



## TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH

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### APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE – MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, February 22, 2024 – 7:00 PM  
Select Board Meeting Room

- MEMBERS PRESENT:** George Brenckle, Vice Chair  
Tim Kaelin, Clerk  
Janice Hight  
Robert D'Amico
- MEMBERS ABSENT:** Scott Rogers, Chair
- TOWN:** Timothy McInerney, Town Administrator  
Jason Little, Finance Director  
Scott Charpentier, Director of Public Works
- OTHER:** Lisa Maselli, Select Board Liaison

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The meeting was called to order at 7:08 pm by Vice Chair, George Brenckle.

**1. Approval of Minutes: February 15, 2024**

The decision to approve the meeting minutes was deferred due to their unavailability for review.

**2. Appointment Consideration of Susan Sartori to Financial Planning Committee**

(CLICK [HERE](#) FOR LINK TO APPLICATION LETTER FROM SUSAN SANTORI)

George Brenckle initiated a discussion regarding a vacancy on the Financial Planning Committee that was applied for by Susan Sartori. George Brenckle mentioned Susan's seven years of prior service on the Financial Planning Committee and her additional experience on the School Committee. While Susan couldn't attend the meeting for direct discussion, the urgency of needing another member for the committee to achieve quorum and proceed with essential work was highlighted. Given her extensive background, the recommendation to appoint her was put forward.

**Motion to Appoint Susan Sartori to the Financial Planning Committee:**

Initiated by Janice Hight.

**Motion Seconded:** By Tim Kaelin.

**Vote:** Goerge Brenckle called for a vote; it resulted in unanimous approval with all present members voting "aye."

**3. DPW Project Update (Presented by Scott Charpentier)**

(CLICK [HERE](#) FOR LINK TO THE PRESENTATION MEMO)

- Pavement Management  
The conversation centered around the Pavement Management Program, operational since 2014, assessing road conditions biennially to maintain a townwide pavement condition index (PCI). Despite consistent investment, the program faces challenges from inflation and emergency repairs diverting funds, leading to a plateaued PCI of 76. Innovative maintenance strategies like rubber crack seal, fog seal, and bonded wearing courses are employed to extend road life cost-effectively. The aim is to manage 10% of the town's roads annually, focusing on both preservation and efficient use of resources to improve overall road quality.
- Sidewalk Improvements and Construction  
In 2022, a comprehensive survey of all town sidewalks was conducted, similar to the pavement management program. This resulted in a detailed assessment and inventory of sidewalk conditions, using a grading system of poor, fair, good, and excellent, instead of the traditional A, B, C, D grades. The survey identified the backlog of sidewalks needing repair or replacement, along with the associated costs, highlighting the cost-effectiveness of different materials. The town also evaluated sidewalk accessibility, planning to integrate these assessments in future updates to improve both sidewalk conditions and accessibility, while balancing funding challenges.
- Complete Streets  
Northborough is a Complete Streets community, securing a \$35,200 MassDOT grant to enhance street planning and public infrastructure. The program focused on public engagement, including online surveys and meetings with the Select Board and Planning Board, to identify critical areas for connectivity improvements, such as filling sidewalk gaps. Although Complete Streets funding supports construction rather than design, with a cap of \$500,000 over five years, it significantly contributes to new construction projects, highlighting the challenge of balancing funds between repair and new infrastructure development.

The downtown revitalization project has led to a report with recommendations, one of which includes leveraging Complete Streets funding to enhance pedestrian infrastructure downtown. For instance, creating a more pedestrian-friendly environment by addressing the lack of sidewalks and improving the overall walkability. The goal is to make downtown areas more inviting for pedestrians, ensuring safety and accessibility for all.

