

**PRESENT:** Selectmen Joseph A. Sergi and Michael Green; John Moak, Town Administrator; Peggy Mazzola, Administrative Assistant; Finance Committee Members Chris DeSimone, Chris Johnson, Alan Leao, Robert Marti, Holly Seiferth, Melissa Tzanoudakis, and George Zacharakis; many department heads

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM. Mr. Sergi announced that Selectman Chairman Patrick McNabb was unable to attend the meeting, and congratulated him on the birth of his son Daniel.

Mr. Sergi explained that the NMRSD has released preliminary budget numbers, and what happens with NMRSD will impact the Town, and vice versa. The Town has had a \$2 million structural deficit the last two years, with a projected \$500,000 deficit for 2012. The Town will see increased costs for health insurance and retirement assessment, among other things. The Town and schools will be faced with decisions that will impact services.

Mr. Moak explained the department heads will talk about what they're trying to achieve, but there won't be time to delve into specific line items, and questions will need to be addressed at a later date. Mr. Sergi remarked that the departments were instructed to submit a 1% increase and 1% decrease budget. The public needs to help us achieve a balanced approach.

Mr. Sergi introduced Gene Ferrari, the Town's new Town Accountant.

**ACTION ITEMS:**

Item #1 – Reserve Fund Transfer Request – Veterans' Service Officer: Mr. Green read a reserve fund transfer request from the Veterans' Service Officer. Joe Mazzola explained that he started with \$10,000 in his budget, and a \$10,000 supplement was approved at the fall Special Town Meeting. He is currently paying out \$3,000 per month in benefits, and doubts that the veterans currently on the rolls will come off before the end of the fiscal year; he also needs a little cushion in case he has another veteran eligible for benefits. Mr. Sergi remarked that veterans' benefits are reimbursed by the State at 75%. Mr. Zacharakis asked if an additional \$10,000 will be enough to get through the fiscal year. Mr. Mazzola stated he doesn't have a crystal ball, so it's difficult to predict. Mr. Mazzola requested \$30,000 in veterans' benefits for FY 12 so he doesn't have to keep coming back for additional funds. One veteran has moved from Pepperell to Ashby, and another has been removed from the rolls, but he still has three veterans receiving benefits. Mr. Mazzola explained the state approves the benefits request and reimburses the Town 75% of benefits paid out. Those veterans over age 65 who are receiving medical benefits from the Town will likely stay on the rolls for the foreseeable future.

Mr. DeSimone suggested that the Finance Committee also vote on the reserve fund transfer, and asked if there has been an influx of Vietnam veterans or if he is still seeing Korean and World War II veterans. Mr. Mazzola stated it is mixed; more Vietnam veterans received federal funding due to exposure to Agent Orange.

On a motion by Mr. Green and seconded by Mr. Sergi, the Board of Selectmen unanimously voted to recommend a transfer from the reserve fund in the amount of \$10,000 to Veterans' benefits. On a motion by Mr. DeSimone and seconded by Mr. Marti, the Finance Committee unanimously voted to approve the reserve fund transfer request.

Item #2 – General Budget Discussions with Department Heads:

**Board of Health:** Board of Health member Phil Durno outlined the accomplishments, objectives and impact to their budget, noting that the Board did not ask for a 1% increase. With a 1% decrease, the hazardous waste collection would potentially be eliminated. The contract for the landfill closure expires in 2012, and this will need to go out to bid in early 2012. It was noted that the level funded budget included a \$2,000

decrease in hazardous waste collection and a \$2,000 increase in wages. It was noted there will be no increase to Nashoba Board of Health.

Council on Aging: Council on Aging Director Marcia Zaniboni and Chairman Merle Green were present. Ms. Zaniboni explained there are maintenance issues with the building, most notably the roof and plumbing. It was noted that with the changes in staff, there would be no furlough in 2012. Ms. Zaniboni also discussed the need to offer programs and activities to our “younger” seniors. It was agreed that the issues with the roof must be coordinated through the Town Administrator’s office.

Library: Library Director Deb Spratt was present and discussed the impact the reduced hours have had to the residents of town. Ms. Spratt will need to apply for a waiver again unless there is an 8% increase in the library budget, which she realizes will not happen. A 1% increase in the budget would be a show of good faith to the state, and decrease the furlough by about two days. If the budget is reduced by 1% they will need to have an additional one-week furlough.

Recreation: A representative from the Recreation Commission was unable to attend. Mr. Sergi read an e-mail from Commissioner Derek TenBroeck, outlining the impact to their budget based on the three scenarios requested by the Finance Committee. Ms. Tzanoudakis noted that the budget has been cut significantly from last year. Mr. Moak stated this was accomplished by combining the positions of Community Center Coordinator and Recreation and Program Director.

Cemetery & Parks: Cemetery & Parks Superintendent Terry Spaulding outlined the goals of his department and described the impact of a 1% decrease; if the budget were increased by 1% he would add to wages. A brief discussion ensued relative to field maintenance and the roll that the sports organizations have in assisting with field maintenance.

Fire/Ambulance: Chief Toby Tyler outlined the department’s activities over the past year, and indicated that a 1% decrease would not be as big a factor as they are planning to replace an ambulance, which would reduce repairs and maintenance costs. A new oxygen vendor has also reduced costs. Chief Tyler explained they are very close to receiving paramedic certification and described what that would mean for the town. Mr. Moak stated the primary option for replacing the ambulance would be through debt exclusion, and the town will see a drop in debt in the next two to three years. Chief Tyler stated the fire department budget is below bare bones; even with a 1% increase, they will have to cut back on building repairs and maintenance and other items to meet step increases.

