

Finance Committee Notes  
May 11, 2022  
Town Offices  
6:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 6:05.

Present: Ginger Robinson, Joyce Muka, Nate Messer, Glenn Caffery, Michèle Higgins,  
Bill Glabach (SB), Erica Jensen (SB)

absent: ø

Guests: Candace Hope 6:08-7:23, Liz Kidder 6:10-7:23, Emily Yazwinski 6:15-7:23 (all from the Public Safety Advisory Committee), Michele Giarusso (Municipal Assistant) 6:43-8:20.

Michèle had questions about the percentages she wrote for the minutes of the meeting on April 27. Erica confirmed that they were written correctly. Glenn made a motion to accept them. Nate seconded. Joyce abstained. Ginger, Nate, Glenn and Michèle voted to approve. The notes were approved.

Because the notes from our meeting on the 13th of April could not be approved at our meeting on April 27, we took them up at this meeting. (Nate and Michèle could not attend the meeting on the 13th, and there were not enough members present who had attended that meeting on the 27th to vote to approve, they were delayed until this meeting on the 11th of May. Glenn took the notes.) Joyce voted to approve. Glenn seconded. Ginger voted in the affirmative. Nate and Michèle abstained. The notes were approved.

Ginger told us that Michele G. will begin putting numbers into the budget worksheet. She will also put in the extra expenses beyond the regular budget into the worksheet. Ginger noted that Michèle had forgotten to list the request from the Recreation Committee of \$6,000.

Discussion with the Public Safety Advisory Committee began with Ginger asking them to talk to us about the feasibility of keeping our own Police Department. Liz explained that we currently do not even have 30 - 32 hours per week of police coverage. Some hours that police are available are office hours for administrative work, LTC and FID cards, so that not all hours are patrol hours.

If we had just one full time officer, we would need to be paying him/her somewhere between \$40,000 - \$50,000 in salary plus benefits, possibly for a total to the Town at approximately \$70,000 per year. There is also a fee of \$325 for the data base.

Police reform is extensive, and the pool of officers will be drastically diminished which is a major concern to police departments across the State. Small towns will not be able to maintain police departments and would become a "training ground" for other towns.

Ginger asked a theoretical question: can towns share a chief? Liz suggested that this would be difficult. Liz went on to explain that the first third of the alphabet has until the end of June 2022 (this year, next month) to complete the new training. In addition to individual police officers, departments also have to be certified in nine categories for a certain level. Beyond that, there is another level of certifications for police departments which has 139 criteria. Each officer must complete 2700 hours by 2027 of on call duty to remain certified. Administrative time is not part of this time; they must be patrol hours.

Ginger suggests that the capital expense is in our favor by going with Bernardston. We would have 140 per week of call coverage with Bernardston versus approximately 28 hour with the State Police. Keeping our own would cost approximately \$75,000 for 164 hours per year which works out to about \$45.00 per hour. Going with Bernardston works out to 140 hours on call per week equaling about 7,280 hours per year at about \$12 per hour. We would have 80 dedicated on-call hours per month. Our monthly bill is expected to be \$7,137 and \$85,644 per year.

Liz noted that Bernardston is about to participate in a program with Clinical Support Options along with several other area towns which calls on a social worker to accompany a police officer who goes to a call where a social worker is more appropriate than a police officer. Because Bernardston will be working with this program, Leyden would automatically be included. Another benefit to going with Bernardston is that the school children of Leyden already know the police because they frequently visit the Bernardston Elementary School. The feasibility grant will, in the long run, pay for a new cruiser. In the meantime, Bernardston is retiring a cruiser which is in decent shape and which they will give to Leyden. Liz noted that in the Wendell-Leverett agreement, should the long term agreement fail, the cruiser which Wendell bought would be returned to Wendell.

Glenn asked for clarification about how these hours count. Liz said that some of the hours would be office hours, but the agreement still works in our favor. Nate asked about the option with the State Police. Erica explained that there would be no hours for

obtaining LTC/FID cards and no hours of patrol. We cannot have a chief from another town if we went with the State Police option. There would be no community policing. One of the issues that the Collins Center is studying is the issue of insurance liability.

