100,000 annually, sometimes more. How many of your volunteers end up in police service? About 35 to 40% of them. The Community Pantry sings the praises of the Emergency Management Department. Does this department work off grants? Yes, and all their training is done through the police department. They assisted during COVID with vaccines. What is the Police Reform Act about? The Massachusetts Police Training Committee (MPTC) passed a ruling that communities can no longer have auxiliary police department, nor part-time officers in the municipal Police Dept. . All must be certified at the full-time police officer level. The Town Manager, the former Police Chief and the new Chief have written arguing on behalf of the Town's auxiliary team. When does this take effect? It takes effect in tiers over the next three years. There is what is called the Bridge Academy, but they must have 2500 paid hours to go but these people are all volunteers. Has the state Reps been made aware of this? They are aware.

Mary McBride, seconded by Don Damon

made a motion to recommend the Emergency Management Agency Budget in the amount of \$65,400.

It was voted:

11 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

### **Police Department – Chief Roy Frost**

Chief Frost supplied the committee with informational handouts prior to this meeting. Chief Frost – Due to COVID they had some adjustments to their schedules, back in 2020 they went to 12 hour shifts to help offset issues with exposure. Once COVID was under control they went back to their standard 4 and 2. With the Omicron variant they kept it under control with masks and social distancing. They also adjusted how they managed the medical calls they are on with the EMS and Fire departments. The officers were staged in such a way that they were ready to respond but stay far enough away until they were absolutely needed. POST (Peace Officer Standards and Training) will certify law enforcement officers, make sure they are properly trained and can strip them of their badge and policing powers if necessary. Certification requirements have all been standardized. POST has two separate departments, one is division of certification, which deals with our training, academy training, in-service training and the other is the Division of Professional Standards which oversees all the investigatory issues that revolve around police. POST has created new standards, and programs. The department is working on new programs to involve the public. Looking to resurrect PAL. The budget has not changed much. Contract negotiations are still in process. The budget will change once the contracts are settled. It could be a Spring Town Warrant, but probably won't be ready until Fall Town Meeting..

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. What does POST stand for? Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission. How are the officers managing the change? They are fighting the rumor mill; officers are always afraid of being made an example of. Is POST the reason the Auxiliary is being dissolved? Yes. The department is looking to hire a new Dispatch Supervisor. Yes, looking to put a mid-level person to help manage the area. Four new vehicles, we are replacing four old ones, car #'s 2, 5, 6 and 9. They have very high miles. Do you keep a check on overtime? Lt Commander Ron Balboni and the Chief's secretary Beverly give the Chief an update each week. What has happened to Qualified Immunity? It has been affected by POST. If an officer is decertified, they no longer qualify for Qualified Immunity. Has the way people see officers these days affected recruitment? We just ran a recruitment program at Middlesex Community College. We offer the Civil Service exam annually for recruits. Yes, recruitment is down but it is not just due to public relations. It is in part public relations, Civil Service, and Qualified Immunity. Happy to hear PAL will be back and Coffee with a Cop, both great programs. With everything going on with police in the country, have there been any complaints of abuse by police in general? We have had the occasional complaint of rudeness but not any abuse complaints. Are scams costing the police department any money? There is always some cost of resources. Scams originating from overseas are extremely difficult and most never solved. Most scams are reported to a federal government website [www.ic3.gov](http://www.ic3.gov). If there are any solvable they will follow up. Firearms tactical training program has a 25% increase. We now have minimum requirements for taser so there are now firearms training every Spring and Fall and annual certification and recertification for tasers. Every office carries a taser while on patrol. Equipment maintenance contracts, ACOM, is that body cameras? No, that is audio recording equipment that is used to record everything incoming and outgoing from the station. Billerica does not have body cameras yet. Budget looks good compared to surrounding towns. How many officers do we have working each shift? Billerica has five patrols on the street with two supervisors during the day shift from 4 am to 12 pm, detectives are available Monday through Friday a minimum of one each day, none at night and there are four patrols and one supervisor overnight, midnight to 8 am. Do we have enough staff? It can get crazy, but they have gotten good at situational awareness, knowing where officers are and where they are supposed to be. The officers have mastered getting from one end of town to the other if needed. Also, mutual aid is a great resource when needed. Most of the budget is personnel costs. What about our 911 system? FEMA says it is fine, it is a state system. What about Civil Service challenge, is there a way to ease out of it? The unions support is needed to get Town Meeting to vote in favor of eliminating Civil Service. Is Fleet maintenance done in house? Some, they do as much as they can. Big jobs on our aging fleet are completed by AT&T and they do a good job. What is your grant money intake each year? We have the 911 grant, OUI grant, Safe Streets grant, and they are about \$30,000 each grant. Anyone out on 111F (Leave with pay for incapacitated employees)? Just one and he will be coming back. Do you anticipate a significant increase in your budget due to Police Reform? We do not want to speculate; we have to see how things play out. Why are we getting Labradors instead of German Shepherds? Most bang for the buck, very personable and more geared to search and rescue which is good for the aging population here in Billerica. We do get many missing persons calls. Are we seeing an uptick in the community with Fentanyl? We have a significant problem with substance abuse disorder. We have Narcan available through our Fire and EMS departments. We have our substance Abuse Coordinator Mike Higgins who is training people on it. Not just Fentanyl but substance abuse products are up across the board, the numbers are high. Replacing cruisers, would it be worth while to replace a couple extra now since the

