

					ACTUAL	ACTUAL	ACTUAL	BUDGET	6 MONTHS	PROPOSED	%	\$	
		ORG	OBJECT	ACCOUNT / DESCRIPTION	2021	2022	2023	2024	2024	2,025	CHANGE	CHANGE	
GENERAL FUND													
	Fire	Personnel	12220	51100	FIRE CHIEF'S SALARY	129,910	132,724	138,704	146,389	66,919	150,848	3.05%	4,459
			12220	51105	DEPUTY FIRE CHIEF	0	0	0	117,000	45,000	119,340	2.00%	2,340
		Personnel	12220	51110	ADMINISTRATIVE SALARIES	62,285	63,517	65,435	67,818	30,989	70,827	4.44%	3,009
		Personnel	12220	51115	PARTIME ADMIN SALARIES	0	0	0	0	0	0	#DIV/0!	0
		Personnel	12220	51120	FIREFIGHTERS' SALARIES	1,270,337	1,285,633	1,345,798	1,411,096	631,681	1,424,899	0.98%	13,803
		Personnel	12220	51132	HAZ MAT ASSISTANT	10,320	10,300	10,807	26,474	3,263	27,643	4.42%	1,169
		Personnel	12220	51230	CALL FIREFIGHTERS WAGES	3,897	4,191	3,820	20,000	1,216	20,000	0.00%	0
		Personnel	12220	51300	OVERTIME	170,192	164,844	177,133	165,000	165,000	172,000	4.24%	7,000
		Personnel	12220	51410	LONGEVITY PAY	8,400	8,600	9,400	8,800	8,800	8,300	-5.68%	-500
		Personnel	12220	51420	FIRE HOLIDAY PAY	53,002	59,463	61,380	65,379	25,417	66,388	1.54%	1,009
		Personnel	12220	51460	EDUCATIONAL INCENTIVE	134,617	146,451	147,444	175,200	65,457	178,150	1.68%	2,950
		Personnel	12220	51930	IN SERVICE TRAINING	72,163	52,364	45,398	48,895	23,069	50,612	3.51%	1,717
		Personnel Services				1,915,123	1,928,087	2,005,318	2,252,051	1,066,812	2,289,007	1.64%	36,956
		Expense	12220	52110	UTILITIES	28,013	32,250	35,934	30,400	13,786	41,450	36.35%	11,050
		Expense	12220	52410	VEHICLE MAINTENANCE	27,136	50,705	20,222	26,250	18,540	55,075	109.81%	28,825
		Expense	12220	52415	EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE	6,755	8,088	12,082	20,425	10,523	18,400	-9.91%	-2,025
		Expense	12220	52800	CONTRACTUAL SERVICES	8,766	25,085	14,713	14,000	13,615	16,000	14.29%	2,000
		Expense	12220	53110	PRINTING	1,261	1,451	3,054	1,000	0	1,000	0.00%	0
		Expense	12220	53190	TRAINING EXPENSES	2,780	7,403	4,321	9,000	1,258	9,000	0.00%	0
		Expense	12220	53210	FIRE PREVENTION/EDUCATION	0	688	452	1,000	1,036	1,000	0.00%	0
		Expense	12220	53410	TELEPHONE	3,691	3,720	3,720	3,720	2,915	3,720	0.00%	0
		Expense	12220	53420	POSTAGE	19	16	20	400	22	400	0.00%	0
		Expense	12220	53720	COMPUTER SERVICES	13,662	31,451	11,554	10,613	11,289	0	-100.00%	-10,613
		Expense	12220	54290	OFFICE SUPPLIES	164	119	806	1,000	350	0	-100.00%	-1,000
		Expense	12220	54490	BUILDING MAINTENANCE	11,924	21,775	23,710	0	0	1,000	#DIV/0!	1,000
		Expense	12220	54590	CUSTODIAL SUPPLIES	2,590	2,163	2,782	2,500	859	3,000	20.00%	500
		Expense	12220	55130	UNIFORMS	16,226	18,618	22,273	22,500	11,198	22,500	0.00%	0
		Expense	12220	55990	MATERIALS & SUPPLIES	10,308	15,838	9,096	13,250	3,587	13,250	0.00%	0
		Expense	12220	57110	TRAVEL/MILEAGE	44	82	100	390	0	390	0.00%	0
		Expense	12220	57310	DUES	4,830	4,505	4,460	4,575	3,900	4,575	0.00%	0
		Expense	12220	57320	SUBSCRIPTIONS	1,375	1,377	1,584	1,445	34	1,640	13.49%	195
		Expense	12220	57340	MEETINGS	0	0	43	604	0	604	0.00%	0
		Expense	12220	57360	NFPA 1500 COMPLIANCE	1,648	300	0	2,350	775	2,350	0.00%	0
		Expense	12220	58530	CAPITAL OUTLAY	5,209	25,730	10,773	30,000	11,206	30,000	0.00%	0
		Expenses				146,402	251,365	181,698	195,422	104,891	225,354	15.32%	29,932
		Total	SUB TOTAL	Fire	2,061,526	2,179,452	2,187,016	2,447,473	1,171,703	2,514,361	2.73%	66,888	
	Emergency Preparedness	Personnel	12291	51130	SALARIES	0	5,000	5,000	5,000	2,308	5,000	0.00%	0
		Personnel	12291	51970	SHELTER COORDINATOR STIPEND	0	0	0	1,000	462	1,000	0.00%	0
		Personnel Services				0	5,000	5,000	6,000	2,769	6,000	0.00%	0
		Expense	12291	52690	EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE	0	0	0	0	0	0	#DIV/0!	0
		Expense	12291	53410	TELEPHONE	0	0	0	0	0	0	#DIV/0!	0
		Expense	12291	55980	FIELD SUPPLIES	408	0	607	1,000	0	1,000	0.00%	0
		Expense	12291	58690	NEW EQUIPMENT	0	0	0	0	0	0	#DIV/0!	0
		Expenses				408	0	607	1,000	0	1,000	0.00%	0
		Total	SUB TOTAL	Emergency Preparedness	408	5,000	5,607	7,000	2,769	7,000	0.00%	0	

