

TOWN OF FALMOUTH
SELECT BOARD
Meeting Minutes
Open Session
MONDAY, JANUARY 3, 2022
SELECT BOARD MEETING ROOM
TOWN HALL
59 TOWN HALL SQUARE, FALMOUTH, MA 02540

Present: Doug Brown, Chair; Nancy Taylor, Co-Chair; Megan English Braga; Sam Patterson; Onjalé Scott Price.

Staff Present: Julian Suso, Town Manager; Peter Johnson-Staub, Assistant Town Manager; Jennifer Mullen, Finance Director; Peter McConarty, DPW Director; Patricia Favulli, Director of Assessing.

1. Call to Order by Chair Brown at 7pm.
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Recognition

Chair Brown noted Sophia Urban, daughter of former Select Board member Ahmad Mustafa, and her husband Peter works for the Town. Sofia passed away and will be missed.

4. Announcements-none.

5. Public Comment

Maureen Harlow-Hawkes noted the West Falmouth Fire Station work is being done to open it and that it, along with many Town buildings are plagued by the lack of maintenance. She also noted a newly hired Falmouth fire fighter recently left Town service.

Suso stated the West Falmouth Station closed due to failure of the hot water heater in the basement, it was temporary, unanticipated, and not due to lack of maintenance.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

1. Administrative Orders
 - a. Vote authorization for the Town Manager to execute the license extension with the Coast Guard for Nobska Light

Chair Brown motion approval. Second Patterson. Vote: Yes-5. No-0.

Patterson noted the Town had a 5-year lease with Coast Guard, they are renewing the lease, and the Coast Guard is in the process of turning the property over to the Town. This is an intermediate step, get into next 5-year lease and then hopefully the Town will own the property at some future time.

BUSINESS

1. Presentation of proposed fiscal year 2023 budget
Jennifer Mullen, Finance Director, presented the budget, which was forwarded to the Select Board prior to the holiday. Mullen made some adjustments to the budget and provided them to the Select Board during tonight's meeting.

Mullen made a PowerPoint presentation of the Budget. Fiscal year 2022 revenues are stronger than anticipated, new growth was certified at \$1.6 million there has been an influx of building permits over the last couple years, level funded aid, free cash increased in fiscal year 2021.

Stabilization funds were reviewed, funded every year. Equipment for the Sandwich Fire Station will be purchased using capital stabilization funds, so the Town will not need to borrow money to do so. SPED stabilization fund set up with the School Department years ago and a reserve pending student needs which can vary each year.

Property taxes are the largest revenue, about 76%. Increases are limited due to proposition Two and a half.

Estimated local receipts include motor vehicle excise tax and hotel/motel and meals taxes. 75% of meals tax is allocated to capital stabilization fund. Community impact fee of 3% on from short term rentals becomes effective 7/1/22. Increase in Hotel/motel/short term rental taxes from 5 to 6 percent. The Select Board vote before Town Meeting allocating all short term rental allocation to go to Falmouth Affordable Housing, Mullen will need clarification to incorporate into the basic financial policies; it is not as clear cut as what was voted. What was voted was all short term rental allocation, but she needs clarification because when the State legislature voted to tax short term rentals, we had no idea what money that would bring in. During a joint meeting with School Committee, it was mentioned that the Town would allocate half of it to the School Department once we knew how much was coming in. We have one good fiscal year of receipts, about \$1 million, so need clarification to rewrite the policy. There was no vote to take the 1% from 5 to 6 percent.

Chair Brown said that originally the possibly 3% and additional 1% would go to Affordable Housing, he understood the 11/15/21 vote of the Select Board was to use all the money for affordable housing; whatever from short term rental of houses to short term housing. Mullen stated she needs clarification of that so she knows how to write the policy, she understood the 1% was for affordable housing, needs to be clarified for the community, how it will be allocated and look back at how much money is coming in and how to estimate it, how to write it into the policy. She would like to have discussion about the schools because two years ago they agreed to share with the schools; when certain revenues increase, there is a formula that includes funding the schools. Taylor asked to move those two agenda items to another meeting and move forward with the budget tonight.

