

**Finance Committee
Town of Buckland
Minutes of Meeting
March 10, 2022**

This meeting is being conducted remotely in accordance with the provisions of the Governor's March 12, 2020, Executive Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law.

Present:

Finance Committee: Larry Langford, Paula Consolo, Dena Wilmore, Bruce Lessels via Zoom
Town of Buckland: Heather Butler, Town Administrator, Clint Phillips, Selectboard, Barry DelCastilho, Selectboard

Others: Leah Phillips, Mohawk School Committee, Martha Thurber, Mohawk School Committee

The meeting was called to order by Chair Langford at 4:00 pm

Martha Thurber explained why she's supporting the Mohawk budget. The school committee worked hard on this budget, tried to produce an all-funds budget so towns can see every expense. Budget was built around strategic plan. Focuses on literacy, social emotional learning, elementary music and computer science course has been added. This allows MTRS to add a full time music teacher. Trying to carefully steward Federal funds from pandemic relief. Early on these funds were spent on direct expenses related to covid. We're now using these funds for additional counselors and for other areas where students need help as a result of the pandemic.

MTRSD is working on a strategic plan to ensure we right size our schools and the programs within our schools so that our schools are sustainable. Buckland's operating assessment goes up only .49% this year. In FY24 there will be more capital purchases.

Leah Phillips explained her view of the Mohawk Budget. She voted not to support the budget. She agrees with what Martha said, but has concerns about lack of sustainability. She heard from several Buckland residents who were against the budget because we spend too much on administration, lack of programs and opportunities, lack of focus on athletic facilities. Our baseball fields are in bad enough shape that some teams will not play us on our fields.

Martha added that many people in our area want Mohawk to be like it was when they were there.

Larry explained that the reason he had asked Leah to come to this meeting is so we can understand the concerns of people who may be opposed to the school budget.

Paula supports this budget - our assessment is up only a little bit, and the school committee worked hard to be transparent about the budgeting process.

Martha said the district has applied for a planning grant to do long term planning. We hear about the first school long term planning grant mid March. We want to circulate a long term plan next fall and then solicit feedback. We have two years of ESSER funds remaining.

Paul motioned to approve the minutes of Feb 21; Dena seconded. Passed unanimously.

Operating budget discussion

Last year's new growth number may have been a spike. We're using 20,000 as a conservative guess

Also keeping local receipts amount conservative at 237,250

Franklin Tech number - our seat on the Franklin Tech board is presently vacant. We need to encourage the selectboard to appoint a Buckland rep.

Smith vocational number isn't double last year, because, despite our having two students instead of one at Smith, we save on transportation expense which is shared between the two students.

If we opt out of mosquito control group (and save \$5,000), we'll have to renegotiate agreement with the state.

Bring reserve fund back up to \$25,000 per our policy of .5%

Question about putting Building and Grounds under Public Works. Heather explained that one of the issues of having B and G included with Highway is that, every time we need labor for a town need, we would pull people from Hwy or from Wastewater. Line 192 is statewide public buildings where these functions make the most sense. This makes sense internally. If we put it under hwy, we lose the ability to track those expenses.

Should we create a public works dept? This is a selectboard question. Dena argued in favor of it because it would prevent an additional person reporting to Heather.

Line 73 - reducing police expense. Heather explained that meetings around shared services are ongoing and that, based on executive session meetings, selectboard suggested level funding police expense in order to ensure there's enough in the budget for FY24.

Line 96 could be reduced by about \$5000 because hwy probably won't need as much for rental equipment since they're buying a mini excavator.

We're required by the state to level fund winter road

Line 135 - Heather thinks this is not just mowing, which B and G should be doing (and which should be in their budget).

Line 152 - We have to put some money into OPEB. We'll put \$1,000 into this.

Sources and Uses

Dump Truck doesn't meet requirement for using Chapter 90 money, but loader does, so we'll lease the Loader and Mini Excavator and purchase the dump truck.

We're holding some free cash for redoing the salt shed which will need to be done in the next few years.

Our policy on free cash is to use it for stabilization until stabilization is at a healthy level, and then to use it for one-time purchases.

We'll review the capital planning tool from the Collins Center at the next meeting, which should help us think about free cash and our future capital needs.

Town building repairs line will go to getting some electrical work done on the Historical Society Museum.

Should we put something in Senior Center capital line? It will take a couple of years to get the act creating a district passed. Paula doesn't think we need the district to do needed improvements on the Senior Center.

Barry updated us on the meeting the other night to discuss the potential district. Ashfield has issues with 50% of capital debt being funded by usage and 50% by ability to pay. Three selectboards have to put the same language on town meeting docket and if it passes in all three towns, then the selectboard has to vote it after legislation passes. Prohibition against paying senior center board of managers was taken out. Dena raised issue around wealth assessment based on zip codes. Suggested weighting assessment on value instead of wealth.

Larry brought up that we still don't have good numbers on the people in Buckland who are using these services. He's asked for the numbers but hasn't received them. They're important because they figure in the funding formula.

There were no public comments.

Our next meeting is 3/21 when we need to finalize the budget.

Chapter 90 money is detailed under procurement spreadsheet.

COLA for town employees is 3% in budget.

Paula moved to adjourn at 5:35pm. Dena seconded. Unanimously approved.