2025 Line Budget

ORG	OBJECT	ACCOUNT / DESCRIPTION	ACTUAL	ACTUAL	ACTUAL	ACTUAL	Actual	BUDGET	BUDGET	BUDGET	BUDGET	GROSS BUDGET
			GENERAL FUND	GENERAL FUND	GENERAL FUND	GENERAL FUND	GENERAL FUND	GENERAL FUND	GENERAL FUND	GENERAL FUND	AMBULANCE	
			2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2025	2025	2025
12220	51100	FIRE CHIEF'S SALARY	\$119,956	\$125,722	\$129,910	\$132,724	\$138,704	\$144,991	\$150,848			\$150,848
12220	51210	DEPUTY CHIEF					\$0	\$117,000	\$119,340			\$119,340
12220	51110	ADMINISTRATIVE SALARIES	\$59,047	\$61,292	\$62,285	\$63,517	\$65,435	\$67,142	\$70,827			\$70,827
12220	51120	FIREFIGHTERS' SALARIES	\$1,198,751	\$1,256,277	\$1,270,337	\$1,285,633	\$1,345,798	\$1,411,096	\$1,424,898			\$1,424,898
12220	51132	HAZ MAT ASSISTANT	\$16,785	\$13,662	\$10,320	\$10,300	\$10,807	\$26,212	\$27,643			\$27,643
12220	51230	CALL FIREMEN WAGES	\$14,028	\$14,318	\$3,897	\$4,191	\$3,820	\$20,000	\$20,000			\$20,000
12220	51300	OVERTIME	\$143,000	\$148,718	\$152,784	\$160,144	\$177,133	\$165,000	\$172,000	\$260,642		\$432,642
12220	51410	LONGEVITY PAY	\$10,200	\$9,600	\$8,400	\$8,600	\$9,400	\$8,800	\$8,300			\$8,300
12220	51420	FIRE HOLIDAY PAY	\$22,724	\$53,034	\$53,002	\$59,463	\$61,380	\$65,378	\$66,388			\$66,388
12220	51460	EDUCATIONAL INCENTIVE	\$122,708	\$133,419	\$139,195	\$146,451	\$147,444	\$175,200	\$178,150			\$178,150
12220	51930	IN SERVICE TRAINING	\$40,102	\$35,632	\$71,967	\$52,364	\$45,798	\$48,895	\$50,612	\$29,504		\$80,116
Personnel Services			\$1,747,301	\$1,851,674	\$1,902,098	\$1,923,387	\$2,005,718	\$2,251,738	\$2,289,007	\$290,146		\$2,579,153
12220	52110	UTILITIES	\$25,607	\$25,416	\$28,013	\$26,550	\$35,934	\$30,400	\$41,450			\$41,450
12220	52410	VEHICLE MAINTENANCE	\$21,572	\$18,438	\$27,136	\$28,129	\$20,222	\$26,250	\$55,075	\$28,410		\$83,485
12220	52415	EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE	\$1,076	\$11,482	\$6,755	\$5,745	\$12,082	\$20,425	\$18,400	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$24,400
12220	52800	CONTRACTED SERVICES	\$1,864	\$1,863	\$8,766	\$12,125	\$14,713	\$14,000	\$16,000	\$108,260		\$124,260
12220	53110	PRINTING	\$2,727	\$1,633	\$1,261	\$1,355	\$3,054	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000		\$2,000
12220	53190	TRAINING EXPENSES	\$4,085	\$4,809	\$2,780	\$3,653	\$4,321	\$9,000	\$9,000			\$9,000
12220	53210	FIRE PREVENTION/EDUCATION	\$581	\$572	\$0	\$688	\$452	\$1,000	\$1,000			\$1,000
12220	53410	TELEPHONE	\$3,314	\$3,720	\$3,691	\$3,054	\$3,720	\$3,720	\$3,720	\$3,720		\$7,440
12220	53420	POSTAGE	\$20	\$0	\$19	\$16	\$20	\$400	\$400			\$400
12220	53720	COMPUTER SERVICES	\$14,687	\$26,278	\$13,662	\$10,820	\$11,554	\$10,613	\$0	\$0		\$0
12220	54290	OFFICE SUPPLIES	\$261	\$378	\$164	\$119	\$806	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$300		\$1,300
12220	54590	CUSTODIAL SUPPLIES	\$1,646	\$2,007	\$2,590	\$2,163	\$2,782	\$2,500	\$3,000			\$3,000
12220	55130	UNIFORMS	\$19,645	\$18,816	\$16,226	\$18,618	\$22,273	\$22,500	\$22,500			\$22,500
12220	55990	MATERIALS & SUPPLIES	\$14,278	\$12,199	\$10,308	\$15,838	\$9,096	\$13,250	\$13,250	\$45,000		\$58,250
12220	57110	TRAVEL/MILEAGE	\$38	\$83	\$44	\$82	\$95	\$390	\$390			\$390
12220	57310	DUES	\$4,305	\$4,280	\$4,830	\$4,505	\$4,460	\$4,575	\$4,575	\$10,275		\$14,850
12220	57320	SUBSCRIPTIONS	\$1,936	\$1,370	\$1,445	\$1,377	\$1,584	\$1,445	\$1,640			\$1,640
12220	57340	MEETINGS	\$512	\$90	\$0	\$0	\$43	\$604	\$604			\$604
12220	57360	NFPA 1500 COMPLIANCE	\$1,570	\$1,129	\$1,648	\$300	\$1,809	\$2,350	\$2,350			\$2,350
12220	58530	CAPITAL OUTLAY	\$24,581	\$9,915	\$5,209	\$10,480	\$10,851	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$25,000		\$55,000
17750	59150	DEBT SERVICE								\$100,000		\$100,000
Expenses			\$144,304	\$187,488	\$134,548	\$145,618	\$159,871	\$195,422	\$225,354	\$324,965	\$3,000	\$553,319
Total			\$1,891,605	\$2,039,162	\$2,036,645	\$2,069,005	\$2,165,589	\$2,447,160	\$2,514,361	\$615,111	\$3,000	\$3,132,472

2025 Line Budget

Emergency Preparedness									
12291	51130	EMERGENCY MANAGER STIPEND	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	
12291	51970	SHELTER COORDINATOR STIPEND	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$500.00	
12291	51970	ASSISTANT TO EM	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$500.00	
		Stipends Sub Total	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$6,000.00	
12291	52690	EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	-
12291	53410	TELEPHONE	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	
12291	55980	FIELD SUPPLIES	\$0.00	\$110.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	
12291	58690	NEW EQUIPMENT	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	
		Expenses sub total	\$0.00	\$110.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	
	Total	Emergency Preparedness	\$0.00	\$110.00	\$2,000.00	\$7,000.00	\$7,000.00	\$7,000.00	
						TRANSFER TO GENERAL FUND	TRANSFER TO GENERAL FUND		
								Firefighter (Including Fringe Benefits)	\$74,371
								12.5% Administrative Assistant	\$8,393.00
								42% Haz Mat Assistant (Hazmat)	\$11,009.00
								30% Haz Mat Assistant (ALS)	\$7,863.00
								60% Call Firefighters	\$12,000.00
								100% EMT Stipends	\$154,600.00
								10% Career Overtime	\$33,700.00
								60% Holiday Pay	\$39,227.00
								50% FF Ed Incent	\$6,125.00
								50% FF Cert	\$5,650.00
								50% Inservice Training	\$24,448.00
								TOTAL TRANSFER, BY PURPOSE	\$377,386.00
								EMS Revolving	\$366,377.00
								Haz-Mat Revolving	\$11,009.00
								TOTAL TRANSFER, BY SOURCE	\$377,386.00

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TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH

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APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE – MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, March 7, 2024 – 7:00 PM

Select Board Meeting Room

MEMBERS PRESENT: Scott Rogers, Chair
George Brenckle, Vice Chair
Tim Kaelin, Clerk
Janice Hight
Robert D’Amico
Jeff Knight

MEMBERS ABSENT: NA

TOWN: Timothy McInerney, Town Administrator
Jason Little, Finance Director
John Campbell, CPC Chair
Laurie Connors, Planning Director
David Kane, MIS/GIS Director

OTHER: Lisa Maselli, Select Board Liaison to Appropriations Committee

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

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

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm by Chair, Scott Rogers.