prices will be much higher next year? They are having a hard getting the ones they already ordered. The new dispensary opened, how did that go? The inspections went well, it is a highly well-run operation. We do not have any word on how the opening went yet. It was a soft opening and will have a official opening soon.

Mary McBride, seconded by Patrick Logue made a motion to recommend the Police Budget in the amount of \$9,253,292.

It was voted:

11 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

### **Ambulance – Joe Devlin**

The budget is going down by \$42,000 due to a retirement and sick leave incentive. When they do not use their sick leave, they get a bonus, however, due to several events they did not get that bonus. Expenses did go up some due to a software upgrade, per state requirements for tracking requirements. Supply chain issues, increased prices.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. Opioid calls are up, THC and alcohol are up, mental health issues are up and there is a high usage of opioids. Many not realizing they are taking Fentanyl because it is mixed in with whatever drug they are taking. The COVID numbers are down but they are not going away. Billerica Board of Health did well with vaccines and boosters. The COVID numbers have gone down substantially. We think the number of total calls will be over 4,000 calls for the year. It is about an 11% jump. Mutual aid has stayed about the same. The number of calls is not going down and the number one reason for the calls are falls. The level of service stayed the same, we did not lose a truck or were down for any reason. The trucks are holding up, so far so good. The overtime is down to \$52,000. Overtime might get blown out of the water after this year. One of our employees after leaving his shift stopped at Starbucks in Chelmsford and ended up pinned between a car and the building almost amputating his leg. Lahey Clinic did a great job and was able to save the leg. However, his road back has been very difficult. He is currently working as a dispatcher and eventually could be working per diem. Then back on the job if a spot opens. The other reason for the overtime is we had a national guard person who was deployed for most of COVID 1. We are doing very well on collections. Narcan, are we getting it at a reduced cost? We get all our medications through Lahey which is required by statute. Fire, Police and School get their supply from a different outlet. Narcan only works on opioids. The garage is all set, the heater was replaced, and it is all set. What are the requirements for specialty pay and education pay? Specialty pay is for the persons that take care of the clinical coordination which is part of our in-house QA - QI, supplies, and clinical maintenance. Education pay is by contract. Medical Control, what is that? We are required by statute to have a Medical Control Director, it is a physician who oversees the ambulance, we practice on his license. It is through Lahey Clinic and the physician is Eric Wang. We get oversight from them. Mutual aid, why is Bedford and Tewksbury so high? They were having staffing issues in Tewksbury, not 100% sure on Bedford.

Mary McBride, seconded by Don Damon made a motion to recommend the Ambulance Service budget in the amount of \$1,873,952.

It was voted:

11 – In favor

0 – Opposed

Mr. Curran stated he had a friend that moved to Billerica, she had a heart attack not even a month after moving here and received excellent care from our EMS department. She is doing great. Great job by the EMS dept and Chief Frost also doing a great job.

**Treasurer/Collector – John Clark, Town Treasurer/Collector**

John Clark, the budget went down by \$13,000. Down by 1.64% from the prior year. Salaries went up almost \$7,000. Expenses went down about \$20,000. They are looking for a new local bank, the current bank has been closed many days through the pandemic. They gave us a discount over the last two years due to the inconvenience. We have received some good feedback, but we are doing our due diligence. Two of the banks have offered no fees. They will be doing what is called a Good Faith Memo to three of the banks, similar to putting it out to bid. Mr. Clark stated that the department went through some changes at the beginning of the fiscal year, we lost a very valuable member, Asst. Treasurer Joe DeAngelo.. He did a great job and fortunately with the help of the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager they were able to identify a couple of strong internal candidates, one with excellent skill sets that had worked in the office before. Building Dept. Head Administrative Clerk Olivia Canrio was promoted to Asst. Treasurer. She was high honors graduate of Salem State.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. Are we seeing more people paying online? Yes, but not as many as we saw during COVID. There were 40,000 bills this year. There were improvements to our website platform. Residents had learned during the pandemic that they could drop off their bill in the collection box outside, no need to come in. Many are still doing this. The Town collected over \$3.5 million during the month of February via the online platform when the tax bills were due. Does it save the town money when residents pay online? It streamlines the funds, moves the funds in more efficiently. Do we have or will we ever have incentives to pay online? There is a statute that allows you to give a 3% discount on payments made in a certain period. It would have to go through Town Meeting. It would cost the town to give incentives, it would not save the town money. We have a few banks that are insured, we can negotiate rates though they are all very low right now. What is Tax Revenue collections, is that Tax Title Properties? Yes. We budget that \$50,000 every year, is there a reason we would not use that money? We are reserving it for the next year. Is it a law that bills must be mailed through the U. S. mail? No, it is not the law. The statute is a little unclear on this. We would have to get permission from every property owner and every vehicle owner in town. However, a survey done a couple of years ago showed that not even 1% would sign up. Are we behind with collections due to COVID? We are not behind at all. Excise tax, what is the number collected. Just short of \$6 million. Law called non-renewal, if you are marked as not paying your excise, you cannot renew your license. The fees used to collect the money goes to the general fund. Chapter 90 money, what has been collected? We got \$1.322 million. Did we get any extra money for all the new roads that were accepted? It is collected and posted to the ledger.