- Water and Sewer SCADA Project  
Three town meetings ago, funding was approved to implement a SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) system for enhanced monitoring and control of water and sewer facilities. This system allows for remote management, such as adjusting pumps and checking levels directly from a phone, addressing cybersecurity concerns. The initial funding covered half the project, with the remainder supported by a \$491,000 federal earmark from Senator McGovern's office in the FY 23 Surplus budget, requiring a 20% match. Despite slow federal processes, this significant contribution is worth the wait for the benefits it brings.
- Northborough Reservoir Dam Removal  
Northborough is moving forward with a dam removal project in Shrewsbury, located on the boundary with Boylston. The dam, previously used for drinking water, is now redundant as Northborough sources water elsewhere. State evaluations deemed the dam in poor condition, necessitating its removal or repair. Choosing removal aligns with environmental benefits, restoring the area to its natural state. The project has completed most design phases and is navigating through an expanded environmental impact reporting process due to proximity to an Environmental Justice community. Funding strategies for construction are being planned to follow a similar grant-supported approach as the design phase.
- Dog Park  
The dog park's design is nearly finished, located on Boundary Street, a road owned by Marlborough but on land purchased by the town in the 60s for a different purpose. After a thorough site selection and funding for design secured, the next step involves applying for construction grants through the Stanton Foundation, which also funded the design phase. The planning director, with experience in developing dog parks, is leading the project, aiming for construction to begin in spring, grass growth by fall, and opening hopefully by Thanksgiving. The town has already committed \$347,000 towards the project.
- Brigham Street Burial Ground Beautification  
The Brigham Street burial ground beautification is almost finished, pending an additional overseeding. Funds are available for further enhancements, and discussions with the Historic Commission about adding trees and markers for historic graves are planned. The site primarily features open space without burials, located to the left and towards the back from Brigham Street. A tree assessment identified health issues with hemlocks and oaks, leading to their removal. There's consideration for replanting trees, depending on the commission's goals, to enhance the area's beauty and historical significance.
- Senior Center Accessible Trail  
Funds were allocated through the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to construct a wheelchair-accessible trail at the Senior Center, designed to encircle the pond and link with Edmonds Hill Trail. The project, fully designed and bid, will soon commence construction, aiming for a summer opening. Additionally, a \$5,200 grant from AARP will fund benches along the route, enhancing accessibility and enjoyment for visitors.

(CLICK [HERE](#) FOR LINK TO BUDGET DETAIL SHEETS)

#### 4. DPW FY2025 Budget Presentation (Presented by Scott Charpentier)

- Highway Administration and Highway Construction and Maintenance

The Highway Administration is proposing minor adjustments, notably transferring maintenance operations and costs of the highway garage to the Facilities Division for better efficiency and cost-effectiveness, resulting in a 52% reduction in the Building Maintenance budget. The overall budget remains unchanged, simply reallocating funds. After anticipating significant utility cost increases last year and adjusting the budget accordingly, actual expenses were lower than expected. For FY25, the utility budget has been revised downwards, reflecting these unforeseen savings.

Labor wages are expected to increase, and currently, there are two light equipment operators. The goal is to have versatile staff due to the lean team size, encouraging all to be capable of various tasks. The plan includes potentially promoting one of the light equipment operators to a heavy equipment operator, contingent on obtaining a commercial driver's license (CDL), aiming for all staff to handle heavy equipment, similar to practices a decade ago.

Additionally, a proposal is set to introduce a new full-time administrative staff member to Public Works, reflecting the department's expanding responsibilities, including facilities management and solid waste coordination, enhancing internal efficiency and service quality to residents.

The budget reflects a \$12,000 increase for stormwater management, covering expenses like the disposal of catch basin cleanings and street sweepings, which are considered contaminated materials. This year, disposal costs have risen from \$50 to \$112 per ton due to fewer available facilities and increased distance. Despite these challenges, such materials can be utilized as intermediate cap material in landfills, indicating the operational and financial hurdles in managing stormwater waste efficiently.

- Snow and Ice

The snow and ice budget remains unchanged, aligning with the five-year average expense of around \$470,000, with a proposed budget of \$459,000. Despite similar snowfall levels to last year, ice control poses the greatest expense, costing approximately \$7,500 per salt application due to overtime and material costs. Ice events, more costly and frequent due to climate change, significantly impact the budget, despite public perception. The budget is level-funded this year to manage these unpredictable winter conditions.

- Street Lighting

The discussion on street lights focuses on transitioning to LED for energy savings and environmental benefits. Currently, the budget remains unchanged to accommodate this shift, with any unspent funds rolling into free cash for future flexibility. Communities are debating between 4K and 3K LED lights, with some supply challenges noted. The town has 780 lights to upgrade, which could result in substantial annual savings compared to the current \$65,000 expenditure on street lighting. There's no mandate for this change,



but it's driven by the potential for cost savings and alignment with broader municipal trends.

- Cemetery Division

The Cemetery Division's budget sees minor adjustments, including a \$1,800 increase for a seasonal employee to enhance competitiveness in wages. Additionally, there's a \$2,650 rise in materials and supplies to support the Brigham Street burial ground's upkeep. This includes a robust flower program for Memorial Day and July 4th, and necessary fertilization for the grounds, which lack irrigation, to maintain their beauty and respectfulness.

- Trees Division

The Trees budget remains unchanged, focusing mainly on contractual services for tree maintenance. The process involves bidding for quality contractors annually, identifying and publicly hearing about 50-60 shade trees, and then contracting out complex removals that require cranes, due to the limitations of in-house capabilities. A crane day costs about \$15,000, translating to around \$5,000 per tree, with the budget supporting the removal of approximately 12-15 trees annually, alongside other maintenance performed in-house by skilled personnel.

