



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH

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APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE – MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, February 29, 2024 – 7:00 PM
Select Board Meeting Room

MEMBERS PRESENT: Scott Rogers, Chair
George Brenckle, Vice Chair
Janice Hight
Robert D’Amico

MEMBERS ABSENT: Tim Kaelin, Clerk

TOWN: Timothy McInerney, Town Administrator
Jason Little, Finance Director
Kendra Faldetta, Senior Center Director
Jenn Bruneau, Library Director
Isabella Caruso, Interim Health Director, Epidemiologist/Shared Services Coordinator
Brian Griffin, Chief of Police

OTHER: Henry Squillante, Treasurer of the Friends of the Northborough Senior Center
Ron Doucette, President of the Friends of the Northborough Senior Center

Meeting Agenda [CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE](#)

Link to recorded meeting: [CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE](#)

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by Chair, Scott Rogers.

1. Public Comment

There were no comments from the public.

2. Approval of Minutes: February 15, 2024 [CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE](#)

Motion to Approve Meeting Minutes as Submitted without Modification:
Initiated by Robert D’Amico.

Motion Seconded: By George Brenckle.

Vote: Scott Rogers called for a vote to approve the February 15, 2024, Meeting Minutes; it resulted in unanimous approval with all present members voting “aye.”

3. Senior Center FY2025 Budget Presentation (Presented by Kendra Faldetta) [CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE](#) 

Kendra Faldetta provided a comprehensive overview of the Northborough Senior Center's vibrant community, emphasizing the center's pivotal role in engaging and supporting the senior population. The Northborough Senior Center had a vibrant year in 2023, highlighted by significant community engagement and support. The Center recorded 19,779 swipe-ins through the MySeniorCenter Program, emphasizing its role as a pivotal gathering place for seniors. A wide array of 3,105 programs and activities were offered, excluding those related to the Bistro 119, catering to a diverse range of interests and needs. Transportation services remained a crucial aspect, with the Senior Center vans providing 3,169 rides, facilitating access to the Center's resources and events. Volunteers played an essential role, contributing 2,575.80 hours, underscoring the community's commitment to supporting senior activities and operations. The Center's SHINE counselors held 386 appointments, offering vital assistance with health insurance needs, while the outreach team dedicated 1,697 hours to assisting 418 different individuals. On average, the Senior Center welcomed 80.40 visitors daily, showcasing its importance as a hub for senior interaction, learning, and support.

A notable adjustment in the budget involves the integration of a portion of the Senior Center's maintenance budget into the facilities budget which is facilitated by the effective management and support of Shawn Thompson, the Town of Northborough's Facilities Manager. The Senior Center FY25 budget document outlines detailed line-item expenses for salaries and operational costs. The total annual salary for the Senior Center Director is \$90,000, with the Office Assistant and Outreach Coordinator earning \$65,448.15 and \$79,104.90 respectively. The Outreach Coordinator's wages are partially covered by the State Formula Grant. Additionally, the document lists non-general fund wages for Van Drivers, paid by the Worcester Regional Transit Authority, and two Program Coordinators for The Bistro @ 119, funded by program revenues. Longevity pay for a specific employee is noted at \$350. Operational expenses include utilities (\$65,760 for Eversource, National Grid, and Verizon), contractual services (\$3,895 for cleaning, copy machine, and software support), printing (\$400), postage (\$500), custodial supplies (\$3,000), Senior Center programs (\$2,000), travel/mileage (\$1,000), dues (\$1,050 for MCOA, NCOA, and Motion Picture License), and meetings (\$750). The total personnel expenses amount to \$234,904, with total expenses at \$78,355, culminating in a total operating budget of \$313,259.

Scott Rogers inquired about some of the maintenance issues the Senior Center faced in 2023. Kendra Faldetta explained that during the week between Christmas and New Year's, the worst possible timing, the Senior Center's heating system failed. Everyone was either on vacation or break, exacerbating the issue. The necessary replacement part's manufacturer was closed for that holiday week, leading to an inevitable delay. Despite early problem identification, the absence of the essential part meant no immediate repair could be done, forcing a closure of about two weeks until the part arrived, and repairs were completed. The geothermal heating system, while innovative, has proved challenging in New England's harsh climate. It appears the malfunction was due to a pump that failed to warm up the groundwater, leading the building's temperature to drop to around 36 degrees. Efforts to continue operations from home were made, but the cold made it virtually impossible to use the building. Additionally, a burst pipe in the fire suppression system caused significant water damage to the computer and

exercise rooms, necessitating their closure, and still pending a long-term resolution. Despite this, the building only closed for a day thanks to quick action to isolate the damaged area and restore electricity. Maintenance is currently working with the insurance company to evaluate all options for recovery.