Property taxes 2.5 % levy capacity, estimated new growth \$800,000, the Town is maximizing debt drop off. Mullen looks at the last five years, not the last 2 years. She is confident that the next couple years new growth will be at least \$800,000, even though we may take more than that in.

Level funded health insurance, the increases are unknown at this time. The Town will be able to handle a 2-4% increase in the operating budget. School Dept budget increase 2.79% (1,435,271). Upper Cape VoTech 10% increase (337,845). The school has had a lot of federal grant money, they need policies and procedures in place to handle what has been going on with Covid and additional allocations will be needed.

Budget increases include three full time firefighter positions, 2 full time police offer positions, one full time health inspector, the solid waste contract, AFSCME reclassification, adjusted wage schedule for the DPW and Seasonal employees.

Suso thanked the department heads and staff members for attending tonight and for their enormous work re: analysis, proposals, and discussions.

Chair Brown asked about Beach Department salaries; the Beach Committee recommendations were significantly higher than what is budgeted, and he asked if this could this be revisited. Suso said much time was dedicated to developing that with Mullen and the Acting Beach Superintendent; one item reflected overlooked there are several additional steps in allocation for beach department salaries as compared to other communities on the cape. There is also a significant increase for all seasonal positions. Mullen said every year look at seasonal employees and adjust them, adjusted significantly in the last couple years. Look at affordability as well, this adjustment is increase of about \$125,000 overall. They look at flexibility of not hiring seasonal employees at step 1 if looking to be competitive. There are a couple positions that have been very difficult to hire for, they could look at hiring bonus because trying to sustain a high hourly rate for seasonal employees can affect ability to pay other employees. If only increase wage scale for seasonal employees by 20% what about the other employees; need creative ways to look at this with other positions as well. Chair Brown feels that hiring for under \$15 per hour could lead to difficulty in hiring. When adjusted to \$14.25 at step 1, other steps were adjusted all by the same percentage. Step 1 will not be used in all instances, it offers flexibility in hiring.

English Braga noted people will go to the beach without lifeguard; we do not lose money but lose a service when there is no lifeguard. Suso noted there were a few unstaffed beaches towards the end of the season, but the Town was able to keep beaches in good condition and have them staffed. Parking attendants have not been as difficult to fill, they considered a bonus system for lifeguards and encourage them to stay for the season. Increase of 5.6% to seasonal wage scale and bonuses, unions are getting 2%. Bonus incentive

paid to sign on and then to stay through mid-August after the Road Race. Mullen put the wage budget together, including salary and wages for the beach; the budget plans for a sunny day for 3 months, but you know the beaches will not be open every day; rainy days give flexibility. There are turn backs of funds that are not used for wages. Beach Department previous seasonal employees return for another season, they can earn an increased step. Mullen said that if a lifeguard is paid \$30 an hour, it would create problems with everyone else. If wages are higher for seasonal employees than full time year round employees, there may be subsequent union issues.

English Braga noted that you assess who your candidates are, looking at who the talent is, and bring them in at a higher step. There is wiggle room in the budget to do so and department heads need to make these calls. There has been a shift in what young people do for work now, it is seen in other communities as well. Lifeguarding used to be a popular job, however, young people feel they need to do jobs for internships or to build a resume. This struggle will likely continue.

Chair Brown noted lifeguarding is not an easy job and he does not want it to be the lowest paid job in the town.

Brown asked about the \$25,000 in the budget for beach nourishment. Mullen explained that is included every year but is not used. The Beach Department can use it in conjunction with Marine and Environmental Services; working with MES and the DPW as well as moving sand around and nourishing. Chair Brown would like a new initiative of engineering what a beach nourishing project should be, such as at Chapoquoit Beach.

