

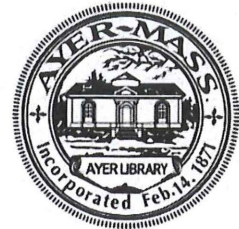
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FEB 17 2022

TOWN OF AYER
TOWN CLERK

3:03 pm



Town of Ayer
Joint Meeting of the Ayer Select Board and
Ayer Finance Committee
Ayer Town Hall – 1st Floor Meeting Room
Ayer, MA 01432



Broadcast and Recorded by APAC

Tuesday January 26, 2022
Open Session Meeting Minutes

SB Remotely Present: Shaun C. Copeland, Chair; Scott A. Houde, Vice-Chair; Jannice L. Livingston, Clerk

Fin Com Remotely Present: Patrick Diamond, Chair; Mark Smith, Vice-Chair; Lou Conrad

Also Remotely Present: Robert A. Pontbriand, Town Manager
Carly M. Antonellis, Assistant Town Manager

SB Call to Order: S. Copeland called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. 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 meetings 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 and Channel 8. S. Copeland stated that all votes will be taken by Roll Call.

Fin Com Call to Order: P. Diamond called the Finance Committee to order at 6:01 PM.

First FY '23 Budget Public Presentation: R. Pontbriand thanked both boards for their attendance and noted that all department heads were in attendance. He will be using two documents this evening, the FY '23 DRAFT #1 budget (posted on website) and a Power Point Presentation that will be posted on the website following this presentation. R. Pontbriand reviewed the annual budget process. He presented several of the Town of Ayer's budget successes, such as the 2021 Free Cash Balance at \$2,528,927; the 2021 Stabilization Fund Balance at \$2,684,322; the Capital Stabilization Fund Balance at \$2,787,812 and the growth of the unused levy capacity from \$2,449 in FY '12 to \$3,491,202 in FY '23.

R. Pontbriand stated that DRAFT #1 does not include the school assessments, nor the costs of the union contracts, not the COLA for non-union staff. The total increase over last year at this point in the process is 4.22%. He noted that there are 4 new proposed positions in the budget: Town Social Worker, DPW Junior Engineer, Benefits Specialist/Administrative Support and Planning & Conservation Administration. There is also a requested increase for additional Code Enforcement hours and about \$100,000 in additional wages for the Fire Department, not covered by the SAFER grant. There will be a reduction in debt service by \$324,000 and due to the reorganization of the Benefits and Payroll office, there will be about \$26,000 in savings.

R. Pontbriand presented a Wage and Expense analysis, noting that wages and benefits make up about 75% of the omnibus budget. 81% percent of the Town's revenue comes from the tax levy and about 2.7% comes from state aid. R. Pontbriand urged residents to visit the Town's budget webpage at ayer.ma.us/budget.

J. Livingston stated that it was a beautiful presentation and noted that all contact information was listed on the Town's website. S. Houde asked about the consulting services increase in the Assessor's Department. Town Assessing Administrator Tom Hogan said that he will be retiring within the next year and the Town will then need to contract out for valuation services. S. Houde asked about the amount in the Reserve Fund being at \$300,000. R. Pontbriand stated that he and the Finance Manager made a recommendation, but the decision will ultimately rest with the Finance Committee.

S. Copeland asked about the \$96,000 in additional funding for the Fire Department not covered by the SAFER Grant. Chief Johnston stated that shift coverage for personnel taking vacation, personal time, is not covered by the Grant resulting in the needed increase.

L. Conrad asked what the staff turnover has been in the past year and if we were retaining the staff we want to retain. R. Pontbriand stated that the Town has a very good record of retaining personnel, but that we are in a unique position with several key department heads retiring. R. Pontbriand also noted the difficult job market whereby the Town has to go out for advertising 2-3 times per job posting, which was not the case in the past.

Pauline Conley, 40 Cambridge Street asked P. Diamond when the Finance Committee would be meeting with departments to review their budgets. P. Diamond stated that he already went through that process. P. Conley asked if these meetings had been done in public session. P. Diamond stated that all Finance Committee meetings are public, open meetings. P. Conley asked about the difficult job market and finding replacements for the expected retirees and how many of those retiring would be coming back as consultants. R. Pontbriand stated Mr. Wetzel has stayed on in the DPW until the end of April to do special projects. He stated that he has not received all formal retirement requests but that there may be opportunity to keep people on in a parttime basis, which will be looked at for each position. P. Conley asked if there would be an update by Town Meeting on whether the Town has hired replacements or fund for consultants. R. Pontbriand stated for the known positions, whether it was replacement positions or consulting arrangements, he would update and budget accordingly. P. Conley then asked the SB to add another budget presentation since the next one scheduled is the day prior to the warrant closing. She then asked what the Executive Bi-Board was and who was on it. R. Pontbriand stated that the Bi-Board was an advisory group who looks at the budget and financial manners. The Bi-Board is subject to the Open Meeting Law and Public Records Law. The following individuals are on the Committee: The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Finance Committee, a Select Board member, Town Manager, Finance Manager, Treasurer/Tax Collector and Assistant Town Manager.

Fred Meshna, 21 Prospect Street asked if the new playground was included in the budget this year. R. Pontbriand stated that Capital Planning Committee recommended putting forth up to \$320,000 for the project. The remaining funding, \$300,000, is pending before the Community Preservation Committee.

R. Pontbriand asked Chief Johnston to explain why the Department pursued the SAFER grant. T. Johnston stated that the need for additional firefighters has been an ongoing discussion for several years. There were several significant fires, growth of the town and an increase in the number of calls. He noted that the shift personnel have not changed since 1998. The SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) Grant, through FEMA, will pay for the costs of four new firefighters for three years. He noted that this would be in accordance NFPA 1720 and 1710 standards, which promotes the most efficient and safest response. Chief Johnston stated that maintaining a Call Fire Department has been challenging over the past several years. L. Conrad stated he was concerned about when the grant ends in three years, who would pay the cost. R. Pontbriand stated that in year 4, the Town owns those positions. He is proposing earmarking funding over the next three years to help offset the costs in year 4.

Fin Com Adjournment: A motion was made by M. Smith and seconded by L. Conrad to adjourn at 7:01 PM. **By Roll Call Vote:** P. Diamond, aye; M. Smith, aye; L. Conrad, aye. **Motion passed 3-0.**

SB Adjournment: A motion was made by J. Livingston and seconded by S. Houde to adjourn at 7:02 PM. **By Roll Call Vote:** S. Copeland, aye; J. Livingston, aye; S. Houde, aye. **Motion passed 3-0.**

Minutes Recorded and Submitted by Carly M. Antonellis, Assistant Town Manager

Date Minutes Approved by SB: 2/15/2022

Signature Indicating Approval: James Lee Rivington