

BILLERICA FINANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES
March 24, 2022

A meeting of the Billerica Finance Committee was held on Thursday March 24, 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; Patrick Logue, Member; John Kleschinsky, Member; Kelley Sardina, 1st Associate; Town Accountant Paul Watson, Ex-Officio; and Joyce MacMillan, Recording Clerk.

Excused: David Gagliardi, Chairman; Douglas Meagher, Vice Chairman; Doug Fogerty, Member; and Sharon Healey, 2nd Associate.

CALL TO ORDER:

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

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Adrienne Anzelmo, 1 Eliot St – would like to know why money is not allocated to our school playgrounds. They have been neglected for years. She would like answers as to who is responsible for the school playgrounds. They have gone to the school committee and were told to submit a Warrant Article to Town Meeting for playground funding if they wanted to see playgrounds updated or replaced.

Doreen Healy, 53 Baldwin Rd – Would like to know if they will be allowed to make comments later regarding a budget item. The answer from the Chair was no, she can make her comments now at public comment or come to the Public Hearing on March 31, 2022. Ms. Healy said she had given her questions to a FinCom member to ask for her.

BUDGETS:

Conservation Budget – Isabel Tourkantonis, Conservation Director

The role of the Conservation dept is summarized in the Budget Book and also in the Town's Annual Report that was submitted. They serve as a liaison between the Conservation Commission and landowners, business owners and the community overall to administer and streamline the Mass Wetlands Protection Act and the Billerica Wetlands Protection ByLaw. They work closely with other departments for stormwater issues, land development, beaver management and protecting open space.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. Are we still using a contracted company for beaver control? Is there still only one company around? There are other qualified beaver management consultants, the company Billerica uses (Beaver Solutions) is quite reputable and has done a decent job in Billerica. Bay Circuit Trail, is it in your budget? We do have funds allocated for trail signage, outreach, and signs out in the field. Will any of your budget or grants be used for culvert covers? The DPW/Engineering dept applies for grants whenever grants are available. It would not be done through Conservation. What is done through this dept is the coordination and streamlining of the permits that's required. Have we applied for any grants for invasive species? Clancy Main, Asst Town Manager, stated that some funding was requested through the CPC and if there are grants available, that he missed, please forward the information to him. 1200 acres of Conservation Protected land. Conservation restrictions are added protection under article 37, protected via the Mass Wetlands Protection Act. Conservation restrictions are not only approved by the Conservation Commission but also the Select Board, and if anyone wanted to build or expand within 100 feet of wetlands or 200 feet of a riverbank, they would have to go through a

Wetlands Review. Do any of the other towns around us use Beaver Solutions? Yes, many do, and Beaver Solutions has been doing business with Billerica for about 15 to 20 years now. Board of Health set that program up using Beaver Solutions. Would towns get more for their money if they combined their efforts? No, we have so much here in town to keep them busy. They use Billerica as a case study in their webinars. Your clerk is no longer in your dept, did she retire? No, she moved over to the ZBA and a part time clerk from the Town Managers Office moved into the full time Conservation position. Does this dept handle invasive species? It is managed project by project, site by site and would need to be evaluated. The Town is involved in Invasive Species Management through OARS. They have River Stewardship Council, they have volunteers who go out every summer and pull water chestnuts from the Concord River and communities pay a sum to help support that effort. The funds from CPC for invasive species, what is that money going to go to? The Town Managers Office is working with Conservation to identify the areas in need, starting with Nutting Lake. It is not a one-time effort; it can take a few years to get rid of these invasives. A comprehensive plan is needed. It is a constant battle trying to keep up.

Rino Moriconi, seconded by Patrick Logue made a motion to recommend the Conservation Budget in the amount of \$262,103.

