

BILLERICA FINANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES

March 7, 2023

A meeting of the Billerica Finance Committee was held on Tuesday March 7, 2023, at 7:00 p.m. in Room 210 in the Town Hall.

Present: David Gagliardi, Chairman; John Mulloy, Vice Chairman; Mary McBride, Secretary; Douglas Fogerty, Member; Sharon Healey, Member; Patrick Logue, Member; Doug Meagher, Member; Philip Newfell, Member; Larry Norman, Member; Darlene Torre, Member; Brian Dorrington, 2nd Associate; Paul Watson, Ex-Officio Town Accountant; and Joyce MacMillan, Recording Clerk.

Excused: Donald Damon, Member

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Dave Gagliardi called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Kelley Sardina of 95 Gray Street stated that the December 29th meeting and all future Finance Committee meetings should be offered by Zoom or televised for the residents. Also, the meeting for March 2, 2023 was not time stamped and wants to know if it needs to be.

DPW BUDGETS - Fred Russell, Director of Public Works

Mr. Russell sent a copy of a power point presentation (attached) to the committee prior to the meeting, and he reviewed this presentation for the committee. He covered the FY24 budget for the DPW Administration, Cemetery, Engineering, Highway, Parks & Trees, Solid Waste & Recycling, Wastewater, and Water Departments. Expenditures for Debt Service, Salaries, Reserves, Contract Services, Supplies, Utilities, Solid Waste & Recycling, Snow & Ice, and Capital Outlay. He summarized the three main contributors of major changes in the combined DPW Budgets: New Solid Waste contract; Cost of chemicals; sludge hauling. Mr. Russell also mentioned the accomplishments of FY23 for the DPW and what they are looking to accomplish in FY24.

Chairman Gagliardi asked the committee to wait to ask their questions after each of the departments went over their budgets.

Parks and Trees – Michael Haines, Superintendent

Mr. Russell stated this budget is basically level funded, with a slight increase to salaries and a slight decrease to Capital Outlay.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions and concerns. Will the town be replacing any of the trees that have been cut down on Middlesex Turnpike? There was a Tree Hearing today and National Grid is open to replacing/planting some trees. There is a reduction in the budget, why? In FY23 the department purchased 3 big pieces of equipment. In FY24 there will only be one piece of equipment being purchased.

Mr. Curran gave accolades to Mr. Haines and the entire Parks and Trees Department for a job well done. They are doing a tremendous job; the department is a success story.

John Mulloy seconded Patrick Logue made a motion to recommend the Parks and Trees Budget in the amount of \$969,902.

It was voted:

11 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Cemetery – Michael Haines, Acting Superintendent

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions and concerns. Is there perpetual care for veteran’s headstones? Donnie Jarvis, Veterans Director for the Town is planning on starting this service himself. He will be cleaning up the graves, marking the ones that need to be marked and hopefully getting the resident veterans involved. When will there be a new Superintendent for this department? When Mr. Crotty retired, the position was downgraded to a supervisor position. They are still looking to fill this position. Who would this supervisor report to? To the DPW director. What is happening with the headstone foundations? Are they sinking? There has been issues with some sinking foundations. We use the prisoners to help with fixing the foundations. Is Phase II of the cemetery open? Yes, open and selling plots.

John Mulloy seconded by Mary McBride made a motion to recommend the Cemetery Budget in the amount of \$406,997.

It was voted:

11 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Highway – Ed Tierney, Superintendent

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions and concerns. Why are there so many vacancies? It’s been very difficult to hire qualified staff, primarily for the HMEO positions, because these require licenses which are hard to find. There will be ongoing conversations with the union about hiring non-licensed staff and have them train for and obtain the license while already on the payroll, rather than carrying all of these open positions. This is an issue throughout the industry. Has the Town switched over to using Brine instead of salt? They are using brine and salt, and moving towards more brine than salt. Plow contractors, what is the hourly rate for the snow contractors? It is anywhere from \$91 to \$120 an hour. Does the Town have GPS on the vehicles? No, not at this time. With all the vacancies, is the Town paying a lot of over time or bring in contractors? There is some overtime, we are also coving with other people from other DPW departments. How many contractors do we have? There are currently 98. About how much over the budgeted amount of \$350,000 will we be for snow and ice removal this year? We are unable to answer that question at this point because we don’t know how many more storms we will have this year.

John Mulloy seconded by Mary McBride made a motion to recommend the Highway Budget in the amount of \$2,409,984.

It was voted:

11 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Engineering – Kelly Conway, Town Engineer

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions and concerns. When is the Glad Valley project scheduled to start? Funding is on the TIP for 2026. Any plans to bring in

the orphan streets onto sewer? They are planned for sometime in the future. Is the Town paying for any part of the Middlesex Turnpike project? The Town is paying only for the design and easements, the state is paying the rest. The Contractual Services budget, who is that covering? Consultants, mapping every three years and contracts. What about supplies? It covers office supplies, ink, spray paint (the department goes through an awful lot of spray paint), blotters, paper, and more. Is there a map that shows when roads are going to be hooked into the sewer system? Yes, it is on the Town Website under GIS.

