

Boylston Finance Committee Meeting Minutes for February 12, 2024 Budget Hearings

Attendees in Person: Howard Drobner, Eric Brose, Karen McGahie, Stephanie Miczek
Attendees via Zoom: Dave Butler
Absent: Greg

Meeting brought to order by Howard on 2/12/2024 at 6:46 pm

Karen moved a motion to accept the minutes from January 29, 2024, Eric seconded. Roll call vote:
Yeses: Howard, Stephanie, Karen, Eric, Dave. Nos: none.

Dawn Porter- Town Clerk

Dawn sent a letter to the Selectmen with a narrative about the issues in the clerk's office and needs requests.

Needs more hours for Clerk. Looking for 32 up from 28.

Needs more hours for Assistant/Clerical. Looking for 26 up from 15

In addition to daily activity from town folks, still have significant other duties including archiving, and keeping up with the increase in regulations and filings.

Elections - money added to budget, should be sufficient.

Records room - still processing/organizing records project in basement - doing a great job on this project and nearing completion (of the back log of filing and sorting).

Jacob (Jack) Vaili - Board of Assessors Administrative Assistant

Adding money into postage for higher postage expenses and possibly use this for computer replacement if necessary.

Lots of vital records - needs more time off hours to do much of the additional work of the office. There's only one employee (currently 26 hours a week) that is just enough to cover when office is open to the public. Steady stream of people in the Assessors' Office. Can't be in Archives and in the office answering phones simultaneously. Also works for facilities and for the library, and would prefer to move hours to the Assessors' Office to complete that work.

Half as many people showing up as did last year to complain about abatements/assessments. Not surprising that the office received increased activity last year, and not surprising that that activity has slowed down. Common statistics with other local towns.

Asking for information about overlay monies being returned – Jack to review and confirm prior year details and current funds to be returned.

Dennis Costello & Sarah Barrette - Board of Health

Nurses budget line-item primary topic of discussion

Looking for additional hours. Currently working 7 hours @ \$50 per hour. They said that they are looking for higher pay per hour, but the increase only reflects a COLA. At that rate, and she doesn't work the full 7 every week right now, the total would be \$18,200. Asking for \$20,000

Tasks: Works with the Fire Department, the elderly, attends quarterly meetings, zoom or in person with the GBPH – Greater Boroughs Partnership For Health (regional agreement); acquire unexpired COVID tests, gets state information on current diseases, article on mental health for COA, Sharps containers, wellness, case management.

Additional topic - Animal Inspector, Dog Officer, and Animal Control Officer - in talks to regionalize this position that might bring additional costs (perhaps \$17,000?). Not a request from Dennis. Difficult getting someone to fulfill on dog officer position at \$2,900 a year.

John Annunziata - Police

Regional dispatch discussion. John warned of complications of regionalization, without siding for or against regionalization. Challenges of current system – we can't just have one dispatcher on at a time, which is the current system. Need one to provide medical advice/help with distressed callers, while 2nd person would be answering other phones. Received a grant for \$25,000 to temporarily help with this. Adding one new position and increasing one position from a 32-hour part time to full time 40 hours. Would then have full coverage of dispatch on a rotating schedule with 5 full time positions. Looking for a second dispatcher currently from 10:00 am to 6:00 PM for busy times. Increase from 2 to 4 permanent part time. Submitting an increase in overtime budget from \$12K to \$36K despite the addition of staff.

Regionalization - Selectmen looking for community input. Don't want Police doing dispatch paperwork – expensive overtime for the town. Even with regionalization would need 1.5 positions records clerk (one full time). Initially, if approved by the town to move to regionalization in July we may experience a need to use police officers to help with dispatch to cover shifts that would normally be covered by dispatchers, but we would have a hard time filling. Employees don't like joining an organization if they don't have a future prospect for employment there.

Police: Sick time/overtime/vacation pay – increase in hours from 89 in FY2022 to 177 in FY2023. Have older officer and younger officers on FMLA - younger for maternity, older for caring for a spouse which leaves open shifts being covered by overtime. This is an ongoing issue, and one officer is on extended FMLA, and will cause further overtime hours. Dave pointed out that we come out even, with the overtime, because we didn't fund a position. The tradeoff is overtime versus a new position. It makes the chief's job more difficult for scheduling, and only an issue for officers when stressing the current staffing (otherwise officers are happy to pick up overtime hours).

Howard mentioned that we've been made aware of additional police position request - Lieutenant, adding school resource officer, as well as increase requests for other positions.

Nancy Konitsky (Finance), Carol Costello (superintendent), District Officers; and Meaghan Grill, School Committee. In attendance, but not part of the meeting - Julie Malik - Berlin Finance Committee, Jessica Degliaberti (attending as a town resident, not school committee)

Meaghan stated initially that the attorney for the schools recommends stating that the budgets as presented are preliminary. Discussing budgets on Feb 27, presenting final budget on March 12, and as consultant advised, allowing 7 days for comments, before reconvening for a vote on March 19th.

Reviewed budget packet – starting on Page 3 and all changes (see packet for full list) - District Wide increases in positions, and Special Education transportation increase is from \$170/run to \$400/run. BES - new classroom teacher and 2.5 paraprofessionals. Tahanto - Athletic Director full time from .60 (talked about this last year) and Athletic Trainer full time. Looking at 6% increase in Boylston Elementary students for next year. Trying to keep class sizes around 20 students - using Paraprofessional as helping hands in lower grades, and full-time teachers in higher grades. Currently 22 students in a class, and want to keep class size under 25.

School resource Officer - Meaghan wants to "put a pin in it" because not much feedback from the school committee's open forum discussion. Karen talked about using 80% of the projected officer costs in the budget as opposed to the calculation that shows \$46K currently. Total cost is about \$200K first year (including a vehicle) and those costs would go into the school budget. The selectmen have not weighed in on the resource officer, but the working assumption by the school committee is 75% of the time in Tahanto and 25% of the time in BES.

Total Budget increases: Look at an 18% increase in BES and 11% increase in Tahanto for Boylston. Discussed Capital Expenses -\$405,000 for BES and the Boylston share (about \$400,000) of the total Tahanto requests of \$670,710.

Approved 5 transfer requests with Roll Call Votes. Transfers to be signed by Howard. All unanimous.

Dave brought up a question of the Vision software. Concern that the software won't provide the finance committee with a benefit, and it is unclear what the benefit is to the rest of the town departments. Howard to discuss with Matt regarding feasibility/usefulness, and whether it's a reasonable expense for the benefit.

Karen made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Eric seconded. Roll call vote all ayes. Meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Eric Brose
2/13/2024