

BILLERICA FINANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES

March 22, 2022

A meeting of the Billerica Finance Committee was held on Tuesday March 22, 2022, at 7:00 p.m. in Room 210 in the Town Hall.

Present: Mary McBride, Secretary; Donald Damon, Member; Rino Moriconi, Member; Cheri Gargalianos, Member; Philip Newfell, Member; John Mulloy, Member; Doug Fogerty, Member; Patrick Logue, Member; Sharon Healey, 2nd Associate; Town Accountant Paul Watson, Ex-Officio; and Joyce MacMillan, Recording Clerk.

Excused: David Gagliardi, Chairman, Douglas Meagher, Vice Chairman, John Kleschinsky, Member, and Kelley Sardina, 1st Associate,

CALL TO ORDER:

Acting Chair Mary McBride called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

No one came forward.

BUDGETS:

Assessors Budget – John Speidel, Chief Assessor

John Speidel gave a brief overview of his department. He has a staff of six, three Assessors and three Clerks. The Clerks administer several exemption programs for seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, car excise and real estate questions. He has an Assessor that only does listings, another that does personal properties and one that does buildings and abatements, he is the Asst Assessor, and he will be retiring on April 8, 2022. Mr. Speidel stated that about a third of his time is taken up by court cases. His budget has gone down \$19,000, it is an 8.45% decrease over last year's budget. Their supplies are level funded.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. Why has Contract Services dropped \$1,200? It dropped in FY22 from FY21, the department eliminated Docu-Sign software expense.

Rino Moriconi, seconded by Patrick Logue made a motion to recommend the Assessors Budget in the amount of \$554,296.

It was voted:

9 – In favor

0 – Opposed

Department of Public Works – Fred Russell, Direct of Public Works

Mr. Russell introduced himself to the committee. He has been with the town almost four months now. He gave a brief overview of his departments: Engineering, Parks & Trees, Cemetery, Highway, Water, Wastewater and Solid Waste. He thanked his department heads, and said he would be lost without them. His overall budget has increased by 2.8% and Mr. Russell had given the committee a handout showing where all the increases and decreases are and how they are trying to stretch their funds. He went over the upcoming projects and some of the objectives and goals for the future projects and programs.

Engineering – Kelley Conway, Town Engineer

Kelley Conway stated her budget is similar to last year's. A Storm Water Engineer, which was approved at last Fall Town Meeting, has been added to the Budget. There were step changes, and supplies & expenses and contractual services are level funded.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. The non-union salary adjustment, is that part of the salary report that came out last year? Yes, the Town Engineer position was moved to a non-union position, and she is now a ByLaw employee. Having engineers in-house saves the town money - have we ever figured out how much it saves the town? Kelley can get the committee numbers if needed. Will the miscellaneous consultant services go down now that we have a Storm Water Engineer? No, those miscellaneous services are general consulting services, some are part of the roadway paving program and water and sewer services, etc. Is the state on track with the Middlesex Turnpike project? They still have about a year on that project. Kelley's salary went from a step 5 in her previous union to a step 9 as a ByLaw employee. That was the union change. Vehicle charging stations, will the town be willing to use electric vehicle for safety inspectors, engineers, etc.? Yes, they will be looking at that in the future which is why they are looking into charging stations. While stretching the dollar, does it make sense to use different techniques for sealing cracks and filling holes in the roads. There are different types of treatments out there that are less expensive. One is Fog Sealing; it is like sealing your driveway. There was a roadway management assessment done in 2020 reporting the conditions of the roads, what should be spent on the roadways and gives ideas of solutions. According to the study, Billerica should be spending \$4 million on roadwork. Billerica is currently at \$2.5 million now. Does the .70 help the town with any kind of funding or grants? No, it is just a road rating goal to reach. Currently the town is at .68. What is the GIS service? It is a service the Town currently offers. Go to the town website, to Public Works, then to Interactive GIS and click on existing maps. These maps are full of information, pipelines, cemetery resting places, etc. Where will the Katie Durand Memorial Park going to be? On Carter Ave.

Rino Moriconi, seconded Patrick Logue by made a motion to recommend the Engineering Budget in the amount of \$1,104,392.

It was voted:

9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Parks and Trees – Michael Haines, Superintendent

Mike Haines, the budget has gone up 1.66%. Mr. Curran went over all the increases and decreases in this budget. The Parks and Trees Dept have taken the fertilizing of the parks in-house and is saving the town \$5,000 a year for this service, which used to be done as a contracted service.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. What is Tree City USA and when did we have it here in Billerica? The last time we were named was in 2008. What designates a "Tree City"? It is a 4-step program: decoration, and celebration on Arbor Day, spend so much per capita on the tree budget, creating a tree ordinance and satisfying all criteria to become designated. Is the on-call increase part of the contract? Yes, it is a contractual increase. Do we trade in the old mowers? Yes, eventually they get traded in. Are we still maintaining the fields at the Vining? Yes. Mosquito control, is it still a phone in? The state does it now. The Town still pays for the helicopter in the Spring. Do the crane rentals include the crane operator? Yes. Will the budget go up with the Vining and Ditson being all grass now? No. Taking over the care of the fields is working well. Were the Vining

lights taken down? Yes, so were the lights at the Pollard field since they were a safety hazard. There is a Warrant Article for new lighting for both locations.