Emily stressed that the coverage with Bernardston is professional. They are certified. Erica said that the feasibility study is looking into the long term options. Liz referenced Bill's statement at a previous meeting that we really should test this arrangement with the interim agreement. Bill added that the mental health component with CSO is big but that we cannot do it now without Bernardston. Ginger reiterated that people are asking for 1) no speeding in town, 2) no higher taxes, 3) friendly police, and 4) local police. Liz restated that Chief Palmeri is committed to making this work; he has been responsive throughout this entire time. He's already been checking radio coverage and looking for ways to economize. For instance, he is looking at possibly converting the aging Tahoe to some sort of emergency vehicle. Bernardston will use their own laptops.

Erica asked Liz to talk to Chief Palmeri to ask about CJIS; Leyden has its own dedicated account and would like to know how that will work once the interim agreement with Bernardston is in place.

Liz said that there does need to be a contingency: Bernardston canNOT subsidize Leyden per the agreement. If, for instance, Leyden decides that it would like more hours from Bernardston, it would cost approximately \$250 - \$300 for each additional ten hours per month. We wondered which line item to put this contingency. Joyce believes that it could either go into a reserve fund or even a contingency line item in the budget. Erica acknowledged that there will be unanticipated costs that come up. Liz said that there are options if extra hours are needed: extra time per week or taking the hours out of the dedicated hours.

Ginger thought that there should be a one-time transition fee. Joyce says that we could use a warrant article at the Special Town Meeting to take \$10,000 from free cash.

Glenn stated concerns that he has heard about loss of local control with Bernardston partnering with Leyden; they would be our vendors, that they would call the shots. Liz reminded us that while we do accept their standards, there will be task force meetings which include Leyden representatives every month, so that if/when issues do come up, they can be handled. Emily stated that it is her belief that Bernardston sees this as a real partnership. Bill wondered if the long-term agreement is headed to a percentage based fee as in the Wendell/Leverett agreement. Liz did not know.

Bernardston has four full time police.

Nate asked what the next step is. Liz answered that the Public Safety Advisory Committee has recommended that both Select Boards sign the interim agreement. The Leyden Select Board will vote on May 23, and the Bernardston Select Board will vote on May 18. The agreement will take effect on July 1. After that time, Leyden will no longer have its own Police Department. The Collins Center people hope to have assembled and studied Leyden police data by July. It is expected to take six to nine months to work on a final agreement.

The grant will continue through September of 2023. There is incentive to learn how to work together with Bernardston. Some of the costs which the grant will cover include renovating the substation; the police would probably need one office with a small interview room. Leftover space could go back to the town for record storage. There would be money for a carport, as well as a new cruiser. The final agreement would largely be developed from input from the task force. There was discussion about which room in the Town Offices would best suit this police substation, but it is likely to be located where the current police station is.

Ginger noted that we need to meet more frequently. The warrant closes on May 27 with a final deadline of June 7. The next Public Safety Advisory Committee meeting is the 18th at 6:30 p.m., so we will meet at 5:00 p.m. We will ask them to come back to us on the 25th at 6:00 p.m.

Michele G. needs a second set of eyes to go over the budget figures. Joyce volunteered. She went over the utilities budget for the Town. The supplies line was separated for Town Hall and the Town Offices, but she did not know why. She will merge them. It looks as if that line is over by \$600, but it is not. The fees are for the bonds. For the computer line, \$4,000 will be adequate. Michele noted that the charge for each additional email account that is set up is \$150.

For postings for all boards and committees, the request is \$3,000 and is an increase of \$200 from last year. Joyce stated that these fees should come out of their own revolving funds but also noted - again - that we do not get sufficient reports from the Accountant to know for sure.

The custodian is asking for a 3% increase, up \$165 over last year. We wondered how many hours she works. Michele thought 4 per week but also noted that she comes in as needed and additionally shovels snow.