Mary McBride seconded by Patrick Logue made a motion to recommend the Treasurer/Collector Budget in the amount of \$787,473.

It was voted:

11 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

**Sub-Committee Report on Compensation:**

The subcommittee consists of Cheri Gargalianos, Phil Newfell, Doug Meagher, and John Mulloy. Cheri went over the purpose of the committee and what they discussed. The purpose was to discuss the stipend of the Select Board. What they are proposing is instead of the stipend, they want to put that money in a line item in the Town Managers budget for expenses for the Board of Health, the Conservation Committee, the Planning Board, the Select Board, and the Zoning Board of Appeals. If they want to do Professional Development, take a class, or go to a seminar. They can submit for reimbursement for said class and expenses. They checked other towns to see what they do. Many towns either pay them all a salary, or they do not pay any. We know that the majority donate their stipend, this is not saying they cannot still donate to what ever charities they give to. This came to Cheri's attention back in 2014 when health care was removed from the Select Board.

The committee discussed what some of the other towns do and how they handle compensation or reimbursement. How to make all the committees and boards more aware of reimbursements for classes, seminars, etc. The Town Manager's office drafted a document for Expense Reimbursement. A policy that they should have in place regardless. This goes back to the Finance Committee wanting to split the Warrant Article. Yes, and the vote on the Select Board was very close, 6 to 5 which is why they decided to pursue this. When speaking to the other committees, some of them did not realize they could be reimbursed for classes. Taking classes, going to seminars are things that would help a board or committee member understand their position better and what they should be doing on these committees and boards. They will have more understanding of the law and their position and make better decisions. It is a plus for the member and the town. This would be done at the expense of removing the stipend from the Select Board. The way it would work, the Select Board put in an article to fund the stipend in lieu of the fact that the Finance Committee did not. If their article fails at then the Finance Committee will have to motion to amend the budget to take the \$1800 stipend out of the Select Board budget. If the article passes it's done. There are some on the committee that think this in is not a good idea. It was brought up that the Select Board have been receiving a salary since 1839 and it was also said that the Select Board is who ran the town up until 1979 when the Town hired its first Town Manager. The committee will discuss this more at their next meeting.

The Committee meeting has gone past 10 pm, and Patrick Logue, seconded by Don Damon made a motion to continue past the Town's normal meeting hour of 10 pm.

It was voted:

11 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

Doug Fogerty stepped out of the meeting at 10:29 PM.

**Review and Vote for FinCom Spring Warrant Articles**

Chairman Gagliardi stated these are the FinCom articles they do every year.

Mary McBride seconded by John Mulloy made a motion to place an Article on the Spring Town Meeting Warrant to fix the compensation of the Town Clerk as printed in the amount of \$122,753.65.

It was voted: 10 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

Mary McBride, seconded by John Mulloy, made a motion to approve the Budget Article

It was voted: 10 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

Doug Fogerty rejoined the meeting at 10:31

Mary McBride, seconded by Rino Moriconi, made a motion to place on the 2022 Spring Town Meeting the Article for transferring funds of \$5,000.

It was voted: 11 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

**REVIEW OF MARCH 3, 2022, MINUTES:**

Patrick Logue, seconded by Mary McBride, made a motion to accept the minutes of March 3, 2022, as amended.

It was voted: 11 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

**Miscellaneous Correspondence:**

Next Finance Committee Meeting Tuesday March 15, 2022. We will not meet on Thursday, March 17.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

John Mulloy, seconded by Cheri Gargalianos made a motion to adjourn.

It was voted: 11 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

Chairman David Gagliardi adjourned the meeting at 10:36 pm.

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Joyce MacMillan, Recording Clerk