

## BILLERICA FINANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES

March 21, 2023

A meeting of the Billerica Finance Committee was held on Tuesday March 21, 2023, at 7:00 p.m. in Room 210 in the Town Hall.

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

Absent: Darlene Torre, Member

### **CALL TO ORDER:**

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

### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

None

### **FY24 BUDGETS:**

#### **Town Clerk – Shirley Schult, Town Clerk**

Paul Watson let the committee know that this would be Shirley's last Finance Committee meeting. She is retiring and come April there will be a new Town Clerk. The committee wished Shirley well with best wishes and hopes that she enjoys her retirement.

Mr. Watson continued, there is a big drop in this budget, and it is due to Shirley leaving and whoever the new person is will start at a much lower rate of pay without having the benefit of Mrs. Schult's many years working for the Town of Billerica.. Other than that, this budget is level funded.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions, comments, or concerns. There were no questions, but everyone thanked Shirley for her service to the town.

John Mulloy, seconded by Patrick Logue made a motion to recommend the Town Clerk budget in the amount of \$256,629.

It was voted:

11 – In favor

0 – Opposed

#### **Elections – Shirley Schult, Town Clerk**

Paul Watson stated that what drives this budget is the number of elections per year. There are only 2 elections in FY 24 (Presidential Primary and Town) which leads to the decrease in this budget. There is a little increase in wages due to the increase in the minimum wage.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions, comments, or concerns. The voting machines are very old, what's the future for these machines? They are about 30 years old and will have to be replaced soon. We can't get parts for them unless the parts are taken from another machine. Did we vote on financing new machines in a previous budget? They are in the Capital Budget to be replaced, not sure for which year that is supposed to happen.

John Mulloy, seconded by Larry Norman made a motion to recommend the Election Budget in the amount of \$140,996.

It was voted:

9 – In favor  
0 – Opposed  
2 – Abstain – McBride  
and Gagliardi

**Registrars – Shirley Schult, Town Clerk**

The only change in this budget is a step increase and a 3% cost-of-living wage for the Registrars' Clerk.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions, comments, or concerns. On page 101, Shirley is still listed for FY24. That is a typo.

John Mulloy, seconded by Don Damon made a motion to recommend the Registrars Budget in the amount of \$77,389.

It was voted:

11 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

**Fire Department – Robert Cole, Fire Chief**

Chief Cole stated Engine 3 is finally completed. Engine 5 is ordered and should be here in the first quarter of 2024. The open positions due to retirement have all been filled. With COVID past, we are getting back into some of programs, changing smoke detectors for seniors, CPR for 6<sup>th</sup> graders, and all the other SAFE programs that they do in the schools.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions, comments, or concerns. A while back one of your ladder trucks got jammed up under the bridge, is that back online? Yes, we got it back in August. Was the work covered by insurance? Yes, we did have a \$1000 deductible. The truck is 10 years old; we did take the opportunity while it was down to do some needed maintenance. Do we have 2 ladder trucks? No, that last one was traded in towards a new engine, it didn't have much value, it was 30 years old. In the 10 months that the ladder truck was out of service, we had three incidents when the ladder was necessary. Mutual aid was used on all three of those calls. Have there been any more talks regarding the North Fire Station? Yes, currently they are trying to address the structural needs of the building. Also looking at HVAC and basement issues. They brought in a consultant to look at the basement and are developing a plan to address it.

The other big piece is to address the living quarters. Are all the stations able to clean their gear? The only station that does not have a washer/dryer is the North. How does our fire department factor into the Active Shooter Preparedness? NFPA3000 is a group that does fire department standards. They work with police departments to come up with the standard where the fire department would work with the police to help bring out victims. They would never go in on their own. They would handle the ambulance task force and med flights if needed. On responses, there is zero on the fire drills. That line is for the requested fire drills from businesses and such. Are you fully staffed? Yes, as of December 2022. How is the fire

department helping with animal control? Nets are kept in the trucks for catching bats, they also get called out for animals in a chimney. Box Services, is this call boxes? The boxes that used to be on buildings, that system was retired a few years ago. It was costly and difficult to maintain, and the system was over 100 years old. Were they required by the NFPA? No, it was a service started by the town 100 years ago.

