



Finance Committee
TOWN OF HALIFAX
499 Plymouth Street
Halifax, MA 02338

Meeting Minutes

Monday February 24, 2025

Committee Members Present (Remotely) Jim Walters, Frank Johnston, William Smith, Mike Rugnetta, Edward Bryan & Michael Bennett.

Absent: Cheryll Zarrella Burke

Audience: Chief Chaves, Jean Gallant, Steve Hayward, Ellen Snoeyenbos, Erica Russ. Mary Gains, Lindsay Martinelli, Cesar Calouro & Cody Haddad

Jim Walters called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM

This meeting is being conducted remotely and being recorded by Area 58.

ACCEPTANCE OF FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: The meeting minutes from February 18, 2025, have been circulated to the committee members prior to the meeting for review.

Jim entertained a motion to accept the meeting minutes of February 18, 2025

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: William Smith

Roll Call: Jim Walters, Frank Johnston, William Smith, Mike Rugnetta & Michael Bennett.

MOTION PASSES 5/0

Edward Bryan – Abstained was not present for meeting

FY26 BUDGET REVIEW – HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT: Jim turns the meeting over to Steve from the highway department. Cody shares his screen with the highway budget. This year the highways budget is level funded for the most part. Steve only has a few increases this year. The first increase was line 77 – the highways surveyor which includes the 2% COLA increase. Cody is going to have to confirm this increase, the figure did not match the spread sheet. There was also a 2% increase and step increase for the clerical line item.

Stormwater management falls under the highway department. The permitting regulations are being updated so the town had an engineering company come in and help with the budget. They are predicting it will cost the town \$182,500. Unfortunately, there is nothing the town can do about this increase as it is mandatory. They have 2 new projects and one includes a new filter service near the lake. Steve confirmed the highway department can currently change the filters without hiring an outside contractor. Next is the snow and ice which

is level funded. Streetlights had a small increase. Traffic lights, Warden Salary, Tree Maintenance, and insect and pest were all level funded.

Jim asked about Barn Maintenance and why it's not under the building maintenance budget. This money is used for drains inside the barns or minor fixes, so they don't need to go through building maintenance. Jim will follow up on this later.

The Cemetery Department wages have been increased by the 2% COLA, the \$71,600 includes the overtime wages as well. The department averages 2 burials each month. The rest of the Cemetery Budget has been level funded. The cemetery department has been covering the cost of the part-time wages and overtime wages for maintenance to the fields around town. Cody was unaware and he is going to review this with Steve and move these to Highways Wages.

Public works – Solid Waste is the next category. The clerical was adjusted by 2% however they are part of the new union forming so they cannot give a definite on this yet. The recycling center wages includes a 2% COLA. They do have an increase to help with the overtime wages. They may be able to reduce this a little bit. Their expenses increased by 1.1%. Collection disposal charges are level funded. They did have to increase the solid waste by \$5/ per ton which is contracted.

That concludes Steve's budget. Jim asked him to stay on the call until the public participation section in case anyone from the public had any questions regarding his budget.

FY26 BUDGET REVIEW – LIBRARY DEPARTMENT: Jim turns the meeting over to Jean from the Library. The library only has 3-line items. They will be having a 2% increase. Currently Jean has announced her retirement. Currently, they have not hired a new director. The employees will get longevity and steps increases. They are unaware of the new COLA due to them being part of new union. This will be finalized once a contract has been negotiated, this includes 6 employees.

The library is open 41 hours a week, they are only required to be open 25 hours a week. This includes Saturday 10AM – 2PM. They are not open on Saturdays during the summer.

The expense budget will be level funded from last year. The supplies from last year have gone down. But the electric bills are about \$14,000. Jean also has dues for professional certifications that need to be paid. To remain certified with the NBLC the library is required to spend 19% of its budget on supplies. Jean requests a waiver with the state because of the extended hours and only must spend 16% and still gets the full funding. The library receives a certification incentive of around \$20,000 each year for remaining certified. This funding can be used for programming or however she sees fit.

The sales network runs around \$188,000/ year. There is a balance of \$40K in the account and she has items the board has asked her to spend it on. Including lockers for residents who want to pick up books after hours. Jean is not comfortable spending this until after the town meeting. Once the town meeting is completed, she has quotes ready to go and projects ready.

EJ asked about reducing hours and if that would negatively impact the town. Jean agreed they will be able to reduce the hours on certain days when they are not holding programs. Jean will confirm the hours she needs to remain open to not affect her supplies budget.

This concludes the library budget review. Jim asked Jean to stay on the call until the conclusion of the public participation.

FY26 BUDGET REVIEW – POLICE DEPARTMENT: Jim turns the meeting over to the Chief to review his budget. The first line item is for the Chief and Deputy Chief positions which are contractual at \$283,841. This is a combined increase of 4.4%. The wages decreased by 8.5% due to 2 senior officers retiring last year. Part-time wages are budgeted for \$10K, they only have 2 officers that work overtime at a lower rate. Wages will be level funded from last year. All other accounts are level funded. The police chief did mention the sick time buyback incentive through the town. The Chief believes this is something the finance committee can investigate because they have never had to use that full amount.

The training budget was increased to \$12K due to education incentives and police training programs. They also use this for training ammo. If the town has to pay for a new recruit, they will need to pay \$6K to send them to the academy as well as their wages (Police officer 1 Rate). The clerical wages are part of the new union and reflect the 2% increase but could change.

Expense account is level funded. The higher amounts are for the internet and data processing which is a 3^d of his expense budget. They will be using postage through the town hall going forward. However, if they need to spend money on certified mail or FedEx that would need to come out of an departments expense account.