It was voted:

9 – In favor

0 – Opposed

Board of Health – Kristel Bennett, BOH Director

The Board of Health (BOH) is responsible for protection of public health, welfare, and environment within Billerica. They are also focusing on Mental Health, and they are responsible for enforcing several Mass General Laws and several state Sanitary codes. This budget increased \$25,000 due to a promotion and contractual obligations

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. In the book it states Food Service Inspections conducted, 240 (COVID). Why is COVID in parenthesis? During COVID, we shut down a few times, restaurants shut down a few times, and inspectors were in and out, so inspections fell behind. An inspector was out on maternity leave and they brought in the retired department head and got caught up. Will the Community Service Coordinator be transferred to full time, stay the same or be eliminated? They are still exploring part time/full time, it is not going to be eliminated. There are a lot of mental health issues not being addressed and this position will help with these issues. There is a big gap of people ages eighteen to the elderly that are in need. Regarding your car allowance, if you have a car accident, who pays? Does the town pay for your insurance? Depends on if accident happens during company time. Looks like there is an error on the salary for a staff member. That was an error in FY2022, this year is correct. Assistant Health Director was a requested position, it is not funded. It is a position she would like to add but is not funded. You have four full time employees and one part time. Did the Town receive any grants for hiring part time for Contact Tracing? Yes, there was grant funding. The Board of Health conducted Contact Tracing and received much help from staff from some of the departments that were closed during COVID such as the Library, COA, School Nurses, and their salaries were covered by their own departments and any overtime was covered by the grants. Do you know the amount received in grants? Ms. Bennett will have to get back to her on that. Is the BOH well-staffed? With just coming out of COVID, that was tough. The roll of the Board of Health is ever changing and

now with the growing need for Mental Health/Social Services and Regulatory needs, we may see the BOH grow. How many people did the town have to take to court during COVID? During COVID the courts were shut down for a while. However, we do have one case that is ongoing being pursued. Do you have an idea of how much money was brought in by fines? Ms. Bennett has a report on that and will forward the report to the committee. Stormwater review is completed by consultants through the BOH. However, we now have a new Stormwater Engineer in the Engineering Dept. Do you know what the amount of revenue was with permits? Ms. Bennett will generate a report and forward it to the committee. Clarification on the salary error in 2021/22 (FY22). \$10,000 was the BOH Principal Receptionist Clerk was promoted to Head Administrative Clerk covering BOH and Permit Alley and \$15,000 was contractual increases. Clinics and homebound flu vaccines and other vaccines, do these take place at the COA or somewhere else? They are with the Public Health Nurse; we have not had clinics due to COVID. The consultant that we pay is a physician and he signs our standing orders so we can administer vaccines. Does he review and certify training? He goes over it with the Public Health Nurse and she reviews it with staff. How many complaints? 249 complaints of which 115 were regarding masks. During COVID the Public Health Nurse was quite busy and working full time. She normally works part time, is there a need for her to be full time? Not currently, they do manage their time well. Do you provide sharps containers? They do not provide them, but they do accept them for disposal. Will the BOH be involved with the cannabis dispensary? They do have oversight; they adopted a new regulation last year and working on getting an application from the dispensary. Cannabis Control Commission also has jurisdiction over them as well.

Mr. Curran stated that BOH operated extremely well under extraordinary amount of stress. Kristel Bennett came on board two weeks prior to the COVID pandemic. During that time, the BOH had much to deal with, many levels of stress and changes to go through. The BOH role has completely changed. They had a difficult run over the last two years, and he wants to thank Kristel and her staff for all they have done, and he just cannot say enough about Joanne White and everyone's help.

Rino Moriconi seconded by John Mulloy made a motion to recommend the Board of Health Budget in the amount of \$475,493.

It was voted:

7 – In favor
2 – Opposed – Kelley
Sardina and Patrick Logue

Shawsheen Tech – Brad Jackson, Superintendent and Melanie Hagman, Asst. Superintendent – Director of Finance

Mr. Jackson also wanted to thank Kristel and the BOH health, they were a Godsend during an incredibly stressful time.