Chair Brown motion to increase \$25,000 to \$50,000 to get an engineer working on that. Mullen said there is beach survey money under Conservation, and it has been appropriated the last couple years. Jen Lincoln is not present but can provide an update. Chair Brown said that Conservation asked for full time position, 19 to 40 hours, Mullen explained the recommendation was not to fund at this time because they gave a full time position two years ago and have other departments and community development they need to publicize. The focus on this budget was public safety.

Taylor is interested in what the beach nourishment has been, Mullen said beach profiling was done in the last couple years and believes that would be the beginning of the process.

Suso said if the Select Board wants to prioritize that and take active initiative on the \$25,000, they can vote for that. Patterson would like to make it an agenda item and would like to hear a presentation on how to go through that process, where we are at so far, and learn the process. Chair Brown suggested a future joint meeting with the Select Board, Conservation Commission, and Beach Department.

Scott Price asked why school lunch is blank, Mullen said that it now goes directly to the school so the line item should be deleted.

Community Preservation fund decrease was questioned, Mullen said that is a debt: it is decreased from last year to this year-the land bank was paid off early. Mullen said the debt is paid through the general fund, that is why you see it transferred in.

Chair Brown asked about requests from Recreation Committee for handicap access to Trotting Park Fields, Suso said that is within the DPW and they have been reviewing. Mullen said it is funded by capital money.

Peter McConarty, DPW Director, said that they are in the process of working on ADA spaces for Trotting Park Fields this year, working on concept plans, and plan to do the work in house. Spaces by the field, the driveway will be an access for ADA vehicles to drive down there, they can sit on concrete pad or watch from their vehicle. Better to have the parking spaces at the field access. They will be doing it in the spring, Parks has funds, they have the equipment and talent to do the work in house. They will follow the contour on the road leading to the parking. They will try to get the lower part paved before summer. They have funds now to do what they are looking to do for ADA access.

Scott Price asked McConarty about solid waste and recycling job Mary Ryther is in, it is a part time position and Scott Price asked if full time is being considered. McConarty is looking into that, Mary has been doing things they have not been able to do, at this point part time is sufficient.

Scott Price asked about the differential line in the Salaries and Wages, Mullen said that is evening shift differential and subject to union contracting. Superintendent of Parks position is vacant and unfunded, the Finance Committee likes to see it remain in there. Since Mullen has been there, the Parks Department issue is gaining seasonal employees, caring for grounds, and they felt the resources would go to workers to do that work; they were not ready for another administrative position. It is something they may look to put in in the near future. English Braga noted that they do a great job, workload keeps getting bigger, maintenance plan needs to keep going and a part time administrator may assist. They have made progress in the last few years, fields are in good condition, they have not heard as many complaints they have heard in the past.

Scott Price asked about system wide purchase order system, is it a computer system. Mullen said there is a computer system in place to use the purchase order system, they want to unify it with all departments using the purchase order system, same policies and thresholds; making it unified.

Chair Brown asked if it is possible to have a cleaning company clean the bathhouses at the beaches that have them. Clayton said there are 3 bathhouses at two beach locations: one at Surf Drive and 2 at Old Silver. Surf Drive has Fairwinds employees in that roll. Old Silver has larger use and earlier opening on weekends; parking attendants stationed at Old Silver report an hour early to do a bleach down of the bathhouses, applicants are asked during interviews if they are comfortable using cleaning products, consideration is taken into account when staffing at Old Silver Beach. Goodwill has stations, but they do not clean those bathrooms, though will stock them. There are people who are interested when asked during interview. It is not in parking attendant job description and supervisors clean alongside as well. Employees can only do it once per day because they are running parking lot. Chair Brown said it is not as clean as they would like, is there a level of service we are not hitting; is help needed? Clayton has not fielded that number of complaints about bathroom issues. They can fill supplies, but do not do bleach down during the day. Chair Brown noted it does not sound like a big problem. Clayton said that the Beach Department works with the Facilities Department and staff to make sure they have what they need to keep it cleaned. Cleaned in the morning, end of day every toilet unit gets flushed, and the building is locked in the night, no one touches it until it is cleaned in the morning.