Dues and licensing and office supplies are going up, but they are hoping to keep the expenses at \$70K. Electrical will increase by \$1K to \$21K for the year. He is aware of the new credit program but wanted to ensure he had enough for FY26. Cruiser maintenance is level funded at \$13K. They are going to be proposing a capital request for the new cruisers. If it's not approved, they will need to look at increasing this line item.

The Police Department does have an article coming forward for the police boat including maintenance and supplies for the vessel. The town was clear at the last town meeting on the importance of lake oversight. Cody stated the capital planning committee will need to review these items before they are presented at the town meeting. (trailer, boat, training, floatation devices for officers, and light kits). The chief confirms the cruisers will be able to tow the boat.

Adding a water vessel will affect the department's staffing and overtime budget. They do not currently have this included in the FY26 budget. It will all be in the article for the town meeting, including wages. The boat would operate with 2 officers per shift. The article at the town meeting will have the personnel cost. This will only be for the first year but not going forward after.

Animal control officer is an outside contractor and the town pays \$32,000 which is the fee for Halifax only. They also service Bridgewater. They will be speaking with the contractor about renewing and how many calls they receive for Halifax. This is for domestic and wildlife calls throughout the town.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

Ellen Snoeyenbos – She is the chair of Board of Trustees for the library. She is a Halifax resident and has also been a library director for 25 years previously. Ellen confirms that Jean is presenting a level funded budget. She also mentions they have looked at cutting hours, however most of their staff are part time so it would be making these hours even smaller. Ellen also mentions that kids getting off the bus from Silverlake utilize the library for tutoring. The library is also used as a safe after school space for many kids so she is hesitant to reduce the hours.

Erica Russ – Asked highway when 58 was repaved near the lakes. Steve responds parts were completed in 2019 and 2018. At that time, they did not have all these regulations with storm waters drains.

Next Erica asked about cutting the library hours to 25 and if they would stay certified. Jean responded yes but the supplies amount would go up by \$11K to account for the 19% supply increase from the current 16%. Erica asked about the incentive grants and when she receives the funding. She gets two payments, one around November and one in April. Erica also asked if they had thought of raising the fees or processing passports. Jean was not sure, but Cody confirmed any fees like that would go to the general fund.

The next department Erica had a question for was the police department. She wanted to know about the new fees being changed around the lake regulations and what that money goes toward. The Chief confirmed that they would go into the general fund. She next asked what the full amount of the new article would be for the Boat. The boat would be \$56K, Personnel costs would be \$10,500 (this would be \$18,193 annual after this year), Utilities would be \$2K, Supplies would be \$500 and Miscellaneous would be \$4K (this would include life jackets and other items). This would bring the total for the article to \$75K

The recycling center was next. There was an echo on the line, so it was hard to understand what Steve was saying. Erica asked about the fees brought in, but he was unable to answer and needed to speak to Sue. Next was the funds for the maintenance on the Barn. Erica wanted to know what he was spending this money on exactly. He mentioned floor drains and small repairs.

Mary Grains - Mary had a question for the highway department and their previous articles for capital items. The backhoe with the sweeper attachment was mentioned. Mary wanted to know if the town appropriates \$100K for this item and the department only used \$75K then shouldn't the \$25K unused be reimbursed to the town. Cody responded, stating that is how it works normally. However, with this article the attachment was part of the article it just had to be ordered separately. Cody confirmed her question stating the funds do need to be used in the scope of which it was appropriated for.

Jim thanks the department heads for their hard work and participation in this meeting. Jim also thanked the public for their participation and input as it is always welcomed and encouraged.

COMMITTEE LIAISON UPDATES: The Zoning Bylaw meeting met last week, they have a few changes to be adjusted. They did make a few amendments in the last meeting.

The government student committee also met last week. They are currently working with department heads to better understand their structure. As of today, they have met with the Town Clerk, Treasurer Collector, Town Accountant and the Principal Assessor. They have another meeting scheduled for March 6, 2025, with some more departments.

CORRESPONDENCE & AS MAY ARISE: Email from Julia, she is a life long resident of Halifax. She graduated of Halifax Elementary School and is a teacher in a near by district for 5 years. She is writing because she is deeply concerned regarding, the budget cuts being proposed. She believes this budget cut will not give the students a safe learning environment. The large classroom sizes, removal of support staff and termination of specialist. She believes the school is already operating at the bare minimum. She is asking the finance committee to help in any way they can.

Jim understands that the cuts will affect the students and staff of Halifax Elementary. He is also aware of the funding available through the town. He knows this is going to be a hard year.

EJ adds that other departments are all working together to try to avoid cuts to the HES. That is the long-term goal to not have to make these hard decisions. However, the responsibility of the Finance Committee is to put forth a plan for the town to vote. It is ultimately up to the residents to make the final discussion.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: None

NEXT MEETING PLANNING: Next meeting will be in person on March 3, 2025, with the Fire Department. Then remote on March 10, 2025.

Joint meeting with BOS on March 25th – Vote on a level funded budget and a budget with an override.

Jim entertained a motion to adjourn at 8:10 PM

Motion: Mike Rugnetta

Second: William Smith

Roll Call: Jim Walters, Frank Johnston, William Smith, Mike Rugnetta, Edward Bryan & Michael Bennett.

All in Favor 6/0

Exhibits: Email from Julia – Regarding School Cuts, Meeting Minutes from 2/18/25 & FY26 Police Budget, FY26 Library Budget & FY26 Highway Budget

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Bennett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "M" and "B".

Michael Bennett, Clerk