Along with Mr. Jackson and Ms. Hagman are two of their School Committee members Taryn Gillis and Ron Fusco. Mr. Jackson had sent a copy of his power point presentation in advance to the Committee. He started with page 3 of his presentation and went over his budget and talked about strategic improvements. Also, they are in the third year of a three-year collective bargaining agreement with the Shawsheen Teachers Association. The largest piece driving their budget increase is their contractual obligations. They are an independent organization so

their budget is fully loaded including health insurance cost for their staff and retirees. Also, an increase in the Middlesex County Assessment. They are a regional school district and legally responsible for providing transportation for every student that attends their school. There is about a \$200,000 increase in transportation. The costs of lumber, sheet metal, pipe, and other materials have increased. Due to this cost increase the school had to increase their vocational supplies. They increased their OPEB contribution by \$19,000. Athletic supplies increased, along with the cost of coaches and transportation. The state has a formula for how much Chapter 70 money is allocated to the Billerica Public Schools vs. Shawsheen Tech. Ms. Hagman went over all their numbers and capital assessment. Each of the five towns pays at least 10%, with the balance (50%) being prorated based on the number of students from each town.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. What is the total assessment for Billerica? \$10 million. Looking at the staff and the number of years some have been there, it looks like you will have a few retirements coming up. Yes, there will be a decent size staff turnover in the next few years. The overall attendance has gone up, but the number of Billerica students has dropped, is there an issue with capacity? They are over capacity and part of the reason for the drop in Billerica students may have something to do with the new high school. They have almost five hundred applications this year with only 340 open slots. As of October 1, Billerica had 486 students planned for the 2022/2023 school year and there were 507 this school year. Do you have a breakdown of grades? Mr. Jackson said he would provide the breakdown of grades to the committee. How many Billerica students graduated last year? He will include that with breakdown of grades. Do you know how many students withdraw each year? They do not have the number with them, but they do see some withdrawals particularly from the ninth-grade students. Some due to sticker shock or overwhelmed by the magnitude of the change, leaving their social peer group, or they just decided it was not for them. When a student unenrolls it is usually through the guidance office, and it is primarily first-year students. Is it because they could not get their first-choice shop? Yes, that is another reason for unenrollment. Part of that is capacity issue. They do maintain a waiting list for shops but after a period of time they will have to come off the list due to the fact they need to have so many hours they must get in for certain trades. The school committee voted against a guidance counselor and an administrator, will the funds stay in you budget or roll over? They voted to defer final ruling on that till April. If that initiative is brought back to the school committee it will have to be funded within the bottom-line budget. OPEB, \$19,000? What you are looking at is not OPEB related. The minimal contribution is a figure that is provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for each community as to how much it must spend (A) in the Billerica public schools and (B) towards its assessment at Shawsheen Tech. It is part of the Chapter 70 overall formula, it is used to assess communities' minimum contributions towards education. Last year's contribution was \$7,158,000. Looking at the Information Support Services & Networking and Programing & Web Development in the handout and noticing it is quite a large salary. The two have been combined, in the FY 21 and FY22 they were separate shops. Computer Services total has decreased. This is due to Federal funds for student devices because of COVID. They were able to use those funds towards the equipment line item because the students needed them for remote learning. Looking at building maintenance, there has been a decrease over the last three years. It tends to fluctuate; it is a 55-year-old plus school that you would think was a 25-year-old school. When students return to BMHS are funds recouped? No, there is a waiting list and if early enough in the year a new student can take the open slot. Are the Adult/Night

School Programs in the budget? No, they use the revenue from the night programs to fund the classes and use of the equipment. Do you have revolving funds? Yes. There are a number of students that drive themselves to school, do you incorporate that into your figures for the busses? They do take that into consideration when developing the bus routes and determining how many busses will be needed. Does Billerica provide a School Resource Officer? Yes, and the officer's compensation is charged to SVTHS budget. Have there been any conversations regarding the future of the building? There have been active talks regarding the building. They are in the process of developing a draft statement of interest that they will be presenting to the school committee and asking their permission to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) to begin a conversation with the state about Shawsheen needs. The school is too small, the classrooms are too small for media inclusion, the shops are significantly undersized. Who pays for the childcare? The childcare is primarily paid for by the users of the program

Rino Moriconi, seconded by John Mulloy made a motion to recommend the Shawsheen Technical Valley High School budget in the amount of \$10,885,000.

