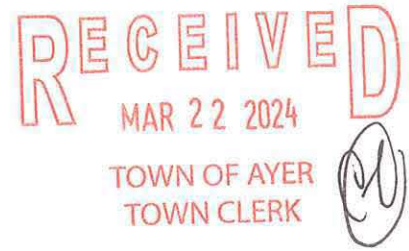


Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes from February 15, 2024



Members Present:

Chair- Kurt Fraczkowski

Vice Chair- Andrew Sealey

Clerk- Eric Sechman

Member- Jin Hong

Member- Bob France

Also in attendance:

NVTHS Superintendent- Dr. Denise Pigeon

NVTHS School Committee – Chris Prehl

NVTHS Business Mgr.- Michelle Shepard

NVTHS Asst. Business Mgr.- Michelle Beauvais

The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm.

Motion: Kurt Fraczkowski made a motion to move the presentation by the NVTHS representatives of the proposed 2025 budget ahead of the presentation by the Stormwater Utility advisory group. Andrew Sealey seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Kurt asked if there were any comments or corrections that needed to be made to the meeting minutes from February 1, 2024. There were none.

Motion: Andrew Sealey made a motion to approved the meeting minutes. Bob France seconded. Unanimous approval.

Kurt called Dr. Pigeon to present the proposed budget with NVTSH school committee member Chris Phehl.

Presentation is attached to the end of these minutes and can be found online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8VVeWSp_Oww.

Applications and enrollment have both been increasing over the past few years. Enrollment is now high enough that Dr. Pigeon believes that next year there will be no school choice Freshman enrolled. Chris said this follows a larger trend seen with other vocational schools.

Question from Andrew Seeley: Is there an upper limit of students you would be able to have? Answer from Dr. Pigeon- 850 is likely the max that the school can currently support.

The school has seen the construction program growing. They used to have 2 construction teachers and now have three.

Question from Eric- How does the school deal with changing enrollment in different programs. Answer from Dr. Pigeon- They flex where need be.

Dr. Pigeon discussed the CTI program. It is funded by the state and is an evening program for adults without training or looking for a change in direction. It is taught mostly by the staff at the school. IT can be intense and a lot of extra work for the teachers, so the school is always looking for additional teachers.

Last year Ayer had its highest enrollment- 69. This year the enrollment has dropped slightly to 63. This is important because it has a direct impact on the town's assessment. The more students enrolled, the higher the assessment to the town.

NVTSH enrollment has a higher percentage of students that are special needs, English learners, and students that come from low income families. In fact over 50% of the students are high needs. This affects the schools budget proposal.

The main budget drivers for FY25 are-

- The high percentage of high needs student and special transportation costs.

- Costs of program instructional materials and tools.

- Cost of building maintenance.

The school is proposing to not fund their OPEB for FY25 given the difficult financial situation that many towns are in. Dr. Pigeon does not anticipate that this would cause higher levels of OPEB funding in the future. They are actually hoping to realize from savings in health insurance costs that could be redirected to OPEB funding.

Dr. Pigeon then described the various school maintenance and remodeling that is in process, including moving the cosmetology section.

Question from Andrew Seeley- How do you get people to practice on for the cosmetology students. Answer from both Dr. Pigeon and Chris Prehl- it is open to the public The public can come in for haircuts, as well as have their cars worked on by the automotive students.

Dr. Pigeon anticipates the school will need \$20M in capital repair and renovations over the next 10 years. The biggest component of that is the HVAC system. It is already beyond its useful life, as well as the fire suppression system.

Over the past 8 years NVTHS has received over \$8M in competitive grants that have helped to offset the new equipment and capital needs of the school.

The proposed Ayer assessment for FY25 will decrease by ~\$60K, This is due to the decrease in Ayer students attending.

Bob France asked for a breakdown of how the assessment is calculated.

Question from Jin- Asked for Dr. Pigeon's opinion on the drug and alcohol situation at the school. Dr. Pigeon said that she encourages anyone to come visit the school and see the students in action. Chris Prehl echoed the sentiment. Dr. Pigeon also stated that NVTHS has a lower chronic absenteeism problem than the state average.

Q from Andrew Seeley- How much does a school choice student pay to attend NVTHS? Answer- the state will calculate the amount. The base amount is \$5000 and that amount can increase if the student requires additional services.

Kurt opened the meeting to public comment-

Pauline Conley- Thanked the NVTHS to helping to build the 2 Habitat for Humanity homes on town.

There were no other public comments.

Next item- Dan Van Schalwyk, the Director of the DPW then made a presentation on the Stormwater Utility advisory work group.

Stormwater is rain. On undeveloped land, it will be taken into the ground. On developed land, it often becomes runoff, and therefore needs to be managed.

The town has a MS4 permit. In order to maintain this permit, the town must follow certain guidelines.

Ayer has 24 miles of drain pipe, as well as culverts, etc.

Historically the town has maintained its stormwater system by allocating funds in the general budget. It has thus far taken a reactive approach.

In 2022 the town completed a stormwater asset management plan. This includes an evaluation of trouble spots in town. A plan was then developed based on criticality to repair and maintain the system.

Why now- Risks are growing. The system is old and climate change is causing more rapid deterioration. Failure to properly maintain the system will lead to increased risks of damage to both public and private property.

In the past the town has spent ~\$300K/yr on the stormwater system. The working group suggests \$750K-1M. This would allow the town to be proactive in approach.

The town has 2 options- continue funding through the general fund or set up a utility enterprise fund much like the water and sewer funds.

Advantages of a Stormwater Utility-

- Would provide longterm sustainable funding factoring on longterm costs.

- Rates/fees would be based on amount of impervious land, ie impact as opposed to everyone paying the same amount.

Many towns in the Commonwealth have Stormwater Utilities. This would also need to go through the Town Warrant in order to be enacted.

Properties could be eligible for credits if they met certain requirements. This could act as an incentive to businesses and other properties.

Question- What is an MS permit? Answer- it allows the Town to discharge water to the state public waterways and makes sure the Town is eligible for grants.

Next item on agenda- Budget process updates. The 2nd draft of the budget will be available February 16. February 20 Select Board Robert will highlight changes from the 1st draft and an update on the FY25 capital plan. March 19- rate review cmte will be making their recommendation for water and sewer rates. There will also be a preliminary Wednesday March 27- 2nd public budget forum.

Next item on agenda- Outside committee updates. Next Exec bi-board mtg will be on March 14th.

Upcoming meetings- 3/7- APD presentation, 3/21- DPW presentation, 3/27- public budget forum

Public comments- None.

Motion: made a motion to adjourn. seconded. Unanimous approval. The meeting was adjourned at 726pm.

Approved 3/21/2024
K.F.
KURT FRACZKOWSKI
FINANCE COMMITTEE
CHAIRMAN