



APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, March 12, 2020
Selectmen's Meeting Room
7:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: George Brenckle
Rick Nieber
Tony Poteete
Janice Hight

MEMBERS ABSENT: Elaine Kelly, Chair.
Bob D'Amico

ALSO PRESENT: John Coderre, Town Administrator
Ernie Houle, Assabet School Superintendent
Kris Luoto, Director of Business Operations
Virginia Simms George, Assabet Regional School Committee
William Lyver, Police Chief
David Parenti, Fire Chief

APPROVAL OF MARCH 7, 2020 MEETING MINUTES

The Committee agreed to postpone the acceptance of the March 7, 2020 until their next meeting.

ASSABET VALLEY TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL FY2021 BUDGET

Superintendent Ernie Houle, Director of Business Operations Kris Luoto and Assabet Regional School Committee Chair Virginia Simms George reviewed the FY2021 Assabet budget.

Superintendent Houle noted that Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School is a vocational school composed of the member communities of Berlin, Hudson, Marlborough, Maynard, Northborough, Southborough and Westborough. Northborough's assessment is based upon the number of students from Town attending the school. The total FY2021 budget is \$22,872,000, which is an increase of \$912,000 or 4.15%. The total FY2021 capital budget for the fifth debt service payment is \$1,977,875, a decrease of \$55,000 from FY2020.

Superintendent Houle noted that the level-service budget allows for a spending plan for the same level of service as in FY2020, retains current staffing levels and meets all contractual obligations. The Capital Equipment budget is level funded for FY2021. There is a 3% increase in the Supply budgets for the first time in 5 years. With increased enrollment, shop supplies can be increased with savings from Academic Departments.

Superintendent Houle indicated that employee health insurance has moved from Blue Cross/Blue Shield to Fallon. Contribution rates for new hires is 70%/30% District/Employee. Existing employees moved from 80%/20% to 75%/25% contribution in the last collective bargaining agreement.

Superintendent Houle reviewed the enrollment changes, indicating that as of October 1, 2019, 52 Northborough students attend Assabet Valley High School, which represents 6.14% of the FY2021 overall Assabet budget, or an operating assessment of \$865,186. This is an enrollment increase of 7 from the 45 Northborough students that attended Assabet Valley last year. Northborough's FY2021 share of the debt assessment from the completed building renovation project is \$137,660, which will continue to decline in subsequent years. The net effect of Northborough's combined operating assessment and new debt service is \$1,002,846, which is an increase of \$166,536, or 19.91%.

Mr. Coderre reviewed the student projects in Northborough, noting that Assabet students will be assisting with the water/sewer garage project following the FY2021 CIP request to seek funds for the planning and design of renovations and expansion to the Water & Sewer Garage. He added that the existing garage was originally constructed in 1964 to house only the Water Department. The Town installed sewers in the 1970's, and this expansion of the departmental operations required additional staff and equipment that was not contemplated when the original garage was built. The current facility is undersized for the number of vehicles and equipment it houses. It requires security improvements and HVAC and electrical upgrades to allow the Town to maximize the benefits of new technologies, including electronic alarms and monitoring systems. Currently several pieces of equipment are stored outside with some utilizing on-board water, thus requiring it to be drained and winterized after each use, and others housing sophisticated global positioning and communication gear.

Following a review of the programs and accomplishments of Northborough students attending Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School, the Committee thanked Superintendent Houle for his presentation.

POLICE DEPARTMENT FY2021 BUDGET REVIEW

Police Chief William Lyver indicated that overall, the FY2021 Police Department Budget reflects an increase of \$150,663 or 5.27%. The majority (\$140,543) of the increase is attributed to the recently settled collective bargaining contract. Although cost-of-living increases are budgeted at 2%, there are several newer officers who are also eligible for 5% step increases. In addition, modifications to the educational incentive language resulted in three officers with previously non-qualifying college degrees to take appropriate classes to meet the educational requirements for an additional 20% pay increase. Following the elimination of the State's Police Officer Education Incentive program (formerly the "Quinn Bill") in FY2010, Northborough decided to only hire police officers with college degrees. The most recent contract provides a path for the last remaining officers to take appropriate classes to obtain the educational incentive, so that all officers with qualifying coursework receive comparable pay.

