

Town of Sandisfield

Select Board
April 14, 2022

Minutes for Select Board Work Session held on Thursday, April 14, 2022 at 6:00PM at the Town Hall Annex, 66 Sandisfield Road, Sandisfield, MA

Members present: Steve Seddon, Alex Bowman, Jonathan Sylbert, Roger Brown, Jacki Bitso, Kathie Burrows

2. Review Assessors budget

In August of 2021, Principal Assessor, Jacki Bitso received a wage increase from about \$30/hour to \$35/hour. At the time, the Select Board agreed to conduct a salary survey for her position, and should it be determined she was still underpaid, they would make the appropriate adjustment to her salary. Jacki has now requested an additional \$5/hour increase for FY23. She has also requested the Assessor Clerk salary increase to \$19/hour. The Select Board reviews a salary survey that Jacki compiled.

Alex believes the salary will be difficult to increase at the Annual Town Meeting since Jacki just received a 10% mid-year raise. He refers back to a previous conversation with Jacki where she explained she works over her allotted 20 hours a week on projects outside her scope of work. Alex asked Jacki to refrain from working over 20 hours, and instead create a budget plan for these special projects. He also proposed the possibility of increasing her hours.

The Select Board questioned how comparable the towns included in the survey are to Sandisfield. Jacki explains that larger towns have MAA certified Assessors, which Jacki is, while smaller sized towns like Sandisfield typically have less hours, but contract out. Laura Lee Bertram, Treasurer in Tyringham notes Tyringham only has an Assessor Clerk working seven hours per week, but they also hire a contractor for an additional \$20,000. Jacki notes there are Assessors in the area who do not have their MAA, which is not a required certification, but gives the employee beneficial experience and knowledge.

To find a comparable situation, Steve suggests requesting an estimate from a contractor as to what they would charge to provide the assessing service to the town. This would determine the value of and how to gauge this type of work. It is possible the Principal Assessor could have less hours open to the public and more work could be delegated to the Clerk. Alex notes while he agrees this would be an appropriate approach, it may be too late in the budget process to acquire this estimate.

Should Jacki be given her requested wage increase, the total increase would be \$5,200. The Select Board will need to re-evaluate this request. Steve asks if Jacki would consider a compromise like \$38/hour rather than \$40, in order to give the Select Board time to request the estimate for comparison. Jacki notes she would consider this so long as the salary was revisited again next year.

1. Review and discuss FY23 budget

3. Review cherry sheets

4. Review tax recap sheets

5. Review levy limit

Jonathan reports the budget balance is off because funds raised and appropriated versus coming from Free Cash were not reflected, which alters the levy limit. While it is determined that the budget has not been compiled accurately in the past, the proper way to transition would be to build an operating budget with recurring expenses and compare it to last fiscal year's raised and appropriated. Free Cash that was used cannot be repeated on the FY23 warrant because it no longer exists.

One of the main goals in this budget is to control the actual levy because residents are complaining of high taxes and the town is only \$140,000 from the levy limit. There is concern about how this will look to the residents at the ATM. Jonathan notes that the few budgets that will differ significantly from FY22 to FY23 will be addressed at the informational meeting, before the ATM. Jonathan will explain the situation at the ATM, but does not feel comfortable continuing the incorrect process that was done in the past.

Jonathan reviews the operating budget and formatting changes he's made, which include breaking out expenses into their own budget lines and adjusting the order in which items appear.

It's proposed to budget the Town Clerk for 19 hours at \$30/hours, and the Assistant for 8 hours at \$25/hour. It's noted that once Mary Kronholm, current Assistant Town Clerk, steps down the hourly rate for this position will be reduced to \$20/hour.

There is a discussion about the dump sticker revolving fund because it does not currently operate appropriately, for the costs outway the revenues. Jonathan recommends closing this revolving account and allowing the dump sticker revenue to be deposited into general revenues.

Yanner Park will be taken out of the operating budget. They go over some stipends and board/committee requests. The Library Board of Trustees will receive a stipend of \$100 per member.

Articles on the warrant will include approving the process of transferring funds from Ambulance revolving into Ambulance Stabilization, and actually transferring the funds. Jonathan has received the wording from the state for these items.

There is a discussion about the possibility of borrowing for the roller and/or grader. Roger believes the town should not borrow, but instead pay for the machinery out of Free Cash. Jonathan recommends establishing a pattern of borrowing and starting now while the interest rates are favorable.

A Capital Improvement Plan needs to be established so that funds can be budgeted towards creating updated buildings and spaces for residents and employees.

Jonathan notes that there has been overspending in budgets, including Operations, Maintenance and Repair which will need to be signed by both the Select Board and Finance Committee. He recommends Roger begin to schedule a weekly Finance Committee meeting to sign Year-End Transfers, for they will be coming in regularly beginning in May.

The warrant should be signed on May 2, and an Informational Meeting for public questions and comments is scheduled for May 5.

Meeting adjourned at 10:06PM.

Steve Seddon

Alex Bowman