It was voted:

8 – In favor
1 – Opposed – Kelley
Sardina

WARRANT ARTICLE:

Petitioner Article to Release Restriction for 23 Lakeview Dr. to 0 Marshall St. (GIS Map attached) – Attorney Steve Lentine

Attorney Lentine, representing Jamie Haberlin, gave a brief overview of the article. Jamie's grandparents purchased the property at 23 Lakeview in 1956, the house was built in 1930. In 1985 they acquired 0 Marshall St. through the tax title process, in which an abutter can sometimes purchase a piece of property that touches his property but with restrictions on the deed not to build on that property. His grandfather passed away in 1992 and Grandmother in 1999. Their heirs are their daughters, one of them being Jamie's mother. Jamie lived there with his mother, his aunt Kathy, and his son. His mother passed away in 2019 and Jamie inherits her 50%. Jamie and his aunt came to Attorney Lentine to see if they could get the restriction switched to the smaller piece of property so they could build a new home on the larger lot. Then Aunt Kathy passed away in September of last year. Aunt Kathy's 50% is left to her two children and Jamie. Both of Jamie's cousins have agreed to deed all the property (23 Lakeview and 0 Marshall) over to Jamie. During the building process Jamie and his son would remain in the house on 23 Lakeview until the new house is completed and is move in ready. At that time, the old house would be taken down.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. Are there any title issues? Not that we can see. Do the abutters need to be notified? Only if Jamie has to go before the Zoning Board of Appeals. The engineers will be looking at the property to see how they can situate the house on the property and meet all the all the variances so they will not have to before the ZBA. 23 Lakeview is a single-family home, lot size 4,000 sq ft built in 1930. 0 Marshall is 10,000 sq ft. There will be an agreement that the new restriction will be filed at the same time as the occupancy. This will mean more taxes for the town, and just how much won't be known until the house is approved and designed.

Rino Moriconi, seconded by John Mulloy made a motion to recommend Warrant Article 29 as written.

It was voted:

8 – In favor
0 – Opposed
1 – Abstained - Kelley
Sardina

Veterans Services – John Curran, Town Manager and Melanie Mendel, Veterans Services Director

Mr. Curran introduced the new Veterans Service Director, Melanie Mendel previously of the Stoneham Veterans Office. This budget has a \$95,000 decrease due to a reduction in the Veterans Benefits line item. The cause for the decrease is due to the fact the department has less cases than in previous years. Salaries went up and expenses stayed the same. Melanie went over some of the changes and what she will be focusing on. She would like to work on outreach and bring in younger veterans. Work on events like Veterans Day. She would like to visit the veterans to the VFW and other veteran organization.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. About how many veterans and or widows of vets do you serve? Currently they have about thirty-three. Are you a vet? Yes, currently serving in the Air Force. It is a requirement of the position to have served in the military. Patrick stated he is the district commander for the VFW, and he will get her a card and he would like to talk to her about partnering up with the town on projects.

Rino Moriconi seconded by Don Damon made a motion to recommend the Veterans Services Budget in the amount of \$453,684.

It was voted:

9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Sealer of Weights and Measures – John Curran, Town Manager and Paul Watson, Town Accountant

Budget is going up by \$1,000 due to the NMCOG contract.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. No questions.

Rino Moriconi seconded by Patrick Logue made a motion to recommend the Sealer of Weights and Measures Budget in the amount of \$13,500.

It was voted:

9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Town Systemwide – John Curran, Town Manager and Paul Watson, Town Accountant

John Curran, this budget is level funded except for retirements. We have several retirements this year.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. When does the contract for resident Aggregate Energy expire? Expires 2024 and will be renegotiated. There seems to be some discrepancy between 2019, 2020 & 2021? There may have been budget amendment done that fall. The Town electricity was not a combine budget until 2021.

Are the streetlights all replaced and are we seeing a reduction in the budget? Yes, and we may see further reduction in next year's budget. Do we get solar farm credits? Yes. Do we lock in prices on fuel? We bid on the delivery cost of the fuel and the cost of the fuel ends up being whatever it is at the port.

