

Finance Committee Minutes
DRAFT

Date: 6 February 2024

Start Time: 5:00 PM

Location:

Ashland Town Hall, Select Board Room
101 Main Street, Ashland, Massachusetts

Members Present

X	Scott Warnetski, Chair		Ryan Turncliff
X	Jonathan Moore, Vice Chair	X	Ed Hart
X	Jenn Cooney, Acting Clerk		Ashwini Chitnavis
	Chantal Kokaram		

Guests Present

X	Michael Herbert, Town Manager	X	Keith Robie, Fire Chief
X	Brittany Iacaponi, Town Finance Director	X	Doug Small, DPW Director
		X	Michael Vinciulla, Deputy Police Chief

Minutes:**1. Call to order**

- The Chair called the meeting of the Finance Committee (the “Committee”) to order at 5:01 PM.
- It was noted that this meeting is the Committee’s annual televised “live” Committee meeting on WACA.
- The Chair noted that he had received notice of two resignations (Ryan Turncliff and Ashwini Chitnavis) resulting in two vacancies on the Committee. Ms. Cooney agreed to take the minutes.

2. Approve minutes from November 7, 2023 meeting

- Motion: Scott Warnetski
- Second: Jonathan Moore
- Vote: 4-0

3. Public comment – None**4. FY 25 budget presentations:**

- **Overall budget**
 - Michael Herbert presented the Town Manager’s Preliminary Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2025 (attached) He noted that the preliminary

budget as presented includes all requests but is not balanced.

- After summarizing existing and ongoing capital initiatives, Mr. Herbert walked through staffing requests by department and the approach to salaries. He then presented the non-personnel requests, including increased utilization of the town's HR system, Waushakum pond treatment and increased costs of supplies and services.
- Next, Mr. Herbert explained FY25 challenges related to fixed costs, primarily utility expenses, higher retirement assessment, health insurance and other insurance (reevaluation and new buildings).
- The Committee and Mr. Herbert then discussed the decrease in New Growth, which was expected. They also discussed the decrease in Excluded Debt reflecting the \$750,000 that used to come from the budget. A discussion of state aid expectations followed.
- The Committee then asked questions and discussed options for closing the budget gap. In addition, there was discussion about one-time revenues, OPEB and benefits.
- Lastly, Mr. Herbert provided an overview of new growth trends and expenditures per capita as a measure of value compared to other Metrowest towns.

- **Police Department**

- Deputy Chief Mike Vinciulla presented the Ashland Police Department FY25 Budget (attached), beginning with an overview of the department's organization chart that showed current vacant positions and the requested new patrol positions postponed last year.
- Mr. Vinciulla discussed concerns around officer mental health and stress of overtime. He highlighted that specialty positions currently are part-time as these officers are covering patrol shifts and noted inability to focus on citizen concerns such as traffic enforcement and safety education. He reminded the Committee that the department had exited civil services, which opens up new recruiting opportunities. He stated that they recently partnered with GetBadged.
- In addition to officer positions, Mr. Vinciulla also discussed the need for a Dispatch Supervisor. He explained that the Sargeant currently oversees these operations, but that public safety communications is a specialized position requiring specific training and knowledge of systems. He noted that there was currently a grant that could be used to assist with costs of this position.
- In addition to providing an overview of line item changes, Mr. Vinciulla provided additional detail about increased software costs and the need to purchase accreditation management software.
- The Committee then asked Mr. Vinciulla further questions about the organizational chart and recruiting for vacant positions.

- **Fire Department**

- Chief Robie presented the Ashland Fire Department FY25 Budget (attached). He began with an overview of current staffing and comparison of call volume year over year.
- Next, Mr. Robie discussed costs associated with Personnel Services. He presented the request for four additional firefighters, noting that the last increase was in 2020. In addition to increased calls, he provided data on the frequency of two or more calls coming in at the same time. He stated that they were relying on off-duty firefighters to come in to help.
- Line items related to Purchase of Services/Equipment were discussed next. Mr. Robie noted costs to replenish supplies were higher due to pricing and also the increase in disposable supplies.
- The Committee asked Mr. Robie questions about training. They also discussed ambulance revenue, including medicare-negotiated payments (approximately 40% of calls) and fees now paid from Holliston for support.
- The presentation ended with recognition of Ed Hart for building the staircase for kids to use Sparky's fire pole.

- **Department of Public Works**

- Doug Small presented the Department of Public Works Budget Presentation (attached). Mr. Small provided an overview of departments and general fund account budgets under the DPW general fund. He summarized that DPW was seeking a 16% increase, with the primary increase in Cemetery, Parks and Trees (CPT) that included a request for a new Parks and Recreation manager position.
- Other proposed increases were also explained, including salaries subject to union contracts, tree work, training as part of the highway budget (noting the difficulties finding new employees that have CDL class B licenses), street lighting expenses and utilities (rates plus additional buildings).
- The Committee and Mr. Small discussed the responsibilities of the CPT crew. Mr. Small explained that he was continuing to look at options on how to manage the fields and other tasks, including options to contract services. He noted that the two DPW requested positions would help address these needs.
- The Committee asked additional questions about options for CPT and a possible Parks and Recreation department.

- **Next Steps**

- The Committee asked about next steps in the budget process and expressed interest in attending the departmental presentations. After a

reminder that the capital process now occurs in the Fall, the Committee discussed the advantages and disadvantages of this approach.

- The Committee inquired about possible other warrants, and Mr. Herbert noted likely articles from CPC, a land donation and a tree bylaw.

5. Other Business. None

6. Schedule Future Meetings

- The Committee agreed that the Chair would coordinate with Ms. Iacaponi.

7. Adjourn

- There being no further business:
 - Motion: Scott Warnetski
 - Seconded: Jonathan Moore
 - Vote 4-0
- Meeting adjourned at 6:43 PM.

List of Documents Presented at Meeting:

Preliminary Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2025
Ashland Police Department FY 25 Budget Request
Ashland Fire Department FY2025 Budget
Department of Public Works Budget Presentation