

BILLERICA FINANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES

March 28, 2023

A meeting and Public Hearing of the Billerica Finance Committee was held on Tuesday March 28, 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; Sharon Healey, Member; Patrick Logue, Member; Doug Meagher, Member; Philip Newfell, Member; Larry Norman, Member; Darlene Torre, Member; Paul Watson, Ex-Officio Town Accountant; and Joyce MacMillan, Recording Clerk.

Excused: Douglas Fogerty, Member; Brian Dorrington, 2nd Associate.

CALL TO ORDER:

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

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

OPEN PUBLIC HEARING:

Mary McBride, seconded by Doug Meagher, made a motion to open the Advertised Public Hearing.

It was voted:

9 – In favor

0 – Opposed

FY24 BUDGET:

Recreation Budget – David Grubb, Recreation Director

The three main items that increased the budget this year are \$5,000 was added to the part-time seasonal budget to help offset the minimum wage increases. There was a \$3,000 increase to the port-a-potty rentals. That is a contractual service increase. Last, we deducted \$5,000 from lake management. That will be supplemented through CPC and managed through the Town Mangers office.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. Have you filled the Assistant position yet? No, we made an offer, and it was denied just in the last couple of days. Looking for someone to fill that position has been put on hold. Is your staff all union staff? All the full-time staff are. Have you thought about hiring a Rec Director retiree from other towns? Yes, I met with someone that retired from Bedford and she underestimated how bored she would be. We will be speaking to her again soon and possibly bringing her on part time. Is Billerica keeping up the program fees? Billerica is significantly lower than other towns in the region. The mission here is to have high quality affordable programs.

John Mulloy seconded by Don Damon made a motion to recommend the Recreation Budget in the amount of \$488,356.

It was voted:

10 – In favor

0 – Opposed

Billerica Public Library – Joe St. Germain, Library Director

Doug Meagher stated that he made a disclosure to our appointing authority, the moderator, that he has a relative that works for the library, so he is authorized by the moderator to vote on the bottom line of this budget but will not participate or vote in any way on the salary line if it were to come up in this discussion.

This budget is increasing by approximately \$43,000. This increase is due to staffing. Nineteen members of the staff are non-union, and their 3% cost of living is already factored in. Eight employees are receiving step increases this year. Two employees are receiving a longevity increase this year. There is a \$7,215 decrease in the electrical supply, cleaning supply line and water purifier line. These services are being centralized in the Facilities Department.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. As we move further into the digital age, are you finding that fewer people are utilizing the library? No, from FY21 to FY22 we saw an increase of usage of 26% in our collection usage, 105% increase in our program participation usage, and 159% increase in visits. Do you still have a lot of people utilizing computers? In FY22, we had on average 146 sessions per week on the public stations along with 44,000 wireless connections for the year. Who cleans the library? There is an outside cleaning service that comes in and cleans six nights a week. In the past, there was a certain amount of money made up by the Friends of the Library to pay to be part of the consortium, is that still true? Yes, but is for the library to be certified by the state not part of the consortium.

John Mulloy seconded by Larry Norman made a motion to recommend the Billerica Public Library Budget in the amount of \$1,697,786.

It was voted:

10 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Council on Aging – Jean Bushnell, COA Director

Chairman Gagliardi has recused himself from this portion of the meeting. He works for COA and has filed a disclosure with the Clerk's Office and the Moderator. Vice Chairman Mulloy will run this portion of the meeting.

Jean Bushnell sent a handout to the committee prior to the meeting and another one at the meeting. Jean went over some items in the handout, starting with "why do they exist?" To help seniors to live vibrant purposeful lives in a respectful inclusive community. She went over all their partnerships with the Board of Health, Fire Department, AARP, the Community Farmers Market, the Library, Lahey Market, and Booster Shot Clinics. Jean went over all the past and upcoming events, grants they are working on, Tax Work off program, Mental Health support, Intergenerational programs and events, the staff and volunteers, and the help they get from the Board of directors and the Friends.