Scott Price asked about Assessing: is it realistic for them to reach the goal to inspect 2100 parcels annually? Mullen said they added staff over last couple years, they do cyclical inspection every ten years. At times it is an unattainable goal, there is also a contract for revaluation. Patricia Favulli explained this is a Household Property Program mandated by the MA DOR to do cyclical inspection of personal property. Second property owners need to respond to a questionnaire every 6-10 years, the form is sent to all second homeowners, and they need to declare all personal property in their dwelling, goal for 2% of those reporting, then the Town reports the information to the State. It is extremely time consuming, 1 staff person works on this for several months. The Town receives an increase in money if the DOR notes stated values are actually accurate.

Scott Price asked in election section, part-time wages is \$70,000: how many people work part time for elections? Mullen said there are many for the nine precincts, it fluctuates depending on the elections in a given year.

Scott Price asked about the line item for dog food in the MES budget, now zero. Mullen noted the Friends of Falmouth Dogs work with MES at times. It may have been put in for supplies.

Scott Price noted bonuses that were approved for FFD and FPD, should bonuses for the Health Department employees be discussed? Mullen said that would not be put in the operating budget, the bonuses were from ARPA funds.

Chair Brown asked about the DPW renewable line item reduced to \$15,000. Mullen explained that is for the wind turbine, likely will zero it out next year.

Chair Brown asked how they find what the short term rental is in the budget book. Mullen said that is part of the hotel/motel and she needs to request it from the MA DOR.

Patterson asked about wording changes and additional goal to go into fiscal policy having to do with sustainability and management focus paying attention to that. He is concerned they are not putting time into planning for long term challenges, their risks mounting, and are not being addressed. Patterson asked the Select Board to look at some changes and agenda in the future. End of budget book, green section that says

Fiscal Policy with a list of goals; d. minimize fiscal risk. He would like to change that to manage financial risk. He would like to add f. sustain and improve the Town's environmental health, cultural health, and diversity. Be more forward thinking. Thinking about what we should be investing in for the sake of the Town.

Mullen noted this is a good discussion when adjusting fiscal policy when talking about short term rentals. If the Select Board feels strongly, they can make this a focus of the strategic planning session in June, so that when they go into budgeting process, they will know that is a top priority. Mullen said the budget put together is in line with what was discussed at the planning session. English Braga would like to look at other communities fiscal policies.

Taylor noted they need to define their goals, work on them, and then give the goals to the Town Manager. If the Select Board is not clear about their goals and articulating those goals, they will keep doing the same thing.

Mullen noted that a few years ago a consultant managed the Select Board's strategic planning session and was able to focus and draw out what the priorities are; having someone from the outside may be beneficial to this Select Board.

Patterson noted there have been complaints that we do not have the staff noting the Town is losing key positions including Town Counsel, Asst Town Counsel, and there are other position vacancies, he questions who is doing those planning functions. Taylor noted there are hiring processes in place, hires have backed out, it is not a funding issue, it is a person issue. Suso noted searches are under way for those positions and they are aggressively moving into that direction. Taylor said when they start throwing blame around it feels unproductive. It is on the Select Board to ask the Town Manager what staffing he needs to make this happen. Patterson does not see where the planning is being done to address them. English Braga suggested that should be part of the Select Board's strategic plan.

Scott Price appreciated the departments performance evaluations of what they accomplished the year before.

2. Individual Select Board Members' Reports-none.
3. Town Manager's Report

Tonight, they are bringing the budget to the Select Board next week to transmit to the Finance Committee.

The Board of Health met tonight and recommended the Select Board put a mandatory mask order in place for Town Buildings and noted it needs to be on the Select Board agenda. It is a voluntary mask mandate, Town employees in public areas are wearing masks and the public is doing the same thing.

The Select Board discussed in person v. zoom meeting for the next business meeting; it is more for those coming out to use the Select Board service. English Braga noted there are ways to streamline their meetings for efficiency and public health, suggesting this be considered.

English Braga motion to adjourn at approximately 8:55pm. Second Patterson. Vote: Yes-5. No-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Chaves
Recording Secretary