

Town of Ayer

Executive Bi-Board Meeting Minutes For

Tuesday, February 8, 2022, 2pm

Attendance: Scott Houde (Chair); Pat Diamond; Mark Smith; Lisa Gabree (Finance Manager); Barbara Tierney (Treasurer/Tax Collector); Carly Antonellis (Assistant Town Manager); Robert Pontbriand (Town Manager)

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 2pm by S. Houde.

S. Houde read the following statement into the record:

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, in accordance with Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law (OML), public bodies otherwise governed by the OML are temporarily relieved from the requirement that meeting be held in public places, open and physically accessible to the public so long as measures are taken to ensure public access to the bodies' deliberations "through adequate, alternative means." This meeting will be live on Zoom. The public may participate remotely by joining Zoom (Meeting ID# 854 0032 4335) or by calling 929-205-6099. For additional information about remote participation, please contact Carly Antonellis, Assistant Town Manager at atm@ayer.ma.us or 978-772-8220 ext. one hundred prior to the meeting.

Review/Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (October 12, 2021):

The Bi-Board reviewed the DRAFT minutes from the October 12, 2021, meeting.

Motion: A motion was made by P. Diamond and seconded by M. Smith to approve the October 12, 2021, meeting minutes. **Motion passed (7-0)** by Roll Call Vote: S. Houde, Y; P. Diamond; Y; M. Smith, Y; L. Gabree, Y; B. Tierney, Y; C. Antonellis, Y; R. Pontbriand, Y.

FY 2023 Budget Update: Review and Discussion of DRAFT #1 of FY 2023 Budget:

R. Pontbriand provided a status update of the budget process. DRAFT #2 of the FY 2023 Budget will be transmitted to the Select Board and Finance Committee on February 24, 2022, and available on the Town's website at that time. On March 1, 2022, he will be making a brief presentation and update to the Select Board on DRAFT #2. The Second Public Budget Forum will be on Wednesday, March 16, 2022, at 6pm on Zoom.

R. Pontbriand asked if there were any questions or comments regarding DRAFT #1 of the FY 2023 Budget.

S. Houde asked the proposed Social Worker position in the FY 2023 Budget was a full-time position? He also asked if it could be a part-time position or if the position could be regionalized with another town?

R. Pontbriand advised that the position proposal is designed to be a full-time, benefitted position. The reasoning is that there appears to be a full-time need and in order to attract qualified Social Workers the salary and benefits needs to be competitive. It is not for certain that after a year, we may find that this is a part-time position and could be altered accordingly. At this time, it is hard to determine, and we know that there is a real need for social services for the Police Department, Council on Aging, and Community and Economic Development not to mention general social service issues for the Town.

R. Pontbriand stated that as far as a regional effort for the position, the Town should not rule that possibility out, but it is difficult at this time to determine based on the workload if this is a possibility. It is certainly something the Town should continue to look at and consider.

S. Houde stated that he supports the position of the Social Worker. He is just wondering as to whether it is a full-time need. He also stated that if there was not enough full-time work for this position could it be assigned other work?

R. Pontbriand stated that could be an option/possibility and something to consider. This is a new position and if approved, the first year will give us a better indication about the work level and demand for the position.

P. Diamond stated that he supports the position as well. He also stated that we need to hire someone with the professional credentials and as such this will need to be a full-time, benefitted position.

There were no other questions or comments on DRAFT #1 of the FY 2023 Budget.

Discussion on Recommendations for Proposed Uses of Free Cash:

R. Pontbriand presented a brief update to the Bi-Board regarding the Town's certified Free Cash along with some proposed recommendations developed by him and L. Gabree for consideration and further discussion.

R. Pontbriand advised that the Town has certified Free Cash as of June 30, 2021, in the amount of \$2,528,927. This is a higher year than normal for free cash due in part to three major factors: 1.) \$833,268 in favorable revenues; 2.) \$1,295,416 returned by Departments; and #.) Overlay surplus of \$402,770.

In terms of recommended uses of Free Cash, R. Pontbriand and L. Gabree recommend the following:

<u>Certified Free Cash:</u>	<u>\$2,528,927</u>	
GASB 45-OPEB	(\$181,000)	<i>+\$119,000 Meals Tax = \$300,000</i>
Forward Funding of Pension Assessment	(\$300,000)	
Compensated Absences	(\$50,000)	
Reserve Fund	(\$13,837)	<i>Replenishment of FY 2022 Payouts</i>
Capital Stabilization Fund	(\$1,584,090)	

Stabilization Fund

(\$400,000)

*Dedicate towards Year 4 of
Firefighters Under SAFER Grant*

\$0

R. Pontbriand stated that the Town should be proactively saving now for the “Year 4” cost impacts of the four new Firefighters under the SAFER Grant. Though the SAFER Grant covers the first three years, in year four the Town will be responsible for the full amount.

