



TOWN OF BLANDFORD
SELECT BOARD

Blandford Town Hall
1 Russell Stage Road Suite 1
Blandford, MA 01008

FINANCE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
February 15, 2023
9:30 am

In attendance: **J. Lombardo**, Blandford Finance; **D. Brodie**, Blandford Finance; **K. Green**, Blandford Finance; **C. Dunne**, Blandford Town Administrator

1. EXAMINATION OF RECORDS OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

None

2. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION / PUBLIC COMMENT

None

3. REPORTS

a. *Town Administrator*

i. Status of Financial Restructuring

Christopher Dunne, Town Administrator, spoke to the Town's financial restructuring plan that was initiated in 2018. The Town outsourced most tax collection, treasury (Mass MuniFin), accounting (Kinsherb) and property assessment (Regional Resource Group) functions. This approach resolved many of the issues that were present with the Town's financial practices but at an elevated cost as the Town has to provide for the profit margin of these consultants. Now that much of the "clean-up" is complete, the Town is steadily transitioning back to a mix of in-house and consulting services that leans more heavily toward the former.

The Town is in the process of hiring a new Assistant Treasurer-Collector who will take on much of the work carried out by Mass MuniFin and who should be able to eventually take on the role of Treasurer-Collector, representing a significant savings for the Town. Kevin Green, Finance Committee member, asked if Sara Hunter, the current Treasurer-Collector is on board with this process given that she has some business to lose under this scenario. Dunne confirmed that Hunter has been an enthusiastic supporter of this effort, serving on the screening committee for the new position and working diligently to find the best candidate.

A new contract was initiated with Regional Resource Group (RRG) in September after they were the only respondents to an RFP for property tax assessment services. Under that contract, the Town has hired an in-house Administrative Assistant to the Board of Assessors and is slowly phasing out RRG's on-site presence with some associated savings both for the Town and the firm. Lastly, the Town has received an FY24 proposal from Kinsherb for accounting services which Eric Kinsherb, Town Accountant, will speak to further today. Other options for the Town include hiring an accountant, sharing services with other communities, or using a regional accounting service offered by a planning agency.

4. ACTION ITEMS

a. Review Fiscal Year 2024 Departmental Budget Requests

- i.** Treasurer-Collector: Hunter jointed the meeting via Zoom and spoke to employee benefits and debt service portions of the operating budget. Sara Hunter, Treasurer/Collector presented budget spreadsheets for her department explaining in detail each of the line items, some increased/some decreased. Hunter explained that the Group Health Insurance line item is substantial and while most eligible Blandford employees do not take the health insurance, she recommends budgeting as if they will. She will be reviewing the Hampden County Retirement Board's FY24 assessment given the substantial increase seen there and the Treasurer-Collector line items, she anticipated no major changes.
- ii.** Board of Assessors: Dr. David Hopson, Board of Assessors Chair joined to present his FY24 budget explaining the financial activities of his department in the past year and the many changes/improvements his department is working on. Hopson discussed the services of our outsourced company, Regional Resource Group, noting that Board structured the current contract to include the hiring of an in-house Administrative Assistant. This will change the mix of consultant/in-house work to about from 95% outsourced help to 75% outsourced help thereby changing the contracted services amounts without knowing exactly how much time the department will need to manage the change. He recommends an increase in the Administrative Assistant pay rate to \$18.00 an hour. In terms of expenses, the Board needs an additional computer so that both RRG and the in-house employee can access the programs they need simultaneously.
- iii.** Conservation Commission: Dick Gates, Chair of the Conservation Commission presented his draft budget to the Finance Committee. Gates is requested that a line item be added to his budget to get some administrative assistance for the department as the work with solar companies and Belle Fleur is complex and time-consuming. Much of the Commission's time is taken up enforcing the Wetlands Protection Act rather than making improvements to Town-owned conservation properties such as Herrick-Knittel. Dunne mentioned that the Town has applied for District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) funding from Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) to fund this so potentially an additional line item will not be necessary. Gates spoke to the other minor expenses that the Commission routinely incurs through the course of the year. Lombardo noted the importance of the work the Commission does for one of Blandford's greatest assets: our land and water resources.
- iv.** Accounting: Kinsharf spoke to his firm's FY24 proposal of \$36,000, roughly a \$6,000 increase over FY23. He mentioned that other options are available to the Town as well and spoke to the transition to a new municipal finance software that they Town may want to undergo soon. Lombardo recommended that given the transitions in the Treasurer-Collector and Assessors' offices, it may be wise to stay the course with Kinsharf for accounting services as this time.
- v.** Library: Nicole Daviau, Library Director, spoke to the Porter Memorial Library's FY24 budget request. She noted a slight increase in the library's requested expense account mostly due to the Central and Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing (CW MARS) membership fee returning to pre-COVID levels. Daviau detailed changes in

library staff compensation and hours with their archivist dropping to just four hours a week and requested increases in hours and rates for all other staff. Constraints that shape the library budget annually include the Materials Expenditure Requirement (MER) that compels 20% of the bottom line appropriation to go to purchase of materials and the Municipal Appropriation Requirement (MAR), that can result in a drop in state aid if not met. On the revenue side, Daviau explained how the State Aid Award works. Committee members asked about the proposed building project to make the library accessible and in-line with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Janet Lombardo, Finance Chair

Absent

Kathie Hudson, Finance Member

Deborah Brodie, Finance Member

Kevin Green, Finance Member