Rino Moriconi, seconded Patrick Logue made a motion to recommend the Parks and Trees Budget in the amount of \$982,033.

It was voted:

9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Mr. Curran took this opportunity to say what a fantastic job the Parks and Trees Dept is doing.

Cemetery – Michael Haines, Covering Superintendent

Michael Haines and Fred Russell. Everett (Bud) Crotty has retired. There was a reduction in salary with Mr. Crotty's retirement. There was a contractual increase with Mr. Crotty's buy out, it is a 4.2% increase. Everything else is level funded.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. Do we still use the services of the inmates? Yes, about 15 to 20 days a year. The Billerica Cemetery Commission, do they set rules, and do they have jurisdiction over how some monies are spent? They are basically advisors; they have a meeting every month. They might have say over the interest money from the sale of the lots. Mr. Russell will be asking the commission to raise the price of the lots. They have not been raised in very long time and Billerica is lower than most towns in the area. Who is on the Cemetery Commission? Paul Matthews, Jim O'Donnell, and Peter Blaisdell. How many niches do we have? There are 125 in the old wall and a couple hundred in the new wall. Cemetery Superintendent title changed to Supervisor, and they are creating a new job description. Any moratoriums on burials in the winter? No. Is the cemetery limited to Billerica residents? Yes.

Rino Moriconi, seconded by Don Damon made a motion to recommend the Cemetery Budget in the amount of \$449,009.

It was voted:

9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Highway – Ed Tierney, Superintendent

Ed Tierney – This year's budget has increased by \$10,000 for plow parts, they are costing more and harder to get. Salaries increased and the addition of a Brush Cutter has yet to be filled.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. Are you expecting a huge increase for cold catch this year? Yes. Staff go every day to the plant to pick up hot top and it goes fast. They use the cold patch on the weekends and nights. Plowing sidewalks is a contracted service that costs \$158,000 a year whether it snows or not. There is only one guy that bids on it each year. It comes out of the Snow and Ice Budget. Why don't we buy our own equipment for this and do it in-house? The machines cost a lot; we would need at least four of them. The contractor we currently use has three machines and has a tough time keeping up. They clean all the sidewalks by the schools, Middlesex Turnpike, and most of the new sidewalks. Is there anything the town can do to get more funds for fixing

the roads? There are Complete Streets Grants that the town applies for. They are not big money, could be up to \$400,000 on the high side. However, they do not come around every year. The town has used \$2.5 million of its own money for roadways along with the Chapter 90 funds. Billerica roadway rating is .68 (for all streets combined, accepted and non-accepted) and the state standard is .70 which is where Billerica is trying to get to. Prior to redoing any streets, do they check the pipes etc. to make sure things below the street are in good working order? Yes, but water main breaks are unpredictable, and there was a street that was paved and not long after they were digging up the street to replace a pipe. This was part of Mr. Russell's presentation tonight, in his FY23 Objectives. Salt vs Brine, what does the town use? The town currently uses salt treated with a mag chloride, but they are going to be discussing using brine.

Rino Moriconi, seconded by John Mulloy made a motion to recommend the Highway Budget in the amount of \$2,431,347.

It was voted:

9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Wastewater Enterprise – Jeff Kalmes, Superintendent

This budget increased. Some of the increase is due to sludge removal and Capital Outlay for fixing the pumps, and contractual services. I & I work continues, looking for cracks and leaks throughout the system. There are a few people retiring and lots of training of new hires going to be happening. They are managing three permits. Part of the Biobot Analytics system – testing for COVID in the wastewater. They know if there is a rise in COVID about one week before the Board of Health.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. About how many loads of sludge are pulled out? About 4 to 5 truckloads per week. How is the wipes education going? They are continuing the education, but people are still flushing wipes and clogging up the system and causes all kinds of problems with the equipment. Constant testing. Even the wipes that say they are flushable, are not truly flushable. Level funding supplies. Extra funds used in Capital Overlay. Last year Don Frost and Mike Powderly retired, this year David Garabedian is retiring after 34 years. Are the pipes from the Brown St pumphouse break repaired? The break is repaired. There are plans to replace 15,000 feet of pipe from the Brown St to the Rogers St pumphouse. The pipes are showing damage from the outside in. This job has already been funded via a Bond Article at the previous Town Meeting and the design work is being done. They are at odds with the MBTA regarding their requirements for the surveyors to enter the property. Billerica runs its own Wastewater Treatment facility, and other communities use MWRA. Have we ever looked at the Pros and Cons of having MWRA vs Owning? There are definitely pros and cons. There are many permits to keep updated, and they do a lot of testing.