1. Public Comment

There were no comments from the public.

2. Approval of Minutes: February 22, 2024 [CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE](#)

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

Motion Seconded: By Janice Hight.

Vote: Scott Rogers called for a vote to approve the February 22, 2024, Meeting Minutes; it resulted in unanimous approval with all present members voting “aye.”

3. Review of Community Preservation Committee Projects (CPC) [CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE](#)
(Presented by John Campbell)

For this year's Town Meeting, the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) has a budget of \$820,000 from projected new revenue and state match, plus \$1,340,577 from CPA reserve accounts. The Committee reviewed eight applications. During deliberations, future needs, such as the White Cliffs re-use proposal and Downtown Revitalization projects, were considered. Based on these considerations, the CPC reached a consensus on the list of recommendations below. If all the proposed recommendations are approved at the Town Meeting, there will be no unallocated funds from the projected new revenue, and \$243,061 will remain in the Unreserved Fund.

- **432 Whitney Street Land Acquisition Project (\$1,700,000):** This project entails acquiring 23.77 acres of undeveloped land for open space and recreation, along with creating 4-8 multi-family affordable housing units. Key benefits include:
 - Development of affordable housing.
 - Protection of wildlife habitat and a wetland system connected to Bearfoot Brook.
 - Preservation of a scenic vista at the property's highest point.
 - Establishment of an open space link between the aqueduct to the west and lands protected by the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Berlin Conservation Commission.

The CPC unanimously agreed to allocate funding from the unreserved fund (\$817,653), conservation fund (\$664,073), and new revenues (\$218,274) for this project.

- **Pickleball Soundproofing (\$54,500):** The Pickleball Soundproofing project, with a budget of \$54,500, aims to install UV-tolerant soundproofing on the top of the current fencing system to mitigate the impact noise from pickleball, reducing it to below nuisance levels. The CPC unanimously agreed to fund this initiative with new revenue.
- **Affordable Housing Funds to the Northborough Affordable Housing Corporation (\$126,856):** The National Association of Housing Cooperatives (NAHC) has successfully used Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds to increase affordable housing in the town by collaborating with partners like Habitat for Humanity. Anticipating more projects soon, the CPC unanimously approved funding for the NAHC, conditional on a funding agreement similar to those used for previous grants.
- **First Parish Church Steeple Repairs (\$210,000):** This project focuses on replacing several key wooden components compromised by age and weather exposure, including stairs, flooring, trusses, and the "cradle" that holds the brass bell. Additionally, the congregation will cover the costs of hiring a contractor to replace defective materials on the steeple's exterior and reseal it to prevent future leaks. The Community Preservation Committee (CPC) unanimously voted to fund this project using new revenue.
- **Wachusett Aqueduct Historic Marker (\$4,729):** A duplicate historical marker will replace one stolen in October 2023. The Community Preservation Committee (CPC) has previously supported similar projects for their value in enriching the community and aligning with the

Master Plan and Historic Preservation Plan goals, all at a minimal cost. The CPC unanimously agreed to finance this replacement with new revenues.

- **White Cliffs Bond Payment (\$164,641):** This payment is the seventh required for the bond on the White Cliffs purchase. It also meets the mandate that at least 10% of new revenue is allocated towards Historic Preservation. The CPC unanimously agreed to use new revenue for this payment.
- **CPA Administrative Expenses Account (\$41,000):** Under CPA legislation, the CPC can allocate up to 5% of new revenue to cover administrative costs, like legal fees, appraisals, and consultant fees for CPA projects. Any funds not used within a year are returned to the CPA Unreserved Fund. The CPC unanimously agreed to allocate 5% of the projected new revenue.
- **Conservation Fund (\$350,000):** With a current balance of approximately \$664,000 from CPA funds previously approved, was proposed for use in acquiring 432 Whitney Street. However, aiming to plan for future CPA funding needs and maintain flexibility across historic preservation, affordable housing, open space, and recreation, the CPC decided to keep reserves in the Unreserved Fund. Consequently, the CPC unanimously voted to deny the application. This decision was supported by the Committee's representatives from both the Open Space Committee and the Conservation Commission.

Discussion / Questions:

In the discussion regarding 432 Whitney Street Land Acquisition, Laurie Connors shared the positive news that the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has committed \$200,000 to a land purchase project. This funding allows the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) to consider adjusting their budget by \$200,000 without affecting revenues. John Campbell expressed optimism about having a strong commitment to proceed to the town meeting with the plan, and Laurie Connors confirmed the commitment's strength.

Janice Hight inquired about potentially hazardous waste due to historical illegal dumping on the property in question. Laurie Connors clarified that the dumping occurred on a different property and that recent tests, including soil test pits, are being conducted to ensure no hazardous materials are present, with results expected soon.

Tim McInerney suggested proceeding with the full funding amount to secure the state grant confidently, highlighting ongoing environmental assessments and an appraisal. Lisa Maselli questioned the necessity and potential costs of a preservation restriction on the land, to which John Campbell explained that any property acquired with CPA funds requires such a restriction. John Campbell mentioned that organizations like the Sunbury Valley Trustees or New England Forestry might hold these restrictions, sometimes at no cost. Laurie Connors added that the DCR offered to hold the preservation restriction for this project.

In the discussion regarding the First Parish Church Steeple Repairs, Robert D'Amico recalls a previous project where CPA funds were used for creating an accessible entry to a church, wondering if it was the same church currently under discussion. John Campbell clarifies it was a different project and church, emphasizing that using CPA funds for accessibility to historic properties is allowed. Jeff Knight raised concerns about using taxpayer dollars for church-related projects, prompting John Campbell to explain that if a facility has significant public use

beyond religious activities, funding is permissible. Despite some pushback and legal challenges in other cases, the project was deemed allowable due to the church's community impact and historic significance. Robert D'Amico notes there was opposition in the past, but the project still passed. The conversation highlights that the funding is for preserving the historic aspect of the church, like its steeple, rather than supporting religious activities directly. The building is recognized for hosting diverse community activities, reinforcing its value to the town, and justifying the use of public funds for its preservation.

4. **Planning FY2025 Budget Presentation** (Presented by Laurie Connors)

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Laurie Connors explained that the key difference between Planning's budget this from last year is an increase of \$12,050, or 3.7%. It encompasses the planning board, Conservation Commission, Earth removal, and ZBA budgets. Essentially, the increase mainly reflects standard cost-of-living adjustments, with the majority of the rise attributed to salaries, as agreed upon with the unions. Aside from that, there are modest increments to cover higher advertising expenses and miscellaneous supplies. Overall, there are no significant changes.

When prompted by Scott Rogers, Laurie Connors shared updates on key Planning accomplishments. Laurie Connors highlighted the downtown revitalization project, which, with a budget of \$150,000 appropriated at a town meeting, was completed under budget at \$148,000 by Weston and Samson engineers. A presentation on this project and Laurie Connor's proposal for a streetscape project focusing on Blake and Pierce Streets was given. This proposal aims at sidewalk and drainage improvements, aesthetic enhancements, and potential parking lot reconfigurations, with an emphasis on collaboration with local businesses for improved efficiency and aesthetics.