- Parks Division

The Parks division plans a \$6,000 increase in wages for five seasonal employees, mainly for maintenance tasks like mowing and trash collection. Additionally, there's a \$4,700 increase in materials and supplies, partly for potential dog park maintenance and town common enhancements, including irrigation and uplighting maintenance. To balance new expenses, repairs and maintenance funds were reduced by \$2,300. The budget also includes a grounds improvement line for park upgrades and memorial refurbishments, with some projects postponed to manage costs effectively.

- Engineering

The funding for the town engineer position has been reallocated to the Assistant DPW Director, reflecting an internal budget shift without impacting overall taxes, though it appears as a significant deduction in the budget. Additionally, there's a \$10,000 increase in contractual services to support the Traffic Safety Committee, which evaluates engineering services for initiatives like heavy commercial vehicle exclusions. Recent assessments for truck exclusions on certain streets revealed logistical challenges, leading to a decision against implementation due to potential traffic disruptions. Upcoming considerations include potential truck exclusions on Lincoln and Pleasant Streets, driven by safety concerns, especially near schools and recreational programs.

- Facilities

The Facilities budget sees a significant increase this year, partly due to a \$14,500 reallocation from Highway Administration and also covering actual cost increases in utilities and maintenance contracts. A substantial portion of the increase is for managing 4 West Main Street, which the town now owns, including HVAC maintenance, insurance, and utilities for the property. Budgeting challenges arise from uncertainties around revenue from tenants, as lease details are still being finalized. Efforts to estimate expenses without clear revenue projections aim to ensure adequate funding, with any excess returning to free cash. An upcoming town meeting article will address

using rental income for building upkeep, based on Chapter 40, Section 3, which permits the use of such income for maintenance, with plans to establish a revolving fund for ongoing expenses.

**5. Solid Waste Enterprise Fund FY2025 Budget Presentation (Presented by Scott Charpentier)**

The solid waste budget faces a steep 24.2% increase, driven mainly by yard waste disposal costs and the end of the current collection contract. Yard waste disposal expenses have been climbing, with the most recent expenditure reaching \$149,000. To comply with regulations, this waste cannot remain at the highway garage for more than a year. The upcoming fiscal year projects a budget of \$125,000 for this purpose, despite hopes for reduced waste.

The collection costs are set to rise significantly, from \$621,000 to a proposed \$724,000, due to the shift towards automated collection methods by most contractors, citing safety concerns. This change necessitates consideration of major operational adjustments and the potential high costs of automation equipment.

Disposal costs are also on the rise, with a notable increase in the contract with our waste-to-energy plant and the cost for recyclable material processing. The shift in recycling market dynamics, especially after China ceased accepting foreign recyclables, poses additional financial challenges, highlighting the complexity of maintaining cost-effective and environmentally responsible solid waste management practices.

**6. Water Enterprise Fund FY2025 Budget Presentation (Presented by Scott Charpentier)**

The water section outlines a 5% increase, partly due to a new administrative role partly funded by the water Enterprise fund. A significant portion of the hike comes from a 5.3% increase in assessments from the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA), impacting half of the budget. Fluctuations in water use, especially by larger cities like Boston, significantly affect these assessments. Efforts to manage the impact include postponing a hydrant replacement program for cost-saving, ensuring the water infrastructure remains robust without compromising service quality.

**7. Sewer Enterprise Fund FY2025 Budget Presentation (Presented by Scott Charpentier)**

The Sewer Enterprise Fund anticipates a significant 10.1% increase this fiscal year, amounting to \$252,000, primarily due to adjustments in the Marlborough FY 24 budget assessments, which had been estimated since FY 16. This increase stems from litigation issues with Marlborough that affected billing practices. Efforts to match Marlborough's escalating costs included incremental budget increases, but a recent assessment suggests a need for a larger adjustment to \$1.3 million for FY 25. This adjustment accounts for previously undefined shared operating expenses and an effort to accurately reflect costs associated with the treatment plant. To mitigate rate impacts, certain expenditures are postponed, including grinder cartridge replacements and other smaller purchases, alongside reductions in legal costs and emergency reserves, aiming for conservative budgeting to ensure financial stability.

**8. Next Meeting – February 29, 2024**

The committee unanimously agreed on the next meeting date of February 29, 2024.

**9. 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 Tim Kaelin.

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

Meeting adjourned at 8:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Angie Sowden  
Executive Assistant to the  
Town Administrator / Select Board

Link to recorded meeting online:  
[Appropriations Committee Meeting – Thursday, February 22, 2024](#)

**Documents used during the meeting:**

- [February 22, 2024, Meeting Agenda](#)
- [DPW Projects Update Presentation Memo](#)
- [Budget Details: DPW / Solid Waste / Water / Sewer](#)