Tim McInerney discussed considering a comprehensive energy efficiency program for the town, utilizing savings from reduced energy consumption to service debt. This could include replacing systems nearing the end of their life or those that struggle to perform efficiently. Although no specific plan to replace the Senior Center's geothermal system has been outlined, it's recognized as a significant expense the town is prepared to address. Kendra Faldetta mentioned that currently, one of two heat pumps is active, with the other reserved for emergency use. A major repair is scheduled for spring to extend the system's lifespan without needing heat. Tim also highlighted a recent contract with Constellation New Energy through a Massachusetts Municipal Association program, which reduced the electricity rate from 15 to 13 cents per kilowatt-hour, starting the next month. This change should help lower the overall utility costs for the Council on Aging, as the building relies entirely on electricity, making the savings on the kilowatt-hour charge crucial.

Ron Doucette, President, and Henry Squillante, Treasurer of the Friends of the Northborough Senior Center, discussed the significant contributions their organization makes to the Senior Center. Annually, this 501(c)(3) organization spends about \$25,000 on various programs at the Senior Center. Specifically, in 2023, they allocated \$18,000 for mailing the Northborough Times newsletter to approximately 2,700 households. Over the past decade, the organization has consistently contributed an average of \$25,000 yearly to support the Senior Center. A notable instance of their support was when they covered a \$10,000 shortfall for an audio-visual system installation two years ago, an amount initially not fully covered by allocated funds.

4. **Library FY2025 Budget Presentation** (Presented by Jenn Bruneau)



Jenn Bruneau delivered an overview and update on the Northborough Free Library, highlighting its significant achievements in 2023 and its goals for 2024. The Library in 2023 achieved notable successes, including expanding operational hours on Monday mornings due to donations allowing for an increase in staff. This change saw an influx of 2500 to 3000 patrons during the new morning hours. Another significant achievement was the comprehensive update of the North Community Resource Guide and the assumption of ownership of the Northborough Guide, enhancing local event visibility and business directories.

The Library conducted around 723 programs with approximately 22,900 attendees, funded entirely by the Friends of the Library. Highlight events included the community art show, intergenerational mini-golf, gaming history program, and a haunted library event, which attracted large attendances and showcased the Library's dynamic engagement with the community.

A pivotal project completed was the transition of the children's collection from the Dewey Decimal to the BISAC system, making the library more navigable and user-friendly. This effort involved extensive work by staff and volunteers, demonstrating a commitment to improving user experience.

The Library was also nominated for a national medal for Museum and Library Services by Congressman Jim McGovern, recognizing the strength of its programming. This nomination

highlights the Library's exceptional contribution to the community, especially in programming and services.

Looking ahead to 2024, the Library aims to translate the community resource guide into multiple languages, update the local business guide, work on a new strategic plan focusing on health and wellness, and complete the collection conversion project. The loss of a beloved children's librarian to a neighboring town underscores the ongoing need for skilled, passionate staff to maintain and enhance the Library's offerings.

These accomplishments and forward-looking projects underscore the Library's vital role in the Northborough community, providing extensive resources, programs, and services that cater to a wide range of interests and needs.

The Library FY2025 budget maintains essential services and adapts to evolving community needs. The budget request maintains utilities, equipment maintenance, and other operational costs while aiming to enhance the library's offerings and capabilities. Significant proposals include the reinstatement of the Assistant Director position to strengthen leadership and support complex decision-making in collection management and community engagement. Additionally, the budget seeks to address the heightened demand for library materials by proposing increases in the books, periodicals, and non-print media budgets, ensuring the library meets State certification requirements. To support the diverse needs of Northborough's community, including language resources and services for New Americans, an increase in full-time professional staffing is deemed necessary. Furthermore, adjustments to Library Assistants' Salaries reflect a strategic move to increase a part-time position to full-time, aiming to restore Monday service hours reduced in FY10. This plan underscores the library's commitment to serving as a dynamic community hub, meeting the informational, educational, and social needs of residents amidst changing times.

5. Health Department FY2025 Budget Presentation (Presented by Isabella Caruso)



Tim McInerney began the discussion by mentioning that the town is currently exploring a potential merger between the Health Department and Family and Youth Services through a study conducted with the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC). This investigation aims to determine if combining these services could enhance the service model provided to different community groups, due to their similar social service offerings. Isabella Caruso, serving as the interim health director after Kristen Black, has been commendably managing the responsibilities, particularly covering the void left by the vacancy in Family Services for approximately a year. The Health Department has been compensating for Family Services during this period, suggesting a natural overlap in functions that could benefit from a merger. Although the study's results are pending, the intention is to present a unified budget for Health and Human Services if a merger is advised, maintaining the combined current funding levels for both departments to ensure financial neutrality. A joint meeting with the Health Department and the Select Board scheduled for Monday, March 18, 2024, will discuss the proposal further, with the objective of presenting a budget that reflects the potential efficiencies and synergies of a merged department.