Additionally, Laurie Connors mentioned working on a dog park project with the DPW director, nearing completion in design and awaiting a \$250,000 grant from the Stanton Foundation. The funds are expected soon, with plans to proceed to bidding thereafter.

Discussion turned to the town hall feasibility study, with Robert D'Amico inquiring about its timeline. Tim McInerney provided that the committee would vote on their recommendation on March 27th, affecting the streetscape project's scope depending on the town hall's potential relocation to Blake Street.

Questions also covered the role of the Central Mass Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) in providing technical assistance and planning services, with specific reference to transportation and land use planning. Laurie Connors confirmed the planning department's webpage includes information on complete streets projects, noting that the Blake and Pierce Street project would likely consume all available grant funds due to high construction costs.

** Scott Rogers paused to welcome Jeff Knight, the latest addition to the Appropriations Committee, who was greeted warmly by everyone present. **

5. **MIS/GIS Budget Presentation** (Presented by David Kane)

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David Kane, the MIS/GIS director for the town, provided an overview of the MIS/GIS department's responsibilities and recent projects. The department, consisting of two people, oversees technology use across almost all town departments, including managing the town's website, email systems, various departmental applications (e.g., Munis, permitting systems,

public safety applications), and networking town facilities. The town benefits from its own fiber network connecting key buildings and uses VPNs for others. The department has been focusing on mobile technology use, cybersecurity, and transitioning services to the cloud.

Significant achievements include coming under budget for the downtown revitalization project, improvements in networking and mobile technology for public safety and remote staff, and a unified IP-based phone system enhancing remote working capabilities. David Kane highlighted a shift towards cloud services, reducing the number of servers and end-user devices, and the implementation of a town-wide IP phone system for better communication across departments.

The department has received grants for IT and MIS/GIS strategic plans, a cybersecurity assessment in collaboration with the town of Westborough and is currently applying for more grants to enhance security and disaster recovery plans. The FY25 budget reflects a consolidation of expenses within the MIS/GIS Department, resulting in a noticeable budget increase but with corresponding decreases in other departments. The focus remains on upgrading servers, enhancing disaster recovery solutions, and bolstering cybersecurity efforts, including multifactor authentication and real-time traffic monitoring for anomaly detection.

A discussion ensued with Jeff Knight inquiring about a new line item for an information systems technician, which David Kane explained had been postponed due to prioritizing other needs. Robert D'Amico asked about Munis, which David Kane clarified as the town's financial management application. George Brenckle noticed a significant increase in computer maintenance costs, attributed by David Kane to equipment replacements rather than capital expenditures, explaining the town's approach to asset management and the transition towards virtual servers and cloud-based solutions.

The conversation also touched on managed services and the increase in costs due to consolidation and enhanced cybersecurity measures, including the implementation of a Security Operations Center (SOC) and upgrades to Microsoft 365 licensing for better remote device management. David Kane shared insights into MIS/GIS improvements, focusing on integrating MIS/GIS into daily functions to enhance services like permitting and public safety without requiring users to have specialized MIS/GIS knowledge.

David Kane further discussed the state's push for municipalities to improve their cybersecurity posture, mentioning ongoing efforts to secure additional funding for cybersecurity and disaster recovery initiatives. The discussion highlighted the ongoing technology and security enhancements within the town, including strategic planning and grant applications to support these efforts.

In conclusion, David Kane excitedly mentioned that there are some interesting updates on the horizon, including a new website, though specific launch dates are yet to be determined. The town uses Civic Plus, a provider that serves about 80% of Massachusetts municipalities, which is transitioning all its clients to a newer version. This update promises to introduce some exciting new features. While the exact timeline remains unclear, it's something to look forward to and inquire about in future discussions. David Kane welcomes any questions or further conversations on this or any other topic, inviting interested parties to connect with him directly for more detailed discussions.

6. Finance Office and Undistributed Expenses (Employee Benefits and Debt Budgets) **FY2025 Budget Presentation** (Presented by Jason Little)

Jason Little introduced himself. Jason Little is the Town Accountant as well as the Finance Director. Jason Little explained that the finance department encompasses the Treasurer/Collector's division, the Accounting division, and the Tax Assessor's division.

Treasurer/Collector

The Treasurer Collector's Office is looking at a proposed budget increase of 7.32% over last year, amounting to \$28,000. This increase is primarily due to cost-of-living adjustments and existing staff raises, with the office staff consisting of four full-time equivalents: a Treasurer Collector, an Assistant Treasurer Collector, and two Financial Assistants.

A significant part of this budget hike is the planned introduction of a time and attendance system for payroll management. This system, an initiative for the upcoming year, aims to modernize payroll processing and benefits administration currently handled by the Treasurer Collector's office. If budget permits, we might roll it out earlier. This new system will enable department heads to submit payroll data online, moving away from paper submissions. Additionally, it includes an Employee Self-Service feature, potentially through Harper's Payroll, allowing employees to access W2 forms, update withholding taxes, and view pay stubs online, eliminating the need for printing and mailing, which has been a logistical challenge, especially post-pandemic.

Previously, physical paychecks and stubs were delivered to the Treasurer Collector's office, with department representatives picking them up weekly. Post-pandemic adjustments led to mailing these, costing about \$2,000 annually in postage. However, the new system is expected to save more than this in payroll processing across departments, reducing the reliance on mailing, with the net increase for this system implementation reflected as \$12,000 in the budget.

Jason Little highlighted the exceptional work the department does, especially in tax collection, where they maintain a 98-99% collection rate. This high rate speaks volumes about the professionalism and efficiency of our Treasurer Collectors.

A discussion ensued with George Brenckle inquiring about the scope of the town's time and attendance system, specifically whether it covers just the town offices or includes the school department as well. Jason Little explained that Northborough has a unique payroll arrangement where the school department manages its payroll independently using its software, Infinite Visions, due to the need for specific controls and the large size of its payroll. This results in the town producing W2s from two different systems, a practice not affected by the new time and attendance system but highlighted as a unique aspect of Northborough's operations.

George Brenckle asked about the possibility of consolidating these systems for efficiency. Jason Little noted that while consolidation would be ideal, it's unlikely due to the school's payroll being integrated with its accounting system, and differences between the software used by the town (Munis) and the school (Infinite Visions), both owned by Tyler Technologies but not directly compatible for such purposes.

Jason Little also praised the Treasurer Collector's office for its exceptional work in benefits administration, especially highlighting a recent achievement where the office successfully transitioned most of the town's senior retirees from the Tufts Complement plan, which was discontinued, to another plan, saving the town approximately \$300,000 in the health insurance budget for that year. This transition also had a significant positive impact on the town's Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) liability, reducing it by about \$12 million, from an estimated \$45 million to \$32 million. This accomplishment underlines the Treasurer Collector's office's effective management and its role in ensuring the town's financial health.

Assessor

The Assessors' Department, consisting of three full-time employees including a principal assessor, a data collector, and an administrative assistant, is experiencing a budget increase of \$29,000 or 9.72%. This increase is primarily due to general wage raises of about 3% or \$7,000, alongside significant hikes in consulting expenses for appraisals during the revaluation year (FY 26), and a \$5,000 upgrade for their Computer-Aided Mass Appraisal (CAMA) software.

