

Approved

Pownal Budget Committee

Monday, March 20, 2023

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Gennifer Giuliano, Brian Stornelli, Donna Watson. Bo Chesney (attended via Zoom)

Town Representatives Present: Becky Taylor-Chase - Town Administrator, Andy O'Brien- Selectperson

Additional Participating Attendees – John Green, Ginny Giddinge

The meeting began at approximately 6:33pm.

1. **Minutes** – Following one amendment to the March 7th minutes, it was moved and seconded that the minutes be approved as amended. All voted in favor.
2. **Solid Waste budget update** – Chair Chesney provided an update from Heidi Richards, Chair of the Solid Waste committee that recycling tipping fees will increase effective July 1 to \$45 per ton, requiring a proposed budget increase of \$1637 resulting in revised tipping fee line item total of \$7367.40 and a revised waste management budget total of \$130,081.

Solid Waste: Ms. Watson moved that the committee recommend an amended appropriation of \$130,081 for Solid Waste expense. Ms. Giuliano seconded. The motion passed with all voting in favor.

3. **General Government budget update** – Ms. Taylor-Chase provided two updates before the committee vote. First, the addition of funds needed for mailers and required advertising for public hearings for the Future Facilities Committee. Second, moving the CEO position to a Level 1 role in support of Ginny Giddinge being appointed the new CEO. All congratulated Ginny!

Selectperson O'Brien also noted the Selectboard's intention to propose a town planner position for town approval. Mr. Green asked about the benefits of adding this position. Selectperson O'Brien explained that the town planner will replace the need for, and cost associated with Northstar's services – with the objective and benefit of providing more timely results and a more customized approach to critical ordinance work while also serving as a point of integrated across key planning priorities and initiatives. If this position is approved at the town meeting, the Selectboard will be prepared to propose amendments from the floor to impacted budget lines.

General Government: Ms. Watson moved that the committee recommend an appropriation of \$299,834 for General Government expense. Mr. Stornelli seconded. The motion passed with all voting in favor.

4. **Public Safety updates** – Ms. Taylor-Chase provided an update that Chief Peters has learned that the emergency software currently used by the town will no longer be available, so he is investigating alternatives that will be compatible with Cumberland County's systems. The cost is expected be at least \$1,000 more. It was proposed by Mr. Stornelli that the committee amend the recommended

appropriation by \$2000 as an estimate that should safely cover the cost and can be amended as needed once the final software is selected.

Public Safety: Ms. Watson moved that the committee recommend an amended appropriation of \$162,092 for Public Safety expense. Mr. Stornelli seconded. The motion passed with all voting in favor.

5. **CIP Transfer Request** – Ms. Taylor-Chase provided an update that the Select Board has put a placeholder on the warrant for an article allowing the town to transfer some amount of funds from the Undesignated Fund Balance to the CIP reserve account. This was also done last year. The CIP committee is meeting on March 29th to look at the models and determine the amount needed. Chair Chesney noted that the Select Board will determine if the Undesignated Fund can be used as a funding source and that the Budget Committee does not need to make a recommendation. Mr. Stornelli again suggested that there appears to be more flexibility in the guidelines for how the Undesignated Fund can be used than was previously interpreted, and it would be worthwhile to re-review and reconsider what were previously interpreted as restrictions.
6. **Carry-Forward** – Mr. Green asked to comment. He expressed disappointment that the recommendations offered 18 months earlier for how to research and determine the best process may not have been pursued. He noted that the MMA should be able to provide recommendations. Ms. Taylor-Chase provided an update that she had an initial discussion with MMA, but their response was very vague, so she also spoke with the town attorney who better understands the way the town operates. Ms. Watson asked about the actual frequency, scale of carry-forward opportunities, and noted that the time and effort spent defining the process should not exceed the complexity of the problem being solved. For the benefit of all, Mr. Green shared a summary of past deliberations and actions taken. Chair Chesney offered to do a synopsis of the issue and the questions raised and provide a recommended approach for the committee to review and comment on before bringing a final recommendation to the Select Board.

The discussion then turned to how best to document carry-forward amounts in the budget. Chair Chesney recommended adding a comment cell on the budget spreadsheet. Ms. Giuliano agreed that would be a clear and simple solution that would also help the committee and others look back over time. Mr. Stornelli suggest that in addition, there could be a separate carry-forward schedule created that would provide more detail and would make it easy to see carry forward decisions made over time. All agreed that would be very helpful. Ms. Giuliano asked Ms. Taylor-Chase if she felt these recommendations would cover the nuances of the variety of situations where carry-forward may be needed. Ms. Taylor-Chase said she believed it would work well. Mr. Stornelli further suggested that a similar separate schedule approach would be helpful for tracking how the Undesignated Fund was used over time. All agreed.

7. **Cash Management Project** – It was reported that the Select Board is in favor of receiving a recommendation on a proactive cash management strategy with the objective of maximizing returns for the benefit of the town. The next steps will be (1) define the parameters, best allowable approaches, and thresholds, (2) research what is available today, and (3) define a process that will be followed to ensure all decisions are presented to and approved by the Select Board so that there is full transparency. Chair Chesney offered to work with Ms. Taylor-Chase on next steps, and Mr. Stornelli also offered to be part of that work. Ms. Taylor-Chase will also be working with the Select Board on any needed warrant articles.

On the benefit of using a proactive cash management strategy for accounts within the General Operating account, Selectperson O'Brien again suggested that the incremental interest earned could be specifically designated to be used to offset taxation. On the benefit of using a proactive cash management strategy with funds in the CIP account, Ms. Watson and Mr. Stornelli noted the potentially significant impact on closing the large funding gap projected by the CIP committee and reducing the need for appropriations from the Undesignated Fund. Mr. Stornelli noted that given recent events in the banking industry this is an opportunity to diversify the banks used by the town and limit exposure. Ms. Giuliano summed up the comments by noting the significant positive impact that this one project could have on the town for years to come.

8. **Annual Report** – Chair Chesney will draft the committee's comments to be included in the Annual Report for all the review.
9. **New Business** – there was none.
10. **Next Meeting** – it was agreed that the April 4th meeting is not needed.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:03 pm.

Respectfully submitted by: Donna Watson