Vice Chairman Mulloy opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. How will the Farmers Market move to the old Ditson site affect the COA? It is a positive for both the Farmers Market and the COA. They will continue to work together. How do we find out what the COA has to offer? There is the website, a newsletter (that can be found in many businesses in town, in the Post Offices, the library, and other town offices), and on Facebook and other social media. How much were the two grants for? One was a shared grant with

Tewksbury, the other with Chelmsford and was about \$7,000 or \$8,000. What does the COA use the transportation for? Our seniors use the vans for doctor appointments, grocery shopping, going to the bank, and group trips. They must book their time 48 hours in advance.

Mary McBride, seconded by Doug Meagher, made a motion to recommend the Council on Aging Budget in the amount of \$421,747.

It was voted:

9 – In favor

0 – Opposed

Planning and Economic Development – Erika Jerram

This is Erika's first year presenting her budget. She has created a mission statement (approved by the Town Manager), which she read to the committee. Erika also went over all the new and improved changes to the department. She went over the structure of the department and future plans and ideas. Also working with the other departments, boards, and committees. Created a new website. All the back planning files are in the process of being scanned. Working on Zoning Recodification to make it easy to read. It's time for an overhaul. The department has hired a company to review current zoning and tell them what needs to be corrected. The current policy is difficult to read and basically tells people and businesses to go away. They started working on an updated Open Space and Recreation Plan, it is a state mandated plan. It is updated every seven years and is due this year. Working with the DPW on the Municipal Vulnerability Plan, it needs annual updates. The MBTA Communities legislation you will be hearing a lot about; it is also tied to zoning. Created a brochure that describes what is important about owning a home in the historic district. They were awarded a Mass Historic Commission grant of \$10,000 that will be matched with CPC money to undertake some survey review about our current Historic District documentation. The last thing she went over was the department goals. Just launched this week is the "Ask a Planner" sessions to be held at the library, the COA and PHR.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. What is the Brownfields Program that you want to establish? Brownfields is a term used by the federal government to define land that is contaminated or suspected of contamination but as a result is underdeveloped or vacant. These are federal grants that Erika has worked with before and she applied for one in December. It is a very competitive grant and does not have any idea whether the town will get the money. If we do, part of the Brownfields Program will start with education and working with private or smaller properties (not for Superfund sites) and provide 21E's (Environmental reports) to help find out if a property is or is not contaminated. Do you have any great economic development ideas for the vacant businesses along Boston Road? Yes, but we need to start with zoning. It is difficult to open a restaurant in Billerica and once it is open, they must go before the ZBA each time ownership changes. Many hoops to jump through, we don't want to take away oversight but more along the lines of streamlining things. Is the Life Science / Concord Road Project still moving forward? They have not pulled permits yet but are supposed to still be moving forward.

"Ask a Planner", is this something can also be done remotely or maybe on BATV? After the Town Meeting and as they move along, they will firm up more dates and other possibilities of locations and most likely will add a virtual session. Times and dates will always be posted on their website.

What is the \$70,000 for Community Development Services for? This year it was used for the Market Analysis, that was \$10,000. The Barrett Planning Zoning Audit was \$24,000. Also, part of the funds is used for Consulting people such as Denise McClure. Hope to use it for District Studies and Tech Park and other areas such as these. Tech Park has high vacancy rates and is in dire need of rebranding. How do you plan on broadcasting these and other initiatives out to the residents, so we know what the money is being spent on? Adding it to the web page, everything she does involves public process and does not make any major decisions on her own. Everything she does involves Town Meeting or the Select Board or the Town Manger. Public oversight is part of the work that she does. Is there anything you would like to add to the budget in the future, a wish list item? Maybe more staff and a Jr. Planner. Is Denise McClure's consulting fee part of the \$70,000? Yes, she is. A few years ago, there was a nice video about Billerica. It's outdated now but maybe once things are up and running well, it is something that could be created again. A video showing what Billerica has to offer. It could be put on the Town website.

John Mulloy, seconded by Larry Norman, made a motion to recommend the Planning and Community Development Budget in the amount of \$356,987.