The principal assessor has notably maintained robust property values, effectively handling numerous Appellate Tax Board (ATB) cases, where taxpayers can contest abatement denials. This diligence has resulted in the state certifying the town's property values first, reflecting the department's efficiency in fair tax administration and the accuracy of property record cards.

Additionally, the department administers exemption programs, funding them through an overlay account which is kept lean, usually less than half a percent of the tax levy. They ensure continuous benefit provision to eligible individuals, particularly seniors, by actively reaching out to those who may not have reapplied for exemptions.

Recent enhancements include expanding the senior work-off program, resulting in more seniors participating and benefiting from tax bill adjustments. They also advocated for lowering the interest rate and raising the income threshold for the tax deferral program, making it more accessible to seniors. This overview captures the department's critical functions and its proactive approach to supporting the community through efficient tax administration and thoughtful program adjustments.

Accounting Division

Jason Little discussed the Accounting Division, where he serves as the Finance Director and Town Accountant, supervising three divisions. The notable budget increase is due to salary adjustments and a proposal for a new Town Accountant position. This recommendation, initially suggested by former Town Administrator John Coderre, aims to enhance administrative efficiency by separating the roles of Finance Director and Town Accountant.

Adding the Town Accountant position will prepare for future needs and emphasizes the importance of succession planning and developing staff internally. Beyond staffing, there are no significant increases in the budget, which constitutes 1.34% of the town's general fund and 3.82% of the town's share of that budget.

Undistributed Expenses

Jason Little discussed the undistributed expenses section of the finance agenda, which encompasses costs not allocated to specific departmental appropriations. This category includes employee benefits and insurance, health insurance, OPEB appropriations, life insurance, Medicare tax, Worcester Regional Retirement Assessment (town employees'

pension plan), workers' compensation insurance, debt service, state assessments, reserve for abatements (also referred to as overlay), and the Appropriations Committee Reserve Fund. Warrant articles, still in development, were not included in his summary.

A significant focus was on health insurance, facing a potential 10% renewal increase, translating to a \$600,000 rise in a budget area already totaling \$6 million. Such an increase is substantial, often encompassing the town's entire budget increment for a year. However, due to turnover and vacancies, particularly in public safety departments, the town has seen considerable savings in health insurance expenditures, leading to a surplus. Despite conservative budgeting to avoid emergency appropriations, unplanned vacancies resulted in a \$900,000 surplus last year, a situation not ideal due to the reasons behind it.

For the upcoming year, an 8% renewal increase is expected with the town's sole carrier, Harvard Pilgrim. Efforts to maintain reasonable health insurance cost increases include a detailed review of employee rosters and adjustments in estimates for "unknown migration" — situations where employees might require coverage mid-year due to qualifying events. The revised budgeting approach aims for a leaner estimate, reducing the projected surplus and resulting in a more manageable 4.4% increase in health insurance costs.

Scott Rogers discussed with Jason Little the approach of closely examining the town's personnel roster to predict more accurately who might join the health insurance plan. This detailed analysis, instead of using broad estimations, allows for a targeted and efficient budgeting process for health insurance costs.

Jason Little explained the process involves reviewing the roster for vacancies and budgeting for potential changes in insurance coverage among eligible employees. They also leverage an opt-out program offering stipends to employees who choose not to use the town's health insurance, generating savings for the town.

Through these efforts, the health insurance budget increase was kept to 4.4% for the year. Additionally, contributions to the OPEB (Other Post-Employment Benefits) trust continue to increase, positively impacting the town's funding percentage for future liabilities, especially after the discontinuation of the Tufts Complement plan, which unexpectedly reduced the OPEB liability by \$12 million.

Jason Little also mentioned the Sick Leave Buyback provision and the employer's contribution to Medicare tax as other significant components of the undistributed expenses, further elaborating on how these items are budgeted in relation to personnel changes and payroll increases.

Worcester Regional Retirement

Jason Little discussed the Worcester Regional Retirement plan, which is on a path to be fully funded by 2036, four years ahead of the 2040 legislative requirement. The town's approach to funding its Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) is similar, working with actuaries on evaluations and funding plans. Once the Worcester Regional Retirement is fully funded, the plan is to redirect funds to the OPEB trust fund. The town is facing an 11% increase in Worcester Regional retirement contributions due to demographic factors, resulting in an unavoidable \$300,000 increase.

Workers' compensation and building liability estimates showed moderate increases, nothing unexpected. Debt service reflects the town's existing declining debt schedules, with no new

projects added except for two approved last year: a DPW project and a fire truck purchase, affecting future borrowing needs.

State assessments provided some good news, with no Charter School assessments for the year, reducing state assessment costs. The town also plans to contribute to the stabilization fund to maintain its bond rating and reserve percentages. This act is likened to transferring funds from a checking to a savings account, showing credit rating agencies the town's commitment to savings. The town's reserves, combining free cash and the stabilization fund, typically total about 12% of the budget, aligning with financial policies to maintain 5-10% reserves. This strategy has consistently brought down reserves to 8% each year as part of the town's financial planning.

Janice Hight inquired about a \$40,000 item for Public Library grants listed as a "cherry sheet offset," which Jason Little clarified is state aid dedicated to the library and does not enter the general fund, effectively not reducing the amount needed to be raised by taxation. These funds are directly designated for library use.

Lisa Maselli asked about the debt service for a renovation project at Algonquin, to which Jason Little responded that it's set to conclude in 2028, with a consistent payment of about \$600,000 annually for the next three years.

Regarding the purchase of a \$900,000 fire truck delayed until May 2025, Jason Little explained the logistical challenges of borrowing and spending within fiscal years, emphasizing the importance of timing in such capital expenditures.

Lisa Maselli also queried if the town earns interest on budgeted funds not immediately spent, such as awaiting the delivery of capital items like trucks. Jason Little confirmed that investment income from money in the bank is a component of local receipts, contributing to the general fund and creating an alternative revenue source that can offset taxes.

7. Review of Annual Town Meeting Warrant

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The conversation revolved around reviewing town meeting warrant articles, with a focus on the updated Capital Free Cash Plan and minor revisions to the schools' requests. This led to a reduction in the debt request by about \$200,000, especially due to adjustments in the fire truck purchase plan. A notable new item discussed was the Peaslee School feasibility study, aimed at seeking MSBA (Massachusetts School Building Authority) participation, which could lead to approximately 52% reimbursement of the feasibility study costs. However, any potential borrowing for this study is not expected until 2026, offering some financial breathing space.

There was also mention of a study from CMRPC (Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission) recommending the merger of Family and Youth Service and the Health Department into one division to create a more efficient service model, with no immediate budgetary impact but an improvement in service delivery.

The group acknowledged the receipt of various documents and reports, including the school budget and the CMRPC report, for review to better prepare for future discussions and decisions regarding these warrant articles and plans.

