

**Buckland Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
Feb 22, 2021 - virtual meeting 6 p.m.**

This meeting was conducted in accordance with the state of Mass. recommendations for virtual meetings during the time of Covid-19 pandemic.

Finance Committee Members: Paula Consolo, Larry Langford, Raymond Lanza-Weil, Ciara Hayden, Tim Gaulin, Karen Blom

Others present: Town Administrator Heather Burke, Amanda Joao Senior Center Director, Horace Taft Buckland Public Library Trustee, Barry Del Castillo selectboard member, Clinton Philips citizen.

Senior Center

FY22 budget presented by new director Amanda Joao. She explained that the computers were hacked in 2018 and user data was lost. She is using the same user data for 2 years since this is what the previous director did. There is \$19,900 in the restricted donations fund and \$3000 will be used for FY22 budget. There's a 2.5% COLA as per the town of Shelburne personnel policy. The largest increase is \$7200 for computer software management and security to protect against future hacks or failures. Buckland's assessment is a 3.75% increase. Paula asked how much is donated to the senior center annually and if more of those funds could be used for operating expenses. She pointed out that we ask all town departments to keep budget increases within the 2.5% levy limit. Amanda said she'd take another look at the budget.

6:18 pm Lisa Blackmer, Buckland Treasurer and Tax Collector arrived

Treasurer/Collector

The Treasurer is requesting \$7000 for tax title in FY22 budget. Last year this was zero and the previous year the actual cost was \$4800. It costs about \$2400 per property to go through the foreclosure process and can take 1-2 years especially during Covid. There are several properties she would like to take to land court and this budget amount would likely cover a few years. Presently, there are 4 properties on the foreclosure list and about 10 on the tax title list with 2018 balance still due - she is chasing these.

The Collector budget includes \$2750 for OPEB study in FY22. This was unfunded in FY21 but had some rollover funds to apply. Professional development and training were unfunded in FY21 so there is a small FY22 request for \$1,600. Because there may be in person training in the second half of the year.

Treasurer/Collector's expenses and salary are apportioned 15% to the WWTF and 85% to the town. FRCOG retirement benefits and employee benefits are hard to exactly budget since an employee may or may not take benefits or need to change their assignments during the year.

The VET budget is an assessment from the Veteran's Administration. Direct VET benefits depend on how many vets are residing in town.

6:42 pm Jan Buchanan Librarian, George Dole and Cass Russillo, Library Trustees arrived. Ciara Hayden Fin Com member is also a library trustee.

6:47 Lisa Blackmer departed

Buckland Public Library

Horace Taft explained that in order for the library to retain its certification with CWMARS and the state, and thus state library aid, the municipal portion of the budget must increase an average of 2.5% based on a 3-year look back. Due to budget constraints last year this was not met and the library had to obtain a waiver from the state. The trustees feel that the library is understaffed and during Covid more hours have been required under the mandated restrictions. They are asking to reapportion the budget and move money from services to the salary line. They want 8-9 additional hours per week. They agreed not to have any one library staff go over 20 hours per week since this is the threshold for getting benefits. The librarian is under 20 hours but they want to hire additional assistants for about \$2000 more in salary. FY 21 budget was \$40,761 and FY 22 request is \$44,472 - this represents the required 2.5% state increase but is based on what should have been budgeted last year without the aforementioned waiver. State library aid could go up or down. Annual fundraising programs have not occurred but they plan to do it this year. There has been a small revenue generation from selling books. The trustees hope that with more staff hours they can do more fundraising.

7:06 - library trustees left. Russ Kaubris and Rick Martin of Franklin County Technical School District and Martha Thurber of Mohawk Trail Regional School District arrived

Franklin County Technical School District

Rick Martin, Principal, presented the recent accomplishments, new initiatives and program changes at the tech school. They've received \$1.2 million in grants to support: renovations of welding, electrical and health classrooms; new vet clinic; and redesign of the cafeteria. Covid grants for PPE, air filters and tents have allowed the school to remain open during the pandemic as a full hybrid model serving 560 students every other day following the CDC school guidelines. Technology grants have allowed for distance learning, computers and internet access.

7:11 pm Martha Thurber, Buckland School rep arrived

Tech school enrollment is up. As of 10/1/20 student count Buckland had 8 students, up from 6 students the previous year, so our assessment is up 31.6%. Next year Buckland has no graduating seniors and there are 7 new applications for a projected enrollment of 15. Increased overall enrollment means increased staff needs, and thus, FY22 includes an additional 11 FTE staff. Some of these are staff that were cut and some are new positions due to growth. The overall budget is \$13.5 million with an average increase in assessment of 2.5% over the 19-town district. State funding is increased because enrollment is up and the school is no longer

a district held harmless by ed reform. Since the school is growing, state aid is increasing as well, so assessments to member towns represent 48.5% of the tech school's budget.

Russ Kaubris presented the budget. The average cost is \$13,969/student. Buckland's FY22 assessment is \$111,754 based on the current 8 students. However, the FY23 assessment will be based on higher enrollment as outlined above with a prediction of 15 students. The FY22 capital assessment is about \$6000/year but fluctuates a bit based on EQV and 2010 census data. Buckland's FY22 capital assessment is \$5789.17. The EQV wealth factor is affected by the zip code issue in the village as experienced with the Mohawk School district. The tech school would like to build a vet building and wants to start to build a capital stabilization fund for this project.

7:56 pm Rick and Russ left

Karen Blom tendered her resignation from the Finance Committee citing that she took a job as Buckland Town Clerk and can no longer hold an elected position in town as an employee.

Paula mentioned that the Mohawk Budget presentation has been postponed due to changes in the budget.

Next meeting, Monday March 1st, 6pm

Motion to adjourn made by Ciara, seconded by Paula. Roll call vote - Larry: yes, Karen: yes, Tim: yes, Paula: yes, Raymond: yes, Ciara: yes

Meeting adjourned at 8:03 pm

Respectfully submitted by Karen Blom