As for Town Counsel, Michele noted that we are over on this budget which was \$3,5000. The Town spent \$5,156 and used advertising fund this year to cover the costs. We wondered if the \$4,000 requested would be enough given the police agreement. Erica pointed out that the grant will pay for Counsel fees related to the agreement. Ginger suggested that we keep the \$4,000 and talk about this later as the Finance Committee.

The Building Maintenance was as \$10,000, but the recommendation is for \$12,000, but ARPA will pay for mold remediation and for containers to place the records in for protection against further mold damage. Michele noted that many of our old records are in very bad shape and that they must be maintained as a priority. She said that that line item can remain at \$10,000 due to ARPA funding.

Verizon and Eversource have said that their rates could go up by 10%, but it is unknown what the State will allow. Crocker Communications is expected to go up \$10 per month. The propane tanks will need to be refilled. The new 1,000 gallon tank to be installed at the Town Hall will be expensive, but it is unknown how expensive. Diesel fuel is almost \$6 per gallon right now. Joyce wonders if we should double the amount requested. We settled on \$27,000. We can't know if it is too much or not enough; the market is so volatile. Bill noted that we can always have a Special Town Meeting to take money from free cash if this amount is not enough; Joyce said that we should know what our free cash is by the time we might need to vote on moving money to cover an added, unexpected cost.

We are at \$93,350 at this point on the Town's request page.

There is no increase on the cemetery line, though with gasoline prices rising, this is somewhat surprising.

The elevator needs repairs, but it is not known now much repairs will cost. Michele says that ARPA money can be used for repairs.

Snow & Sons have charged \$6,000 for years and have not asked for an increase. Michele will contact them to ask if they are planning to ask for an increase and suggests that we put in an increase of \$1,000 for them just in case.

Veterans' benefits will go up about 6%. FRCOG procurement, \$156 more, but the FRCOG state/core assessment will decrease slightly to \$5,419. Insurance is in at \$105,000 but could be less depending on whether Susan Bobe takes out Social Security and Medicare for police. MIIA, however, does not know how police reform works. The

people from the Collins Center will put them in touch with people who do to figure that part out. In any event, we would need to keep the liability for the Interim Agreement. So this amount is subject to change.

Michele then talked about her request for a \$10,000 raise from last year from \$48,000 to \$58,000. Northfield and Warwick asked for 6%. She has the Franklin County comps. In Heath, the Town Coordinator works 35 hours per week and is paid \$54,280. She works 40 hours per week, sometimes on Friday and has very long hours on Monday. The Warwick Town Administrator earns \$43,000 for 30 hours. She also said that the Rowe person is paid \$50,000 and in Hawley, that person works 32 hours. She noted that the highway department received increases this year and wants us to look at the comps for other towns. She told us that she helps out other Town Administrator, pointing specifically to Colrain. She attends many trainings, seeks out and obtains many grants worth millions of dollars. She noted that we did nothing with the Don Jacobs study. Michèle pointed out that the job descriptions which he gave us were of very poor quality and needed a great deal of revision and that Don Jacobs should be taken to task for the them. Ginger asked Joyce to calculate the requested hourly wage for Michele which she calculated to be \$27.88 per hour.

Erica mentioned that the Finance Committee had a previous discussion in which it was noted that the office really should have a part-time person to help out answering the phone, taking minutes at meetings, communicating with other departments and learning what Michele does. The reality is that, at some point, Michele will retire and that somebody should know what she does. Ginger asked Michele to make a list of the grants which she has brought in. Michele said that she has that information. We can do a market adjustment to the salary survey. Nate noted that we do need to look seriously at the survey.

Ginger mentioned that another item that needs to go into the budget request is the \$6,000 request from the Recreation Committee as an item that is "outside the budget." We also need to look that the Winter Recovery money and how to use it: \$112,000. Bill would like to put it away into free cash accounts. Also, ARPA funds will pay for a new highway roof. There is also the possibility that there will be \$49,000 coming in for Broadband for the 5-town back haul, some of which could be paid with ARPA money.

Michèle made a motion to adjourn at 8:24. Nate seconded. All were in favor.

Our next meeting will be at 5:00 p.m. on May 18, 2022.