8. Review Meeting Schedule



AND

9. Next Meeting – March 14, 2024

The upcoming joint meeting with the Selectmen scheduled for March 25th, which historically has been brief due to the Appropriations Committee not finalizing the budget by that date was discussed. Tim McInerney, attending his first cycle, expresses a desire for a more detailed presentation if time allows, but acknowledges the current constraints. Scott Rogers notes that the committee may not finalize their report until April 4th, indicating the meeting with the Select Board might precede their final decisions, yet emphasizes that the process is coming into focus.

The conversation also covered the scheduling of upcoming meetings, with a focus on school budgets and a potential early start time to accommodate schedules. Janice Hight reminds that a joint meeting for a public hearing is a charter requirement, emphasizing the importance of educating the public about the budget process and its balance.

George Brenckle requested a summary of staffing increases across departments for the upcoming budget year, to which Jason Little agreed, noting it would be timely for the next week's discussions. The committee also planned to discuss Recreation Department adjustments due to its inability to cover its budget through fees alone, suggesting a potential general fund augmentation this year.

Tim McInerney offered to provide additional details on the impact of proposed Recreation Department changes. The committee agreed to continue collecting and addressing questions, directing them through Jason Little for consolidation and response, including inquiries about potential water and sewer rate increases.

The committee unanimously agreed on the next meeting date of March 14, 2024, with an earlier start time of 6:30 p.m.

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 Janice Hight.

Motion Seconded: By Tim Kaelin.

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

Meeting adjourned at 8:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Angie Sowden
Executive Assistant to the
Town Administrator / Select Board



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APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE – MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, March 14, 2024 – 6:30 PM

Select Board Meeting Room

MEMBERS PRESENT: Scott Rogers, Chair
George Brenckle, Vice Chair
Tim Kaelin, Clerk
Janice Hight
Jeff Knight

MEMBERS ABSENT: Robert D’Amico

TOWN: Timothy McInerney, Town Administrator
Jason Little, Finance Director
Ernest Houle, Superintendent-Director
Virginia Simms George, Assabet Valley Regional Vocational District School Committee
Gregory Martineau, Superintendent of Schools
Rebecca Pellegrino, Public Schools of Northborough and Southborough Director of Finance
Kelly Guenette, Northborough School Committee Chair

OTHER: NA

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

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

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm by Chair, Scott Rogers.

1. Public Comment

There were no comments from the public.

2. Approval of Minutes: February 29, 2024 [CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE](#)

Motion to Approve Meeting Minutes as Submitted without Modification:
Initiated by Janice Hight.

Motion Seconded: By George Brenckle.

Vote: Scott Rogers called for a vote to approve the February 29, 2024, Meeting Minutes; it resulted in unanimous approval with all present members voting “aye.”

PLEASE NOTE: George Brenckle highlighted that there was a substantial discussion regarding the police department staffing and the handling of an increased volume of calls during the February 29, 2024, meeting. George Brenckle did not suggest that the minutes be amended, just that it would be beneficial to note, and that the discussion can be viewed online for those interested. Scott Rogers mentioned that the meeting's recording had been linked in the minutes, along with specific presentations.

3. Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School FY2025 Budget Presentation
(Presented by Ernest Houle)



The FY25 Assabet Proposed Budget Presentation outlines the budgetary considerations and plans for the Assabet Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District. Here are the key points summarized:

Introduction: Ernie Houle emphasized a commitment to transparency and fiscal responsibility in developing the FY'25 budget, aiming to meet Net School Spending Requirements and address pre-COVID-19 service levels and staffing, including integrating two grant-funded positions into the general budget.

Budget Overview: The budget reflects an 8.5% increase over FY'24, amounting to an additional \$2,137,140, driven by cost-of-living adjustments, required obligations, and the final year of a School Bus Transportation contract with a 2.8% increase. Uncertainties exist regarding healthcare costs, but a notable rate increase is anticipated. Plans include establishing a Stabilization Fund and allocating \$250,000 for Capital Improvement expenditures.

Enrollment and Budget Drivers: The budget document highlights a 4.94% enrollment increase (48 additional in-district students) and various factors necessitating budget adjustments, such as curricular gaps for Multilingual Learners and students with disabilities, mental health and special education needs, and inflationary costs affecting Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.

Staffing Adjustments: New positions include a Paraprofessional (Special Education), Athletic Trainer, and Elective Instructor to address increased student needs and maintain educational quality.

Financial Details:

Chapter 70 Funding Aid sees an 8.11% increase (\$738,035),

Minimum Local Contribution rises by 9.35% (\$1,153,548),

A total increase in resources amounting to \$1,885,447 is outlined.

Capital and Operational Budget Considerations: The presentation covers the statutory method of assessment for municipalities, the establishment of a Minimum Local Contribution (MLC), and plans for capital debt assessment with a focus on transparency and meeting statutory obligations.

Revenue and Expenditure Plans: These plans detail a breakdown of revenues from state aid, community contributions, and other sources, projecting an 8.5% increase in total estimated revenues to \$27,425,514. Expenditure plans encompass various functional areas, including administration, instruction, and maintenance, with strategic investments in health insurance and electricity to manage costs effectively.

Stabilization Fund: The presentation concludes with the proposal to establish a Stabilization Fund for the Assabet Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District, highlighting the need for sustainable capital improvement financing and detailing the required approval process from member communities.

This comprehensive budget presentation underscores Assabet Valley's efforts to balance fiscal responsibility with the need to enhance educational services and infrastructure, reflecting a thoughtful approach to addressing the evolving needs of its students and community.

Discussion / Comments:

Janice Hight, Ernie Houle, Jeff Knight, Scott Rogers, and George Brenckle discussed the FY25 budget for a vocational technical school district, focusing on how the budget is determined and how it impacts member communities, specifically Northborough's ability to contribute financially. Ernie Houle explained that there is a complex formula used to calculate the minimum local contribution (MLC) based on community wealth, the Chapter 70 Foundation formula, and how these affect the budget. The conversation covered enrollment changes, budget drivers, staffing adjustments, the statutory method of assessment, and specific financial details including increases in Chapter 70 funding aid and local contributions.

Key discussion topics included:

- Northborough's relative ability to pay compared to other member communities.
- The state's consistent formula across school districts for calculating assessments and contributions.
- The proposed budget aims to return to pre-COVID-19 service levels, reflecting an 8.5% increase over the previous fiscal year.
- Strategies for managing increased student enrollment, special education needs, and inflationary costs.
- Introduction of a Stabilization Fund to address future capital improvements and equipment purchases, given the unreliability of grants and out-of-district tuition as sustainable funding sources.

The discussion also touched on the admissions process for the vocational school, emphasizing a lottery system post-interview, and the challenges of meeting urgent needs or projects without sustainable funding. The conversation concluded with a detailed explanation of the rationale and mechanics behind creating a stabilization fund to proactively manage capital expenses and equipment needs.

4. Northborough K-8 Schools FY2025 Budget Presentation
(Presented by Greg Martineau)



The following summary encapsulates the Northborough PreK-8 School Committee's approach to creating an educationally sound and fiscally responsible budget for FY25, focusing on enhancing staff quality, maintaining capital assets, and meeting diverse learner needs.

Vision and Mission

- Mission: To educate, inspire, and challenge all students.
- Vision: Students will be collaborators, critical and creative thinkers, communicators, socially and civically engaged, growth-oriented, and healthy and balanced.