Isabella Caruso outlined several priorities for the Health Department, reflecting their commitment to a wide range of community health and welfare issues. One of their key initiatives includes supporting Family & Youth Services (FYS) by contributing to the Health and

Human Services Strategic Assessment and implementing recommendations from the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), pending approval at Town Meeting. Northborough has also received a CDC Drug-Free Community Grant, providing \$125,000 annually for five years with an option to re-apply for an additional five years. A DFC Coalition Coordinator was hired in December 2023 to oversee this effort. Additionally, Northborough serves as the host for the Public Health Excellence (PHE) Grant for the Greater Boroughs Partnership for Health, a collaborative effort involving Boylston, Northborough, Southborough, and Westborough, which aims to allocate staffing resources and funding to the four-town initiative. The Health Department is also focused on utilizing Opioid Settlement Funds effectively by gathering community input from those directly affected by the opioid epidemic and identifying the best strategies for using these funds for opioid abatement. Furthermore, following the state's establishment of an emergency shelter in Northborough for 30 families (100 individuals) on July 25th, the Health Department has continued to serve as the primary contact, with the current number of families housed as of February 29th being 22 (80 individuals).

Isabella Caruso discussed the FY 2025 Budget for the Board of Health. The budget reflects modest increases across several categories, with a total proposed budget of \$220,148, marking a 1.72% increase from the previous year's \$216,436. Key personnel, including the Health Director and clerical staff, see a 2% cost-of-living adjustment, resulting in an additional \$2,067 for the Health Director and \$1,305 for clerical salaries. The Health Agent Wages are allocated \$17,340, maintaining support for a regional full-time Health Agent position, and compensating per diem hours for septic plan review. Longevity pay and various operational expenses, including contractual services, office supplies, and travel, remain consistent with the previous year, showcasing the department's efforts to balance essential public health services with fiscal responsibility. The budget also accounts for necessary testing and maintenance costs due to regulatory requirements and includes a small allocation for new equipment. Overall, the proposed budget ensures the continuation of crucial health services while adhering to state funding agreements and maintaining a modest increase in total expenditures.

6. **Police Department FY2025 Budget Presentation** (Presented by Brian Griffin)



Newly appointed Police Chief, Brian Griffin, explained that the Northborough Police Department has undergone significant transitions and developments from last year to the present, including the retirement of Chief Bill Lyver after over four decades of service. Despite nearing full staffing, a vacancy remains due to Bill Lyver's retirement, with efforts underway to fill the position by early to mid-April. Recent hires in both officer and dispatcher roles have been successful, with a notable reintroduction of a full-time school resource officer enhancing school safety and community relationships.

The department has also introduced a drone program for operational efficiency in various incidents, including assisting the fire department during emergencies. An emphasis on officer wellness has led to the implementation of an employee wellness program to support police officers' mental health and stress management. Traffic concerns are being addressed by appointing a sergeant to oversee traffic programs, and initiatives to connect with the senior community have been established through senior liaison officers.

Efforts to fill the mental health clinician position, which is crucial for responding to crisis situations, are close to fruition. The department proudly received its seventh accreditation

award, highlighting its commitment to maintaining high standards of policing. The launch of a new website and active engagement on social media platforms aim to foster positive community relations.

Plans for the future include introducing a comfort dog to the department to aid in de-stressing officers and improving public relations. This reflects the department's dedication to community policing and outreach. The comprehensive overview encapsulates the department's continuous efforts to enhance its services, community engagement, and internal support systems amidst its evolution and challenges.

The Northborough Police Department's FY2025 budget request shows a comprehensive proposal that includes both salaries and expenses. The budget outlines specific allocations for various roles within the department, such as the Police Chief, secretaries, sergeants, patrolmen, and dispatchers, along with special officers, detectives, lieutenants, and other personnel-related costs including overtime, longevity pay, holiday pay, shift differential, court time, educational incentive, uniforms, and additional allowances for emergency medical dispatch, in-service training, fitness incentive, roll call, and dispatcher's differential.

The expenses section covers utilities, radio equipment maintenance, contractual services, printing, training, telephone, postage, radio line rental fees, computer services, office supplies, repairs & maintenance, custodial supplies, vehicle maintenance, special investigations, field supplies, unclassified costs, and new equipment.