Would it be possible to do a graph especially for medical response over a five-year period? Also, a similar graph for response times? The fees that are collected, where does that money go? The Town's General Fund. How common is it for towns to have two dispatch centers (for Police and for Fire)? We don't have the data on that but there are some towns around us that have Police/Fire combined in their Town, and also Regional services.. There is still research to do and questions to be answered and it is being discussed and worked on. Any status on the contracts? We are still in negotiations. How many 111F's do we have? There are three with injuries. Where do we send the trucks for major work? Greenwood Emergency in Attleboro or Cummings for engines in Dedham. The SAFE Program, how many students and seniors do you help? We are in all the lower schools, do CPR training for 6<sup>th</sup> grade, but we don't have a number. Turnout gear, when do we buy them? We buy 12 sets a year. Each member should have 2 sets and they each get a new set every 5 years.

When do you anticipate purchasing a new truck? With how long it takes for them to come in now, we have to order at least 18 to 24 months ahead of time. Do you have anything planned for Fire Prevention Month? We normally have an open house the last week in October. Plus, there will be some school programs. The fire control system inside the building, did we have to do some maintenance as far as changing out wires? They are in the midst of a radio system infrastructure upgrade. The new system (Police and Fire) is compatible, and the new system will also include the DPW. It should be complete by June.

John Mulloy seconded by Don Damon made a motion to recommend the Fire Department Budget in the amount of \$9,353,839.

It was voted:

11 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

### **System Administration – Chris Bartlett, Director of Technology**

Mr. Curran began, there is an increase to this budget for a nonunion employee COLA. The biggest part of the budget is the expenses. The biggest increase is for copiers and printers have gone up about \$20,000. The line item for the PC's is gone, we bought out the lease to save some money for the next year or two. The PCs are in good shape but eventually will need to be replaced and that \$18,000 line item will come back.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions, comments, or concerns. We have continued concern that there is only one person in this department. They have been discussing this, looking at IT and staffing. How many end users do you support? Not sure of the exact number but it is over 160. Have you seen printing needs go down since many are going paperless for so many things now? Yes and no, been trying to get the message out to not print unless you really need to. Are we protected from ransomware? Yes, but there is no such thing as an impenetrable system. Do we have any employees that work remotely? Yes, we do have a few from time to time but it's not commonplace. Do you think that will increase

over time and if so, will it increase costs? Not really and we don't see that it would increase dramatically. Do we back up our systems to the cloud? It is backed up to the cloud and on site. Do you rely on vendors? Not for day-to-day operations. Have we done a tech audit recently? Yes, we do them monthly.

Discussion about succession planning in this Department. At present Water Billing)Chris is a one man department, Greg Katz (Police IT) will retire in two years, and Judy Dunn (Water Billing) is close to retirement. An IT redo is in the near future.

John Mulloy, seconded by Patrick Logue made a motion to recommend the System Administration Budget in the amount of \$652,549.

It was voted:

11 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

### **Town Accountant and Review of Budget to Actual Report – Paul Watson, Town Accountant**

Paul Watson –This budget is level funded except for the COLA for the Town Accountant. There are three employees all at top step.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions, comments, or concerns. Mr. Watson is a senior employee and retiring soon, he gets an additional 6% for the last three years before retiring. When does the three years run out? It will run out after next year.

John Mulloy, seconded by Larry Norman made a motion to recommend the Accounting Budget in the amount of \$360,437.

It was voted:

11 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

### **Debt Service – John Curran, Town Manager and Paul Watson, Town Accountant**

John Curran, this budget is \$7.4 million, we are working at keeping our policy for keeping the tax levy at \$9 million. There's an upcoming meeting with the Select Board to discuss the future debt. Future projects could have a significant impact on future debt. The Town Manager will go over the Debt Stabilization policy and recommend that the \$9 million guideline be raised. If raised to \$12 million to cover future projects, the average Tax Bill would rise \$121, if raised to \$13 million it would rise by \$170.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions, comments, or concerns. Do we have a ratio of how much the Town is using the Wastewater System? People do not have to connect but if they want to sell their home, they will have to connect. Putting fines in place for people that do not connect would have to go before Town Meeting. Was there a requirement that once sewer went past your residence, you had five years to tie in? Not sure of the time frame but there is a requirement in place that you must hook up within a certain period – one year. Unfortunately there is no consequence if you don't so people don't pay any attention to it. Do you think it might be time to try again with Town Meeting to approve fines? If we could get the support of the Select Board, I would bring it forward again. The more people connected, the more the rates could come down. It will cost about \$200 million more to finish this project. There is about 15% left to do. Are two new schools being talked about?