Budget Process

- A detailed budget process spanning from August to April, including review of budget priorities, preliminary discussions, approvals at various levels, and a public hearing, culminating in the Northborough Town Meeting.

Budget Priorities

- High-Quality Staff: Adding positions like math specialists, health educators, a fifth-grade strings program, maintenance and grounds personnel, a special education team chairperson, instructional technology specialists, a World Language program, and assistant principals.
- Capital Assets: Funding technology replacement cycles, improving classroom technology infrastructure, implementing safety measures, creating outdoor learning spaces, and identifying sustainability initiatives.
- Learner Needs: Supporting optimal student/teacher ratios and fostering culturally responsive classroom practices.

Budget Impacts and ESSER III Phase-Out

- Addressing supplies, materials, textbooks, instructional software costs, and the phase-out of ESSER III funding, which covered expenses like curriculum development and technology updates.

Budget Development

- The budget development process involved iterative revisions from initial requests through to the School Committee's approval, resulting in a 3.99% increase from the FY24 budget.

Proposed Positions and Costs

- A list of proposed positions including special education teachers, educational support professionals, and specialists in various areas, with a total projected cost for these positions.

Budget Offsets

- Significant offsets include Circuit Breaker Special Education reimbursements and savings from retirements and leaves of absence.

Approved Budget

- The FY25 approved budget amounts to \$29,119,597, marking a 3.99% increase over the FY24 budget.

Instructional and Other Materials Included in Budget

- Investment in digital licenses, curriculums for various subjects, social-emotional learning programs, and specific educational roles like a health or math educator at the elementary level.

Historical Budget Increases vs. Inflation

- A comparison of historical budget increases to inflation rates, underscoring the district's commitment to managing finances responsibly while aiming to enhance the educational environment and outcomes for students.

Discussion / Comments:

George Brenckle and Greg Martineau discussed the shift from a capital purchase model to a subscription model for educational resources, specifically textbooks and instructional software. Greg Martineau highlighted that the subscription model offers more consistent budgeting, avoiding the high costs associated with periodic bulk purchases of textbooks. This change is seen as advantageous because it not only reduces capital expenditure but also ensures that educational content remains current, addressing the issue of outdated material in physical textbooks over time. The conversation also touched on the phase-out of ESSER funding, emphasizing strategic expenditure to avoid creating budget deficits. George Brenckle and Greg Martineau acknowledged the industry's move away from print resources, with publishers increasingly favoring digital formats, which necessitates the shift to subscription models for access to up-to-date educational content. Jeff Knight inquired about the prevalence of traditional textbook usage, to which Greg Martineau responded that while it's becoming rare, some levels of education might still see it, but the trend is decidedly towards digital subscriptions.

As the conversation continued, Greg Martineau explained the budgeting process for the Public Schools of Northborough, highlighting various aspects such as the use of ESSER funds, the budget increase from FY 24, and the introduction of new positions like math interventionists and the reestablishment of a Strings program. Greg Martineau discussed the thought process behind these decisions, aiming to avoid creating structural deficits while acknowledging the reality of financial constraints.

Scott Rogers inquired about strategies for integrating new positions through attrition, to which Greg Martineau responded affirmatively, detailing how savings from retirements, and hiring at lower salary levels enable the addition of new roles in a cost-effective manner.

Greg Martineau outlined significant budget offsets, including circuit breaker special education reimbursements and savings from retirements and leaves of absence, which collectively contribute to moderating the budget increase.

Scott Rogers asked about the percentage of costs reimbursed through circuit breaker offsets, prompting Greg Martineau to explain the reimbursement structure and its significance in covering expenses for out-of-district special education placements.

The conversation also touched on enrollment trends and projections, with Greg Martineau noting a past decline but anticipating an increase over the next decade. Janice Hight raised a question about the impact of families housed in the emergency shelter on school enrollment, leading Greg to share the district's experience with enrolling students from these families, the additional support provided, and the positive outcomes observed.

George Brenckle asked about the availability of enrollment and school performance data, which Greg Martineau confirmed will be shared, emphasizing the district's proactive approach to planning for future needs based on enrollment trends and potential impacts from community developments.

Overall, the conversation reflected on the Public Schools of Northborough's strategic and mindful approach to budgeting, staffing, and planning, with a focus on maintaining educational quality and fiscal responsibility amidst evolving challenges and opportunities.

5. Algonquin Regional High School FY2025 Budget Presentation



(Presented by Greg Martineau)

The following summary illustrates the district's commitment to maintaining high educational standards while managing fiscal responsibilities, including strategic planning for future capital needs, and ensuring the social, emotional, and academic growth of students.

Budget Process: Outlined from August through April, involves reviews of budget priorities, discussions with town administrators, preliminary budget submissions, and approvals leading up to public hearings and town meetings in Southborough and Northborough.

Approved Budget Priorities:

- Empowering Learners: Implementing instructional practices that offer rigorous, innovative, and relevant learning experiences.
- Equity of Opportunity: Expanding experiential learning for juniors and seniors.
- Healthy and Balanced Learners: Focusing on the social, emotional, and physical well-being of students.
- Educator Learning and Leadership: Adding a Special Education Team Chairperson position.
- Finance and Operations Support: Aiming for net zero, expanding solar arrays, creating a Special Education Stabilization Fund, using field rental revenues for athletic complex maintenance, and developing contributions to the OPEB unfunded liability.

Budget Impacts: Includes costs related to supplies and materials, special education tuition and transportation, insurance, and the phase-out of ESSER funding.

ESSER III FY24 Expenses: Utilized for student and staff devices, tutoring, and translations, totaling \$142,135.83.

Budget Increase: From FY24's \$26,590,346 to a recommended budget of \$27,871,426, marking a 4.82% increase.

Budget Offsets and Increases: Circuit Breaker reimbursements and adjustments in special education, alongside increases in tech infrastructure, retirement system contributions, and other areas.

Significant Budget Reductions: Achieved through Circuit Breaker reimbursements, staff reductions due to enrollment, special education adjustments, and other operational efficiencies.

Capital Stabilization Fund Policy: Outlines the process for funding and using the Capital Stabilization Fund for large or unforeseen capital projects, with a target reserve level for emergencies set at 1% - 2.5% of the annual operating budget.

Discussion / Comments:

During Superintendent Ernest Houle's presentation, the complexities of the funding formula for education was mentioned, noting its impact based on enrollment changes. Jason Little mentioned previous efforts to understand the formula, highlighting its reliance on enrollment, with Northborough and Southborough often appearing equivalent in per-pupil costs. Greg Martineau confirms that enrollment fluctuations significantly affect community assessments, mentioning that recent years have shown consistent assessments between Northborough and Southborough without any manipulation. Jeff Knight underscored that the formula offers no discretion in its application—it's purely mathematical. Jason Little added that the only notable

variance comes from the 8th-grade graduation rate, where Northborough almost always sees a 100% transition rate to high school, whereas Southborough's rate is lower. Greg Martineau noted efforts to predict enrollment based on 8th graders' plans, mentioning a recent increase in Southborough 8th graders choosing Algonquin for high school, reflecting positively on the school's perceived value.