John Mulloy seconded Patrick Logue by made a motion to recommend the Engineering Budget in the amount of \$1,129,264.

It was voted:

11 – In favor
0 – Opposed

WasteWater Enterprise – Jeff Kalmes, Superintendent

Mr. Russell let the committee know that this would be Mr. Kalmes' last year at the budget meetings, he will be retiring this summer. He has been with the Town for 37 years.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions and concerns. Is the sludge shipped up to Maine? Yes. Have the costs of chemicals gone up? Yes, and they keep increasing. WasteWater deals with a lot of unknown weather events which makes it difficult to predict how much chemicals will be used. State regulations are also continuously changing. Why is David Garabedian still listed for FY24, didn't he retire last year? Yes, that should have Nicholas Evans on that line now. It will be corrected. When will the work on the pipes near the train station begin? It has begun, is continuing and from the capital budget not using operating funds.

John Mulloy seconded by Larry Norman made a motion to recommend the Wastewater Enterprise Fund Budget in the amount of \$9,294,423.

It was voted:

10 – In favor
1 – Opposed - Logue

Water Enterprise –

Fred Russell introduced Mark Riopelle; he is covering John McGovern's position as Interim, although Mr. Russell hopes will stay permanently. John McGovern has retired after a long career with the Water Department.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions and concerns. Are there any ongoing issues from last year's drought? No. Regionally it was not a historic low. We did have to use more chemicals than normal but it never got to a critical level. How is the water quality? The Town recently installed a new ozone system just prior to an anomaly in the Bromate level, and Town staff are adding monitoring processes to see if the reason for the anomaly can be identified. Do you think another letter should go out to the residents regarding the 12 month running average explanation? The first letter was a mandate from the state and there may be a second letter going out. Is the Bromate the cause of the brown water? Not the cause and we are hoping to do a universal flushing program and renovate the Crosby water tank. There are 222 miles of pipe in Billerica. Water testing for copper and lead completed, no

residents were affected and will be completed each year. Why are there so many openings in this department? There 6 open positions and the positions require licensing. Are the contracts multi year contracts? Some are and some are single year. What are PFAS chemicals? It is an artificially made chemical. Billerica is well below contamination levels. Private hydrants have to be reported to the fire department yearly, what happens if they are not reported and something happens? Is the Town liable? We believe the owner of the hydrant would be liable but we will check on that.

John Mulloy seconded by Patrick Logue made a motion to recommend the Water Enterprise Fund Budget in the amount of \$7,583,943.

It was voted:

10 – In favor
1 – Opposed – Logue

DPW Administration – Fred Russell, Director of Public Works

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions and concerns. Are all the residents switched over to the new meters? There are still a few holdouts and we are currently working on switching out the businesses.

John Mulloy seconded by Larry Norman made a motion to recommend the Administration Budget in the amount of \$1,097,833.

It was voted:

11 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Solid Waste – Steve Robertson, Operations Supervisor

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions and concerns. Why such a large increase? We have negotiated a new five-year contract with Waste Management as the previous contract has expired. We were able to get an initial “hometown” discount with Waste Management, and for five years have received a rebate for recyclables. Now disposing of recyclables has become very expensive, and going forward there will be no rebates.

It is due to the increase in fuel, recycling costs (about \$70,000), and tipping fees (about \$50,000). Bulk items currently do not cost anything but will in the future. Mattresses and box springs are now handled by a third party and cost residents about \$40 per piece for pickup. The Town charges a nominal fee for white goods. Town residents can go to [Helpsy.com/Billerica](https://www.helpsy.com/Billerica) for pickup of textile products, which can also be donated. Waste Management contract requires the Town to recycle.

John Mulloy seconded by John Patrick Logue made a motion to recommend the Solid Waste Budget in the amount of \$4,299,490.

It was voted:

11 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Miscellaneous Correspondence:

Next Finance Committee Meeting Tuesday March 14, 2023

Phil Newfell stated the Community Preservation Committee will be meeting on March 23, 2023 to hear about projects such as Disc Golf renovations, Masonic Hall, PHR basketball, and First Congregational Church projects.

Dave Gagliardi stated the Capital Facilities Study Committee has commissioned a study exploring ideas about the best plans for the COA and Recreation Departments, including an Intergenerational Center or separate updated facilities. There will be a presentation at Town Hall in the Conway Room on March 28 at 6:00 PM.

Also, the General ByLaw Committee met with the new HR Director, Michele Rivera regarding the Personnel ByLaws, which are being reviewed for the first time in many years.

ADJOURNMENT:

Larry Norman, seconded by Darlene Torre made a motion to adjourn.

It was voted:

11 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Chairman David Gagliardi adjourned the meeting at 9:10 pm.

Joyce MacMillan, Recording Clerk