Rino Moriconi seconded by Cheri Gargalianos made a motion to recommend the Town Manager Budget in the amount of \$3,051,640.

It was voted: 9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Town/Schools Shared Costs – John Curran, Town Manager and Paul Watson, Town Accountant

The Town Building insurance has gone up \$100,000. Part of that is more buildings like the Masonic and the Howe. Health insurance is level funded, the trust is strong, and they will depend on that if there any increase. Worker Comp and Medicare are level funded. Retirement assessment went up about 20%. OPEB contribution this year is going up to be over \$2 million.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. What is in the OPEB liability? About \$240 million.

Rino Moriconi seconded by Don Damon made a motion to recommend the Town/School Shared Budget in the amount of \$37,199,936.

It was voted: 9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Debt and Interest – John Curran, Town Manager and Paul Watson, Town Accountant

Our total debt service spread out against the three budgets is about 16.1 million. Our policy was to maintain general debt at \$9,066,000 And then the other piece of that policy was the debt excluded money basically self-sustaining because it is paid for by debt exclusion. We make sure that the impact of the Parker and High Schools is always \$200 on the average single-family home. They put money into the levy to make sure.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. Do we know how much the Chapter 90 money is? It's not part of this budget but it is \$1.3 million. The revenue from the pot shop, can we make it a policy to use the revenue for streets? We projected the Town will receive about a million, \$500,000 from taxes and \$500,000 from the host community agreement. The next budget will show that we bumped up the roadway funds by \$500,000. The Town principal went from \$6.9 million to \$8 million. The new fire station was built, and there were the demolition projects.

Rino Moriconi seconded by Patrick made a motion to recommend the Debt Service Budget in the amount of \$7,792,896.35.

It was voted: 8 – In favor
0 – Opposed

The Committee meeting has gone past 10 pm

Patrick Logue seconded by John Mulloy made a motion to continue pass the committee's normal meeting hour of 10 pm.

It was voted: 9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Capital Budget – John Curran, Town Manager

This budget is going up by \$500,000. Capital equipment is \$500,000 line item and the \$1.5 million is now \$2 million which is road work, sidewalks, things that marry up with Chapter 90 money. This gets the town up to \$3.8 million, a little closer to the \$4 million where we are recommended to be.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. Chapter 90 money back in 2019 we got \$1.5 million but now we are getting \$1.3 million. That year we got a supplemental appropriation, generally we get \$1.3 million. The state contribution to Chapter 90 has been \$200 Million (total all cities and towns) since 2012. It is regularly promised that the legislature will raise this to \$300 Million be we are still waiting.

Rino Moriconi seconded by John Mulloy made a motion to recommend the Capital Budget in the amount of \$2,500,000.

It was voted: 9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Town Civic Events – John Curran, Town Manager and Paul Watson, Town Accountant

Level funded except for one line item, the festival account. It was bumped up due to the banners on the light posts.

Acting Chair McBride opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. On the banners we could put the names of the people we lost due to COVID. They were thinking of keeping it light and positive, more spirit lifting.

Rino Moriconi seconded by Cheri Gargalianos made a motion to recommend the Town Civic Events Budget in the amount of \$43,200.

It was voted: 8 – In favor
0 – Opposed
1 – Abstained – Patrick Logue

Miscellaneous Correspondence:

Next Finance Committee Meeting Thursday March 31, 2022 – This is the advertised public hearing.

Mary thanked everyone for their demanding work on the budget and everyone attending all the meetings.

Vote to Dissolve Sub-Committee:

John Mulloy, seconded by Cheri Gargalianos, made a motion to dissolve the Finance Committee Sub-Committee on Boards/Committee Expense Compensation

It was voted: 9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

ADJOURNMENT:

Rino Moriconi, seconded by John Mulloy made a motion to adjourn.

It was voted: 9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Acting Chair Mary McBride adjourned the meeting at 10:18 pm.

Joyce MacMillan, Recording Clerk