L. Gabree stated that now is the time to set aside the funds for “Year 4” of the cost impacts.

P. Diamond asked if L. Gabree had calculated the cost impacts.

L. Gabree advised that she has calculated out the cost impacts as well as looking beyond “Year 4” to Year’s 5, 6, and 7. For FY 2023 the recommendation is to put \$400,000 in the Stabilization Fund dedicated toward “Year 4”.

S. Houde asked about the replenishment of the UDAG Fund in the amount of \$65,000 for the Depot Square Project as recently voted by the Select Board.

L. Gabree stated that she recalled as a matter of policy the Town would not pay back from UDAG in instances where the UDAG Funds were specifically used for economic development or infrastructure purposes.

R. Pontbriand advised that though the Bi-Board has discussed this as a policy it has not been finalized nor is part of the current Financial Policies.

S. Houde stated that he would support replenishing the UDAG funds in the amount of \$65,000 for Depot Square and then finalize the new policy over the summer.

The Bi-Board agreed to recommend that the Town replenish the \$65,000 using Free Cash.

P. Diamond stated that this is a good plan.

R. Pontbriand stated that he and L. Gabree would update the recommended uses of Free Cash to include the \$65,000 UDAG replenishment. He also stated that if the Bi-Board had any other recommendations or suggestions on the use of Free Cash to let him know. The Bi-Board will review and discuss again at the March meeting.

Discussion on Hiring an ARPA Funds Consultant:

R. Pontbriand stated that as the Bi-Board has been discussing for some time, most municipalities in Massachusetts are obtaining professional ARPA Funding consultants due to the extensive requirements of the ARPA Funds outside the scope and capacity of municipal staff. Clifton Larson Allen, LLP (known by the acronym CLA) is one of the highly recommended firms that provides this service. It is my understanding currently, approximately eighteen municipalities in Middlesex County alone are using them (including Harvard, Littleton, and Shirley). The total cost (maximum exposure) for the agreement would be up to \$15,000 which can be charged to the Town’s ARPA Funds (which would be the recommendation in terms of funding for the consultant). Finally, CLA is on the Commonwealth of Massachusetts preferred consultant list which would address procurement.

R. Pontbriand further stated that the scope of the professional services would be to assist the Town in determination of allowable expenses under ARPA, including internal or external applications; assist the Town in developing internal controls and procedures for documenting use of funds; assist the Town with tracking and reporting of ARPA funds to the U.S. Treasury, including char of account set up; and other ARPA related finance support, as requested.

M. Smith asked if there are enough hours in the proposal to do this work?

R. Pontbriand stated that there are. In the event that additional hours would be needed, the agreement could be amended to reflect those additional hours and costs as needed.

S. Houde thanked R. Pontbriand for putting this proposal together and vetting it. This is the direction the Town should take, and this is worth it.

P. Diamond concurred with S. Houde.

Motion: A motion was made by P. Diamond and seconded by M. Smith to recommend that the Select Board vote to authorize the ARPA Funds Consultant for CLA not to exceed \$15,000. **Motion passed (7-0)** by Roll Call Vote: S. Houde, Y; P. Diamond, Y; M. Smith, Y; L. Gabree, Y; B. Tierney, Y; C. Antonellis, Y; R. Pontbriand, Y.

R. Pontbriand advised that he will be brining this matter and recommendation to the Select Board for their consideration at either their March 1 or March 15 meeting.

New Business:

L. Gabree advised that the Town needs to start thinking about developing a plan for middle management for the Finance Department so that there is a succession plan in place for the Finance Department just as there is for the Public Safety Departments. Since I officially retired and having been involved with the search for my successor, we have seen first-hand that there is a real shortage of qualified municipal finance professionals. It is great that the Town was able to hire Fred Aponte and we are fortunate to have him. But we need to plan for the future of the Finance Department by having some mid-level positions to not only do the work but to plan for the future.

S. Houde asked how would you propose structuring this?

L. Gabree stated that is a good question and will need mor thought and research. But we should start sooner rather than later.

R. Pontbriand agreed with L. Gabree and stated that this should be added to the New Business of the Bi-Board and as a future, ongoing discussion with the Select Board and Finance Committee.

Scheduling of Next Meeting:

The Bi-Board scheduled its next meeting for Tuesday, March 8, 2022, at 2pm on Zoom.

Adjournment:

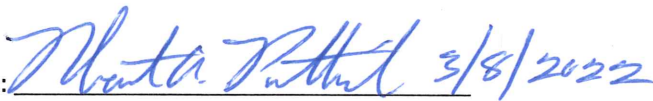
Motion: A motion was made by C. Antonellis and seconded by P. Diamond to adjourn the meeting.

Motion passed (7-0) by Roll Call Vote: S. Houde, Y; P. Diamond, Y; M. Smith, Y; L. Gabree, Y; B. Tierney, Y; C. Antonellis, Y; R. Pontbriand, Y.

The meeting adjourned at 2:45pm.

Minutes recorded and submitted by R. Pontbriand, Town Manager.

Minutes reviewed and approved by the Executive Bi-Board on March 8, 2022.

Signed:  3/8/2022
Robert A. Pontbriand, Town Manager