It was voted:

9 – In favor

1 – Opposed - Logue

Treasurer/Collector – Elaine Russo, Town Treasurer/Collector

Elaine Russo introduced herself to the committee as the newly appointed Treasurer/Collector. She has worked for the Town for 14 years, 11 of which have been in the Treasurer/Collector's Office. She is excited to be in this new role. The mission of her office is to provide taxpayers, Town departments, retirees, public officials, and the public in general a high level of prompt and courteous service. Also, to provide timely collection of all monies due to the town, safeguard all funds due to the town and issue data authorized through Town Meeting, fund expenditures and oversee our payroll services for employees as well as retirees. The budget has decreased this year, primarily due to the retirement of John Clark and the appointment of Elaine Russo at a lesser salary step. Maryann Schafer was promoted to Assistant Tax Collector at a lower salary step than Elaine had in her past position, due to length of time in the position. Hired a new principal clerk, she also came in at a lower salary step than previous clerk. Elaine has worked at reducing banking fees for this year.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. What is the fee charged to the town each time a resident pays their bill via credit card? It is 2.95% online and 2.79% in the office. It is only 40 cents for an ACH withdrawal from a checking account. How much would the Town lose if we did away with charging the residents the charge card fee? We would have to get that figure for you. \$35,000 line for legal fees for foreclosures, how many foreclosures do we do a year? That is the Tax Title Revolving account, not a foreclosure account. We do over 100 tax titles a year. You implemented a new banking service; can you elaborate on that? We did some research, changed the bank account from Bank of America to Eastern Bank, this is saving the Town in banking fees. Eastern Bank offered services without fees. We also changed the Lock Box Provider for lower fees, the payments are now being mailed to Boston instead of Medford.

John Mulloy, seconded by Don Damon made a motion to recommend the Treasurer/Collector Budget in the amount of \$706,241.

It was voted:

10 – In favor
0 – Opposed

WARRANT ARTICLE:

Article 1 - Set Compensation of Town Clerk – Dave Gagliardi

To see if the Town will vote to fix compensation for the following elected official of the Town effective July 1, 2023.

Town Clerk - \$90,456 a year

John Mulloy, seconded by Don Damon, made a motion to recommend Article 1 as printed in the Preliminary Warrant.

It was voted:

10 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Article 2 – Set Compensation of Select Board – Dave Gagliardi

To see if the Town will vote to fix compensation for the following elected official of the Town effective July 1, 2023.

Select Board, Chairman \$2000
Select Board, Member \$1800

John Mulloy, seconded by Mary McBride, made a motion to recommend Article 2 as printed in the preliminary warrant.

It was voted:

8 – In favor
2 – Opposed –Meagher
& Newfell

Article 3 - To Hear Reports of Town Depts., Committees & Officers – John Curran

To see if the Town will vote to hear and act upon the reports of Town Departments, Committees, and Officers.

John Mulloy, seconded by Larry Norman made a motion to recommend Article 3 as printed in the Preliminary Warrant.

It was voted:

10 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Article 18 – FY24 Water Enterprise Fund – John Curran

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate a sum of money to operate the Water Enterprise Fund pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 44 Section 53 F ½ for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2023, and ending June 30, 2024. This Budget was also thoroughly reviewed as part of the Town Budget discussion, but needs a separate warrant article because we use an Enterprise Fund accounting system.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. What would happen if the Town Meeting voted this down? If the Town Meeting approves the budget, the entire budget is approved. Both Enterprise Funds (Water and WasteWater) are reported separately. All Budgets may be amended on the Town Meeting floor.

John Mulloy seconded by Larry Norman made a motion to recommend Article 18 as printed in the preliminary warrant.

It was voted: 8 – In favor
2 – Opposed – Damon & Logue

Article 19 – FY24 Wastewater Enterprise Fund – John Curran

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate a sum of money to operate the WasteWater Enterprise Fund pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 44 Section 53 F ½ for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2023, and ending June 30, 2024.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. No Questions.

John Mulloy, seconded by Doug Meagher made a motion to recommend Article 19 as printed in the preliminary warrant.