Chief Lyver indicated that the department is seeking to replace police vehicles on the following schedule: 2 patrol vehicles in FY2021; 2 patrol vehicles and 1 administrative vehicle in FY2022; 2 patrol vehicles in FY2023; 1 detective vehicle, 1 administrative vehicle and 1 patrol vehicle in FY2024; 2 patrol vehicles in FY2025; and 2 patrol vehicles and 1 detective vehicle in FY2026. Patrol vehicles are typically used for four years/100,000 miles, while detective and administrative vehicles have about a six to eight year/100,000 expected useful life. Included in the funding request is the cost of outfitting the vehicles with equipment, including radar, emergency warning lights, prisoner transport cages and radio consoles. Whenever possible, emergency equipment is moved from the old vehicles to the new ones.

FIRE DEPARTMENT FY2021 BUDGET REVIEW

Fire Chief David Parenti indicated that the FY2021 Fire Department Budget reflects an increase of \$96,333 or 4.63% in the General Fund appropriation. The departmental budget as presented includes 2% cost-of-living wage increases for Union and Non-Union personnel.

Chief Parenti reported that in addition to the General Fund appropriation of \$2,175,829 (which includes a transfer in of \$342,829 from the Fire Department Revolving Fund under Article 4 of the Town Meeting Warrant) the departmental budget also includes \$571,244 in planned expenses that are charged directly to the Fire Department Revolving Fund. The Fire Department Revolving Fund is supported primarily by fees for ambulance services. The direct Revolving Fund charges include ambulance billing services, overtime wages, licensing fees, related maintenance and operational expenses of the ambulances and related equipment. The account also pays for the debt service associated with the purchase of ambulances. The total FY2021 budget that supports the Fire/EMS services is \$2,747,073 (\$2,175,829 plus the Fire Department Revolving Fund direct charges of \$571,244).

Chief Parenti reported that the Northborough Fire Department has conducted a review of all municipal fees for ambulance service. The last time ambulance fees were increased was in 2009. He indicated that the Fire Department currently charges a base fee with additional charges for any specialized skills that are performed. Many communities use a bundle billing method in which all specialized skills are included in the base rates. This is the preferred method advocated by Medicare and the Town's current billing agent.

Chief Parenti reviewed the past practice of the ambulance billing, the levels of ambulance billing, a review of the billing rate survey, the last five years of billing data, and current industry standards. He reported that at their January 27, 2020 meeting, the Board of Selectmen approved the Fire Department Ambulance Fee Collection Policy, which will:

- Allow the waiving of balance billing for unpaid fees for Northborough residents.
- Allow the Fire Department to contract with a debt collection organization through the Town's EMS billing company to help collect unpaid fees from non-residents.
- Include an EMS billing write-off policy.

The Board of Selectmen also approved the proposed ambulance fees, as follows:

Level	CMS Code	Rate
BLS Emergency Base Rate	A0429	\$1,398
ALS No- Emergency Base Rate	A0426	\$1,048
ALS - 1 Emergency Base Rate	A0427	\$1,660
ALS - 2 Emergency Base Rate	A0433	\$2,402
Mileage	A0425	\$ 35
Paramedic Intercept		\$1,221

Chief Parenti indicated that these steps will increase the level of cost recovery so that the Town can continue to maintain and provide a high level of service, while pushing some of the burden back onto the insurance carriers.

Lastly, Chief Parenti discussed the new sanitizing machine directly related to the Town's COVID-19 response. Mr. Coderre indicated that depending on fiscal year-end budgets, the Fire Chief may be seeking a transfer from the Appropriations Committee Reserve Account if State or Federal funding is not made available for the additional COVID-19 expenses.

NEXT MEETING DATES

Meeting Date	Meeting Topics
3/19/2020	Senior Center & Library Presentations & other departments, if needed
3/23/2020	Joint Meeting with Board of Selectmen – Budget Hearing (Charter 6-5)
3/26/2020	Finance Office, Debt Budget; Health Insurance; Economic Development Update; Community Preservation Committee Project Requests; Review of ATM Warrant Articles and Vote on Committee Recommendations
4/27/2020	6:15 PM Pre-Town Meeting @ARHS
4/27/2020	7:00 PM Annual Town Meeting @ ARHS
June 2020	Wrap-Up; Year-end Transfers as needed

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Hight moved the Committee vote to adjourn; Mr. Brenckle seconded the motion; all members in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John W. Coderre
Town Administrator

Documents used during meeting:

1. March 12, 2020 Meeting Agenda
2. March 7, 2020 Meeting Minutes
3. Information packet – Assabet High School FY2021 Budget
4. Information packet – Police Department FY2021 Budget
5. Information packet – Fire Department FY2021 Budget