Yes, the most efficient plan is to combine the middle schools and have another elementary built or do an addition or renovation to an elementary. Do the bonding agencies look negatively on the town if there is not enough debt? Yes, because they presume you're not replacing old structures. They want to be confident you are taking care of your infrastructure. What percentage of the current budget is debt? Thinks it is about 8%. What percentage would the credit rating people consider too much debt? Anything over 10%. DPW building is in the works, discussions for a COA building, when will Parker School and High School come off the Debt? The Parker in 2033 and the High School in 2047. What is the bond rate at? About 4 to 4.5. It was around 2% for the High School. Costs and interest rates are going to continue to rise.

John Mulloy seconded by Patrick Logue made a motion to recommend the Debt Service Budget in the amount of \$7,484,576.25.

It was voted:

11 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

**Town/School Shared Cost – John Curran, Town Manager**

Town building insurance went up a little due to taking on the Howe School, the Masonic Hall, and the new Bubba Shack at PHR. Health insurance is level funded. Workers Comp is increased based on the previous year's amendment budget, same for Medicare. Middlesex Retirement/OPEB up 15% over previous years.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions, comments, or concerns. For the School Health Insurance, the options are "single" or "family", is it the same for the town side? Yes. Have you considered other options? Yes, It has been looked into, but it does not provide any financial benefits to the Town or the insured person. Middlesex County Retirement, do new employees tap into that when they retire? New employees automatically have 14% of their income going into the retirement system, Middlesex County Retirement. Is the 6.5% assessment, is that the town's figure or Middlesex County Board's? The Board, in order to get us fully funded over the next 13 years. Why are some of the shared line items on the school side left blank? Some of these shared costs are estimates and we do not know the cost until after they occur. Was a claim put in to insurance for the vandalism at the school? Yes, and we are getting money back, but we have to pay the \$25,000 deductible.

John Mulloy, seconded by Doug Fogerty, made a motion to recommend the Town/School Shared Budget in the amount of \$38,749,809.

It was voted:

11 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

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

John Curran, budget has gone up based on a letter the Town gets from Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG).

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions, comments, or concerns. How often does someone come around to check on weights and measures? Annually. Do

they come back if there is an issue or questions? Yes, but we haven't had a call in a few years. The last call was regarding a gas station.

John Mulloy, seconded by Larry Norman, made a motion to recommend the Sealer of Weights and Measures Budget in the amount of \$16,000.

It was voted:

10 – In favor  
1 – Opposed - Logue

**Town Civic Events – John Curran, Town Manager and Paul Watson, Town Accountant**  
Level funded.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions, comments, or concerns. The description includes a New Years Family celebration, and other items but specifically the art Street Banners, we would love to see the banners changed. The Veterans department will be holding an event in May, Memorial Day. Wreaths across America, is that paid for from this budget? No, the funds are all donated for that.

John Mulloy seconded by Larry Norman, made a motion to recommend the Town Civic Events Budget in the amount of \$43,200.

It was voted:

10 – In favor  
0 – Opposed  
1 – Abstained – Logue

**Miscellaneous Correspondence:**

Next Finance Committee Meeting Tuesday March 28, 2023 – Advertised Public Hearing

CPC will be voting their article on Thursday March 23, 2023

**ADJOURNMENT:**

Larry Norman, seconded by Patrick Logue made a motion to adjourn.

It was voted:

11 – In favor  
0 – Opposed

Chairman David Gagliardi adjourned the meeting at 9:47 pm.

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Joyce MacMillan, Recording Clerk