It was voted: 8 – In favor
2 – Opposed – Damon & Logue

Article 20 – Allow Town Manager and Finance Committee to Transfer Funds – Dave Gagliardi

To see if the Town will vote to allow the Town Manager, upon request of a Department Head, Board or Commission, to make a transfer of funds between budget line items not to exceed a ~~difference of~~ \$5,000 from the amount voted at Town Meeting per line item for Fiscal Year 2024, with the exclusion of travel accounts, within the same department. Transfers within department line items in excess of \$5,000 for Fiscal Year 2024 must be approved by the Finance Committee. A written report from the Town Manager on all transfers of \$5,000 and under must be provided to the Finance Committee on the first Tuesday of each month.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. There was a short discussion regarding the wording of this article.

Darlene Torre, seconded by Doug Meagher, made a motion to remove the wording “a difference of” from Article 20.

It was voted: 10 – In favor
0 – Opposed

John Mulloy seconded by Patrick Logue made a motion to recommend Article 20 as amended.

It was voted: 10 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Article 21 – Authorize Revolving Funds– Paul Watson

To see if the Town will vote pursuant to the provisions of M.G.L, Chapter 44, Subsection 53E1/2, as most recently amended, to set Fiscal Year spending limits for revolving funds. See list in Warrant Article.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. Beside the Town Manager’s office who controls the BEAM Revolving Fund? The School Department. Does the Flu Shot Program include the one at the COA? Yes. What happened with correcting or moving the BEAM Program? Wasn’t that being taken care of last year? The Warrant Article was pulled last year. Is the Respite Care for the COA? Yes, it is a COA Program.

John Mulloy, seconded by Larry Norman, made a motion to recommend Article 21 as printed in the preliminary warrant.

It was voted: 9 – In favor
1 – Opposed - Torre

Article 22 – Opiate Funds – John Curran

To see if the Town will vote to transfer and appropriate the sum of \$91,038 from the Massachusetts Statewide Opioid Recovery and Remediation Fund’s fiscal 2024 distribution for the support of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery programs as directed by the National Opioid Settlements Agreement.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. Who would be directing where these funds go? Some would be through the Town Managers Office, the Substance Awareness Prevention Director, or the BSAP Committee. There are very strict restrictions on how the funds can be used.

John Mulloy, seconded by Darlene Torre, made a motion to recommend Article 22 as printed in the preliminary warrant.

It was voted: 10 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Article 23 – Rescind Prior Borrowing – Paul Watson

To see if the Town will vote to rescind the borrowing authorizations previously approved at Town Meeting. See list in the Warrant Article.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. These were articles that were completed under the original Warrant amounts and the funds are being rescinded.

John Mulloy, seconded by Larry Norman, made a motion to recommend Article 23 as printed in the preliminary warrant.

It was voted: 10 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Article 24 – Fund Public, Educational, and Governmental (PEG) Access – John Curran
To see if the Town will vote to transfer and appropriate the sum of \$220,789.43 from the PEG access and Cable Related Fund to be provided to BATV for support of PEG Access Cable Television Services.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions or concerns. No Questions

John Mulloy, seconded by Patrick Logue, made a motion to recommend Article 24 as printed in the preliminary warrant.

It was voted: 9 – In favor
0 – Opposed
1 – Abstain - Meagher

CLOSE PUBLIC HEARING:

Mary McBride, seconded by Larry Norman, made a motion to close the Advertised Public Hearing.

It was voted: 10 – In favor
0 – Opposed

MINUTES: March 14, 2023
Review minutes of March 14, 2023

Larry Norman seconded by Patrick Logue made a motion to accept the minutes of March 14, 2023.

It was voted: 10 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Miscellaneous Correspondence:
Next Finance Committee Meeting Tuesday April 4, 2023

The Capital Facilities Study Committee meeting is still in session down the hall in the Conway Room. It seems so far, most people that called in would like to see two separate buildings for the COA and Recreation.

The School and the Shawsheen budget will be on April 13, 2023, meeting. The Shawsheen budget is up \$607,000 and is largely due to capital. They have been asked if they could use the funds to reduce the assessments, but the E & D funds have not certified by the DOR yet.

ADJOURNMENT:

John Mulloy, seconded by Darlene Torre, made a motion to adjourn.

It was voted:

10 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Chairman David Gagliardi adjourned the meeting at 9:16 pm.

Joyce MacMillan, Recording Clerk