Police Department: Chief David Scott explained 90% of the budget is for personnel; they have made internal cuts to meet salaries and wages. With a 1% decrease he will have to lay off one police officer; with a 1% increase he would promote one sergeant to lieutenant and not fill the sergeant slot. Mr. Sergi noted a 1% decrease would bring staffing level to the 1980’s when the town’s population was 4,000.

DPW: DPW Director/Town Engineer Ken Kalinowski introduced new Water/Sewer Superintendent Laurie Stevens. Mr. Kalinowski explained the highway department is short-handed by two people and snow and ice is currently in deficit. There are infrastructure needs that need to be addressed, such as culverts and drainage. A cut to the highway department would mean a severe decrease in services. Highway Superintendent Peter Shattuck stated he has had to be creative with his budget; plow routes have been reconfigured to make the best use of manpower and equipment. Mr. Zacharakis noted the highway department only submitted a level funded budget. Mr. Shattuck stated if he had a 1% increase the extra funding would be put into fuel. Mr. Zacharakis asked Mr. Shattuck to submit budgets with 1% increase and decrease so the Finance Committee can see what those changes would mean.

Mr. Kalinowski stated the Town Engineer/DPW budget is 97% labor; if the budget were reduced reductions would be taken from supplies/services. If the budget were increased this increase would be directed toward salaries, because the bylaw employee has not received an increase in three years.

Discussion turned to the water and sewer departments and fund balances. Mr. Moak commented that there will be articles on the Special Town Meeting warrant to address problems with the Sewer Department budget. Mr. Kalinowski remarked the water fund is robust, and a recent rate increase will cover the cost of the new well project. Mr. Sergi stated he would like to see a memorandum of understanding outlining a formal structure, policies and practices around these entities. Mr. Kalinowski stated he would support that initiative. The water department budget increases are due to capital projects and a 40% increase in chemical costs.

Mr. Kalinowski stated that there are two new employees at the transfer station. Sticker prices will be increased this year for the first time in three years. The department is looking at different recycling methods.

Inspection Department: Building Inspector Harry Cullinan stated the office received five new house permits for Emerson Village this week, but activity has otherwise been quiet. Since the majority of the budget is for wages, and 1% decrease would mean reduced hours for the staff, and a 1% increase would be added to wages. Mr. Sergi remarked that there has been a downturn in construction, therefore the workload in the office should be less; he suggested that perhaps this budget could be level funded for FY 2012. Mr. Cullinan stated he has proposed changes to the way the department charges building fees. Mr. Sergi stated if he wants to present this to the Board again he can, but the last time this was proposed the board decided that with the recession they couldn't justify increasing the fees. Mr. Moak remarked that a reduction in this budget can only come from staff; the department needs to be responsive to builders and developers to get an uptick in building.

Town Clerk: Jeff Sauer stated he has reduced office costs by eliminating old technology and doing some things in-house. If the census figures show a population of more than 12,000 the town will be required to create a 4<sup>th</sup> precinct and the cost of that would be an increase in election workers and \$6,000 for another voting machine. With the help of Dave Pease they were able to create a new dog license program, and with desktop publishing he has eliminated the need to order many forms.

Conservation Commission: Conservation Administrator Paula Terrassi stated there are only two line items in her budget – wages and longevity. She does not receive longevity and her wages are less than her predecessor. If the budget were increased it would help with other things the commission needs to get done; a 1% decrease wouldn't be much of an impact to their budget. Other expenses are paid through the conservation fund.

Planning Board: Planning Administrator Sue Snyder stated that a decrease to her budget would mean reduced hours. She is currently working on economic development and needs to attend workshops and training, so funding for these items would be added to the budget with a 1% increase. She has applied for another grant for design guidelines. The proposed budget allows Ms. Snyder to remain at 30 hours per week. Mr. Moak remarked they have made good progress working with NMCOG.

Assessors: Assistant Assessor Maureen Bolger stated that wages are down and longevity has been eliminated so money has been added to conferences. Mr. Sergi asked if the budget included funding so that she could receive her certification. Ms. Bolger stated there is some money in the budget and she plans to go to a course this summer. Mr. DeSimone questioned why the budget was reduced by \$6,000. Ms. Bolger explained she will only be working 36 hours per week. She did not include a step increase in the budget. Assessor Michael Coffey stated they have moved their board meetings to daytime hours to accommodate Ms. Bolger's schedule. Mr. Sergi stated he does not agree with this, and that they should be meeting in the evening to be available to the public. Mr. Coffey stated they would be willing to meet at another time if the need arose to accommodate the public.

IST: Systems Administrator Joe Traverso explained there is not a lot to work with in his budget to improve systems, and there needs to be a plan for technology. Last year Mr. Traverso took care of the old servers.

The network is slow and unreliable, and some departments are not connected. There is no major plan in building the network, and he would like to get outside company to look at what we have and what we need to get done. This has been addressed in the capital plan.

The Board and Finance Committee discussed the pros and cons of holding off on all capital items until the fall Special Town Meeting.

**ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting adjourned at 10:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Peggy Mazzola, Administrative Assistant

**APPROVED: BOARD OF SELECTMEN:**

*absent*

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Patrick J. McNabb, Chairman

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Joseph A. Sergi, Clerk

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Michael L. Green

**APPROVED: FINANCE COMMITTEE:**

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George Zacharakis, Chairman

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Chris DeSimone

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Chris Johnson

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Alan Leao

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Robert Marti

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Holly Seiferth

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Melissa Tzanoudakis