Financial Strategies and Planning – Presented by Rebecca Pellegrino

Rebecca Pellegrino discussed the financial strategies and planning for the upcoming fiscal years within the school district, focusing on bond anticipation notes, capital projects, and the establishment of a Capital Stabilization Fund.

Rebecca Pellegrino explained that Bond anticipation notes have been issued for current projects, with interest-only payments planned for FY25 and FY26. Permanent financing will commence in FY27, leading to a one-year overlap of debt assessments for a renovation project and a new Athletic Facility, with the renovation debt dropping off in FY28.

Scott Rogers asked for clarification on the financial impact of these projects on the average single-family home, with Greg Martineau acknowledging the need to review the calculations. Scott Rogers suggests that the community is accustomed to a certain tax impact level, which will be briefly exceeded due to overlapping project costs.

Jason Little provided further context on the debt assessments' amounts, mentioning past financial adjustments that have affected consistent debt levels over the years.

Greg Martineau outlined the specific capital projects planned, emphasizing the importance of these investments in maintaining the school's infrastructure and the overall goal of sustaining high-quality educational experiences at Algonquin.

Jeff Knight inquired about the process for estimating the costs of capital projects and whether bids have been sought, with Greg confirming that current figures are estimates based on vendor consultations.

Concerning transportation, Jeff Knight questioned the proportion of students requiring special education transportation out of the district, to which Greg Martineau and Becky Pellegrino responding that it involves approximately 20-25 students, including some within-district students requiring specialized transport.

Greg Martineau discussed the efforts in 2018 to establish a Capital Stabilization Fund, which was approved in Northborough but not Southborough. They plan to propose it again to Southborough voters to create a financial reserve for emergency repairs and small capital projects, stressing that \$400,000 is a modest sum for maintaining a 350,000 square foot building.

Scott Rogers and Greg Martineau further discussed the potential for a \$400,000 annual capital plan and the parameters of the stabilization fund policy, emphasizing its role in funding capital projects and not serving as a savings account for unspecified future projects.

Rebecca Pellegrino clarified the school committee policy on the stabilization fund, indicating a target reserve level based on a percentage of the district's operating budget.

Greg Martineau concluded by mentioning the availability of budget booklets for detailed review and encourages reaching out with any questions for further clarification.

6. Town Budget Update (Presented by Jason Little)



Jason Little provided a budget update to the Select Board on Monday, March 18, 2024. Jason Little highlighted the key points for the Appropriations Committee. Jason Little emphasized the town's position in terms of single-family home rankings among surrounding communities, showing that it's in the middle, with Southborough and Westborough above and others below. This graphical representation aimed to contextualize the town's tax rate relative to its neighbors, indicating a desire for a lower tax rate which corresponds to a higher state ranking.

Jason Little reiterated known revenue sources for the town, with tax receipts being the primary source, followed by state aid, free cash, overlay surplus (proposed for the capital plan this year), and local receipts, which have been adjusted based on investment income performance. Other funds mentioned included recreation transfer funds.

Jason Little discussed fixed costs and non-departmental requests within the town's budget, highlighting a health insurance increase adjusted to 4.4% or \$272,000 with an 8% premium increase, due in part to their joint purchasing arrangement with the schools and the town of Southborough. The retirement system assessment increase was notably higher for the town due to more employees being subject to the Worcester Regional Retirement system.

The presentation concluded with an overview of town department budget requests reflecting a 7.79% increase, with some adjustments still being made, particularly within the administrator's office. The overall projected town budget increase is 7.82%, including new positions to address identified needs, such as adding patrol staff based on statistical justification.

Discussion / Comments:

Tim Kaelin raised concerns about the lack of an organizational-wide staffing study that was proposed by a previous town administrator to assess staffing needs across departments. Jason Little acknowledged the potential value of such a study but notes the delay due to the transition in town administration and emphasizes the practical challenges and delays it could introduce. Jason Little suggested that immediate staffing needs, identified through data and administrative priorities, have been addressed in lieu of the study. For example, the police department's staffing needs were supported by comparative data on call volumes and officer ratios.

Tim Kaelin expressed disappointment that the staffing study hasn't been conducted or planned, highlighting the potential for analytical support in justifying new positions and managing departmental requests equitably. Scott Rogers acknowledges the value of a staffing study for future planning, suggesting it's not too late to undertake one to support future staffing decisions and ensure community support and understanding.

Town Budget Update (cont.)

Jason Little discussed the general fund budget, capital plan, reserves, and the anticipated tax impact based on the current budget projections. Key points included:

- **Capital Plan:** The capital requests have already been shared and discussed.
- **Reserves and Free Cash:** The reserves are around 8%, consistent with previous levels, which is expected to be viewed favorably by bond rating agencies.
- **Tax Impact Reduction:** The tax impact projection has decreased to below 7%, now at 6.9% or \$619, which is lower than what was initially presented.
- **Budget Development:** Jason Little emphasized that while the budget is still being developed and subject to minor changes, major shifts are unlikely. The school budgets,

having been approved by their committees, and fixed costs are expected to remain largely the same. Any potential reductions would likely come from reconsidering additional staff requests.

- **Budget Goalposts:** Initial discussions considered various scenarios:
 - A minimal increase in the town budget by 3.5% alongside the school requests would already allocate all available revenues, potentially leading to a \$464 tax increase (5.2%).
 - Initial department requests suggested an 11% town budget increase before adjustments, highlighting the administration's priorities.
 - A 10% health insurance increase would have led to a higher \$745 tax increase or 8.4%.

7. **Review Meeting Schedule** [CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE](#) 

AND

8. **Next Meeting – March 21, 2024**

The committee unanimously agreed on the next meeting date of March 21, 2024, at the earlier time of 6:30 p.m.

9. **Any other Business to Come Before the Committee**

Reserve Fund Transfer Request: The Appropriations Committee was requested to transfer funds for the following two urgent needs:

Police Station Project: Additional repairs beyond the planned painting are needed due to significant wood rot found at the police station. Architectural services are required to draft bid specifications for the project, as per Massachusetts General Law. With the original funds for painting likely insufficient for these services, and to avoid delays, a transfer of \$5,000 is requested to cover the cost, pending town meeting approval. Re-siding the building is seen as the most cost-effective way to extend its life.

Motion to approve the transfer of \$5,000 for architectural services to draft bid specifications:

Initiated by Janice Hight.

Motion Seconded: By George Brenckle.

Vote: Scott Rogers called for a vote to approve the above-mentioned transfer; it resulted in unanimous approval with all present members voting “aye.”

Plotter Replacement: A critical plotter used by the Department of Public Works and other departments for printing large maps and plans has unexpectedly failed. \$10,000 is requested to replace the plotter, which is also key to efforts to digitize large documents for better storage and access.

Motion to approve the transfer of \$10,000 for plotter: Initiated by Janice Hight.

Motion Seconded: By Tim Kaelin.

Vote: Scott Rogers called for a vote to approve the above-mentioned transfer; it resulted in unanimous approval with all present members voting "aye."

There was no further business presented to the committee.

Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn Meeting: Initiated by Janice Hight.

Motion Seconded: By Tim Kaelin.

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

Meeting adjourned at 9:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Angie Sowden
Executive Assistant to the
Town Administrator / Select Board