

Town of East Bridgewater Finance Committee

175 Central Street
East Bridgewater, MA 02333
Town Hall



Finance Committee Meeting Minutes Wednesday, January 17, 2024

Members present: Dan Picha, Karen Harhen, Lisa Allington, George Jouvin, Karin Gilman

Member(s) absent: Dave Walsh

Guest(s): Melanie Dean (Town Accountant), Timothy Harhen (Fire Chief), Kevin Reilley (Capital Needs Committee), Charlie Seelig, Town Administrator

1. Finance Committee Chair Dan Picha opened the meeting at 6:02 pm.
2. Motion by Lisa Allington, seconded by George Jouvin, to approve meeting minutes from December 15, 2023, approved 5-0.
3. Fire Chief Tim Harhen requested a reserve fund transfer of \$8,655.26 to fund retroactive holiday pay not included in the MOA earlier this fiscal year, as a new holiday was not included and should have been. Motion to approve by Karin Gilman, seconded by Lisa Allington, approved 4-0, 1 abstention (Karen Harhen).
4. The town has received letters of interest from two residents interested in joining the Finance Committee, and they will be invited to attend our next meeting.
5. Town Administrator Charlie Seelig gave an overview of the February 2024 Special Town Meeting articles (exact date is TBD):
 - a. Three-year lease at Leland Farms is expiring in February and town would like to set up an ongoing process to renew.
 - b. Fire Department is requesting the reallocation of \$58,023.00 from the 6/5/23 Annual Town Meeting Article 16, to Fire Department budget line to cover sick.
 - c. A request for new turf field was approved at 2023 Fall Town Meeting, and bids are expected soon. Charlie explained that there are options for how it can be financed, including borrowing, using money from the stabilization fund, or a hybrid solution, including a debt exclusion. There was discussion on whether we should move to a grass field, which may be cheaper but requires irrigation and other upkeep costs. Design work is complete, and work is expected to begin the day after graduation and last throughout the summer. Dan Picha asked if we can use any leftover ARPA funds. Melanie Dean (Town Accountant) confirmed that there may be some available funding. Dan Picha will plan on attending next Capital Needs meeting scheduled for Monday, January 22, 2024.
6. Charlie Seelig provided a high-level summary of the preliminary FY25 budget. Charlie said we are looking at the worst year since the great recession. It does not include another \$88,000 surcharge by the Plymouth County Retirement for a cost-of-living increase from 3% to 5%. Overall the town is

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looking at ~9% increase in health insurance rates from GIC. Patrol officers' union and library department contracts are being negotiated now. About half of the school department's funding comes from the town, the rest is from state/local aid and other sources. Dan Picha asked about possible sale of land, Charlie and Melanie said it is a possibility and is being reviewed now. Melanie explained the reduction in available money from "Free Cash" – which is 50% less than the year before – is due to a plan to reduce this line item over several years, as this money is not a recurring source. Schools will be looking at a new busing contract (March) and expecting a significant increase in transportation costs.

7. Dan Picha reminded everyone of the budget timeline for FY25 and asked members to please meet with department heads by end of January. All budgets should be level-funded and if there are increases, there should be reductions in other line items. We will need to review the town budget again after governor's budget is finalized.
8. Dan Picha gave an overview on the Central School Building Committee, which has met several times over the last few months. In December, the committee submitted enrollment projections; the next milestone is in February. Committee members toured the Central School on January 2, 2024 and are planning to set up public tours for residents to see the condition of the school.
9. George Jouvin asked if department heads have been informed of recent updates to the budget – Charlie will be informing them at this week's department meeting. Lisa Allington asked how to handle legitimate reasons for increases; Dan Picha reiterated that other areas will need to be reduced.
10. Motion to adjourn meeting was made at 6:42 pm by George Jouvin, seconded by Lisa Allington, all in favor, 5-0.

Respectfully submitted, as approved at 02/13/24 Finance Committee meeting, by Karen Harhen, Finance Committee Clerk.