The request shows a total salary increase of 11.57% from FY2024 to FY2025, totaling an increase from \$2,921,565 to \$3,259,588. The expenses are projected to have a minimal increase of 0.71%, growing from \$313,462 to \$315,679. The grand total of the budget is proposed to increase by 10.52%, from \$3,235,027 in FY2024 to \$3,575,267 in FY2025. This detailed budget proposal underscores the department's effort to address its operational needs while anticipating an increase in various cost components.

7. Preliminary FY2025 Capital Budget (Presented by Jason Little)



The Northborough Capital Budget for FY2025-2030 includes preliminary planning for appropriations across various town departments. The Senior Center / Council on Aging, Library, Board of Health, and Police department have detailed projections for both personnel and expense allocations. The budget anticipates adjustments in director salaries, wages, maintenance, utilities, and contractual services, reflecting a keen focus on maintaining and enhancing town services. For instance, the Police Department looks to fill vacancies promptly to achieve full staffing levels, indicating a proactive approach to community safety and operational efficiency. The Library and Senior Center / Council on Aging are allocated funds for books, programs, maintenance, and utilities to support their vital community roles. The Board of Health's budget underlines the importance of health services, with allocations for testing, nursing services, and health agent wages. Each department's budget reflects a careful balance between maintaining essential services and the responsible stewardship of town resources, aiming for efficiency and effectiveness in serving the community's needs.

During the detailed discussion on the preliminary Capital budget, George Brenckle focused on the pressure increases observed in the Enterprise funds, highlighting concerns about how these changes would impact water, sewer, and trash rates. George Brenckle emphasized the importance of understanding the future rate adjustments to inform residents about the financial

implications. Tim McInerney mentioned that the budget directly influences rate determination, and preliminary numbers have been sent for consultation to analyze the rates further. They also touched on the significant impact of the Fire Station construction project and its \$30 million rough estimate. The conversation shifted towards the allocation of free cash, with \$3.57 million available, planned distributions including \$500,000 towards the operating budget, and \$2.2 million for the capital plan, leaving \$500,000 unspent to maintain healthy reserve levels for fiscal stability. They also discussed the OPEB (Other Post-Employment Benefits) contributions, aiming to gradually increase annual funding to address unfunded liabilities, with an emphasis on the strategic financial management to balance the budget and maintain the town's financial health and compliance with policies. The capital budget discussion wrapped up with an emphasis on transparently managing funds and projects, ensuring that the financial impacts are clear and justifiable to the town's residents.

8. **Review of Draft Town Meeting Warrant Summary** (Presented by Tim McInerney)



The discussion revolves around the preparation and revisions to the annual town meeting warrant, emphasizing the need for thorough review and potential updates. Notably, the meeting touched upon several key points:

- Two prior year bills were highlighted, one related to the veterans district involving Westborough and Grafton, resulting in a late \$700 bill due to billing timing. Another involved standing bills from the advocate, specifically an unexpected \$700 bill from the veterans district and two from the advocate, due to a late assessment from the veterans district and a miscommunication leading to a missed credit opportunity.
- A significant portion of the discussion was dedicated to zoning articles, with 13 mentioned, although not discussed in depth during this meeting. This indicates a focus on adjustments and considerations within town zoning regulations.
- The meeting also addressed financial implications for residents, particularly in relation to Enterprise funds, water, and sewer rates. The concern was to provide a clearer picture of how budget changes might affect these rates and subsequently, residents' bills.
- Specific articles of note included:
 - Article 14 on senior tax relief, suggesting a focus on offering robust relief options in alignment with state laws.
 - Article 15 regarding a litigation case with the city of Marlborough, indicating a move towards resolution and the necessity of town approval for settlement funding from Enterprise funds.
 - Articles 17 to 33, dedicated to capital projects, implying a broad scope of investments and developments planned for the town.
 - Discussions on the fire station building committee and school-related articles, including solar lease purchases, highlighting long-term infrastructure and environmental initiatives.
 - A placeholder article (38) regarding the finance department's structure, showing considerations for organizational improvements.
 - Discussions on potentially merging Family Youth Services and the Board of Health to form a Health and Human Services department, suggesting a strategic approach to streamlining and enhancing service delivery.

Overall, the discussion underscored the complexity and breadth of considerations for the town's annual meeting, from financial implications to infrastructure and service improvements.

9. Next Meeting – March 7, 2024 (Appropriations Meeting Schedule)



The committee unanimously agreed on the next meeting date of March 7, 2024.

10. Any other Business to Come Before the Committee

There was no further business presented to the committee.

Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn Meeting: Initiated by Robert D'Amico.

Motion Seconded: By Janice Hight.

Vote: Scott Rogers called for a vote to adjourn; it resulted in unanimous approval with all present members voting "aye."

Meeting adjourned at 9:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Angie Sowden".

Angie Sowden
Executive Assistant to the
Town Administrator / Select Board