Rino Moriconi, seconded by Patrick Logue made a motion to recommend the Wastewater Enterprise Fund Budget in the amount of \$9,016,825.

It was voted:

7– In favor
2 – Opposed – Don
Damon and Patrick Logue

Water Enterprise – John McGovern, Superintendent

Fred Russell highlighted the changes in the budget. Increases to supplies mostly due to chemicals, and some in contractual services. The town spends about \$115,000 a year to rent a hydro vactor truck, and it may be more economical to purchase one instead. There is a Warrant Article for the Spring 2022 Town Meeting to purchase a hydro vactor truck which is approximately \$570,000.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. The study for automation, would you be looking to decrease staff? There would not be a decrease to staff, no layoffs. Fire hydrants are maintained through this dept? The just got 76 new hydrants in. Is flushing done as zones? Yes, in zones and all in April. Do we meter the treated water that goes back into the Concord River? Yes, it is metered. Do we get any credit for the water that goes back? No. Why is the Flushing over time and the total over time is the exact same? There is an amount budgeted, and they stay under it. Are the Water and Wastewater plants protected from cyber-attacks? Yes. In the Water Dept they have a couple different computer systems. They have the town one that is use for email and other town business and a SKADA system that is isolated, it does not have an internet connection. The metered water we take from the river is permitted, is the town doing any better with staying within the permitted amount? Yes, we have never gone over the permit. The new water meters and plumbing code has flattened it out. Are we seeing improvement in billing, is it more accurate across the board? Yes, it has all settled down. Residents can monitor their water usage via the Eye on Water app.

Rino Moriconi, seconded by Don Damon made a motion to recommend the Water Enterprise Fund Budget in the amount of \$7,315,982.

It was voted:

7– In favor
2 – Opposed – Don
Damon and Patrick Logue

Solid Waste – Steve Robertson, Operations Supervisor

Solid waste is contract-driven, this is the last year in the current contract, and there will be negotiations with Waste Management in the spring. \$84,000 in contamination processing, which is level funded from last year. We are doing well and staying consistent with an overall rating of 25% contamination. Code Red (reverse 911 calls) costs, contamination fees, disposal contracts. Two more years on the trash disposal contract with Wheelabrator at \$86.42/ton tipping fee.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. What is our contamination percentage, is it 5% in the contract? The town is at about 10% and yes, the contract amount is 5%. They have been good to us not charging us for the 10% and over. We are a host community for recycling. Residents should call the DPW Admin for broken lids on trash and recycling bins. They give Waste Management a list each week and WM will go out and fix them. Are we still getting money for plastics? No, China has stopped taking in plastic. Are there any domestic companies that take recyclables? The market is getting better and looking for other sources besides China, not necessarily domestic. We have about 25% recycling by weight and 75% in trash. Have you seen an increase with waste due to COVID?

In the beginning but it has leveled out. Can we better publicize Helpsy? It is on the town website. Can you add the CPI increase note to book before Town Meeting?

Rino Moriconi, seconded by John Mulloy made a motion to recommend the Solid Waste Budget in the amount of \$3,679,720.11

It was voted:

9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

DPW Administration – Fred Russell, Director of Public Works

There is about a \$33,000 increase. The two items that are increasing are the salaries and contract services.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. What is the difference between the head administrative clerk and a head clerk? The head administrative clerk is the highest and the head clerk is the second highest on the union pay scale.

Rino Moriconi, seconded by John Mulloy made a motion to recommend the Administration Budget in the amount of \$1,052,971.

It was voted:

9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Mr. Curran told the committee a little about Fred Russell since this was the first time meeting him. Mr. Russell was working for the town of Brookline, MA prior to coming to Billerica and for the town of Woburn prior to that as the DPW director. He likes to make improvements, saving money where he can. He is a terrific addition to the department.

The committee welcomed him and wished him a long happy career with the Town of Billerica.

Miscellaneous Correspondence:

Next Finance Committee Meeting Tuesday March 24, 2022

No Meeting Next Tuesday March 29, 2022

Preliminary Warrant should be available March 24, 2022

MINUTES:

Minutes of March 8 and March 10, 2022

Rino Moriconi, seconded by John Mulloy made a motion to accept the minutes of March 8, 2022.

It was voted:

7 – In favor
0 – Opposed
2 – Abstained – Patrick Logue and Doug Fogerty

Rino Moriconi, seconded by Patrick Logue made a motion to accept the minutes of March 10, 2022, as amended.

It was voted:

9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

ADJOURNMENT:

Rino Moriconi, seconded by Cheri Gargalianos made a motion to adjourn.

It was voted:

9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Acting Chair Mary McBride adjourned the meeting at 9:32 pm.

Joyce MacMillan, Recording Clerk