

TOWN OF PEMBROKE  
APPROVED  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES  
08 MARCH 2022

Linda Peterson, Chairperson opened the meeting of the Advisory Committee at Town Hall at 6:32PM on 08 March 2022.

Also present were: Sandra Beaton, Robert Kenney, Liz Benotti, Matthew Rushing, Stephen Walsh and John Scholl

**Absent:** Tim Landy, Kristi Cullinane

**Guest:** Bill Chenard, Town Manager; Peg Struzik, Town Clerk; Cathy Salmon, Chief Assessor; Kathleen McCarthy, Town Collector/Treasurer; Michael Buckley, Town Accountant

Linda opened the meeting and welcomed Bill Chenard.

Bill outlined his FY23 Budget Update for tonight which he calls his financial triangle along with the Town Clerk. He will present the budget numbers while the department heads will present their organizational structure and operation. These departments don't have a lot of changes to these budgets.

- Town Clerk, Elections, Registration - Peg Struzik
- Assessors - Cathy Salmon
- Town Collector/Treasurer - Kathleen McCarthy
- Town Accountant - Michael Buckley
- Information Technology – Bill Chenard
- Town Utilities – Bill Chenard

**Town Clerk** is an elected official; this is a proposed budget for the elected salary but Town Meeting must vote that salary. Wages & Salaries are clerical and contractual. FY23 we do have a Federal election. He has concerns about the temporary employee budget but will monitor closely. General Expenses, slight change due to election year in printing, this is not consistent year to year due to elections. Temporary employees' budget is conservative but monitoring this very closely as the drivers for this is early election and things outside the normal election day. Registration, not a big change.

**Peg Struzik** – The 2020 Census mandated a change to precinct 3, we are over by 25. Precinct 3 will remain the same and Precinct 3A will be added for those 25. All precincts will be in the same building but for this mandate we do a full set of everything. Peg said they needed ballot boxes and were just able to pick up \$7,000 worth of equipment for \$2,200. We now need this for the new precinct; everybody has been notified. As far as Federal elections, we're looking at day of registration and will have full mail out ballots. We don't know yet who's going to do that work until we hear from the state. Early voting will be fine-tuned in the spring. We'll start working on the November election also in the spring. Early voting costs us \$3,300 a week for a staff of five; we'll probably have two, maybe three weeks of early voting. For the September and November election if we have to do Saturday's that will be an additional \$1,043. The September election is the day after Labor Day. Peg has a full time Assistant Town Clerk. Bill noted that by splitting the precinct the town gets an extra state rep which he can call for services. Not only do we have Josh Cutler, we now have Kathleen LaNatra. Having more than one state rep is advantageous. However, it's a lot of work to have another precinct.

## Questions

### What's driving this cost?

Labor – we pay \$150-\$180 per worker a day

### Town election on the salary; it is always annual?

It's based on the fiscal year. This budget could have a flex point of \$10,000. If they max us out we likely will be short \$10,000. If it can't be funded from a year-end transfer, it would be funded by the Reserve Fund.

**Assessors** - The first line of the budget is the Board of Assessors elected officials' salaries, so that gets voted at town meeting. The first block on the Wages & Salaries are all contracts. The one-line item Bill added is for Vacation Buyback and you'll see this in a number of budgets; this is contractual. General Expenses are up slightly; the biggest one, computer maintenance. You'll see an increase in a couple of budgets. Some of the COVID stuff is a positive; online permitting, mapping software in the assessor's office, these are some of the good things that resulted and we're not going to get rid of them.

**Cathy Salmon** – We handle a lot of things in our office, property tax exemptions, property tax deferrals. All the chapterland, the farmland, etc. The largest thing her office does is assess the property; Pembroke has 7,000 parcels. Last year there was a little over 3.2M. Their job is to value and revalue each and every year. They collect all the data to set value in town. With a 75M budget 60% comes from the property tax. The Assessor's office works in conjunction with the town other offices. When they value the property, they submit it over to the Collector's office who collects it. They work with the Town Accountant on the tax recap that's submitted to the Department of Revenue to get the town's tax rate to send out the tax bills. Cathy reports to the Town Manager, Board of Assessors and the Department of Revenue. We are a small office with an Assistant Assessor, a Principal Clerk and Principal Lister.

### Questions

#### **Home values of property, how is it assessed. Is it based on market condition?**

Cathy said property values always follow the market. They assess on 100% of market value based on the previous January 1st. When they visit a property under construction, they assess on what is complete by June 30<sup>th</sup>. The town currently has three houses and two parcels of land and for sale. The demand is still very high. The Assessor's office is notified when a building permit is issued via the internal shared online permitting system and visit these properties.

**Town Collector/Treasurer** - Wages & Salaries are contractual. We have added the Vacation Buyback line item as well. Where we have seen the buyback, we have added it to the budget. General Expenses are pretty consistent. Kathleen does a really nice job managing the budget.

**Kathleen McCarthy** has an Assistant Treasurer and Assistant Collector and two Principal Clerks. She currently has one opening for a principal clerk. The Collector's office processes all excise (20,000 a year) and real estate tax, water and trash bills, demand notices, warrants, liens, tax titles for uncollected real estate taxes. They also manage recycling stickers and trash bins. The Treasurer's office tracks every penny coming into the town. The town has over 70 different bank accounts and follows the Massachusetts General Laws for investing funds. They manage payroll and benefits for the school and town, deferred compensation, 403B, Flex Spending Accounts, Health Insurance, Pension Plans and do the billing for all the plans. Her office manages the borrowing process for the Betterment program for residents with a failed Title V. She manages the borrowing process for the Town Meeting approval and loans for residents. It's a great benefit for the residents. They handle the Bond process for the town.

### Questions:

#### **Salary increases for 2020-2021, why 11% increase in department head and 9% increase in the clericals?**

There was a change in the structure of the department for the Assistant; she moved out of the union.

#### **What is the difference between Performance Appraisal and Performance Improvement?**

Performance appraisal is a contractual situation where they receive 2.5% increase on their salary after their fifth year and Performance Improvement is reimbursement for professional development for the clerical union for any courses or classes they might take.

#### **Why do we send our tax bill payments to Woburn?**

Bill said this is a lock box procedure and a cost savings. If we collected this ourselves we would spend additional money to employ 2-3 more full-time staff members

#### **What is the cost of benefits, healthcare, etc. for employees.**

Bill said it's very difficult to answer that as we have employees that are at the \$40,000 range and employees at the \$200,000 range (on the school side). The Health insurance plan can cost from \$800 - \$14,000. The Town's Health Insurance is a 75%/25% ratio. We want to be able to retain our superstars. He makes sure everyone knows their entire compensation package.

**Does the town do annual compensation statements?**

Bill said he does not produce it for every employee. Definitely for employees in the Collective Bargaining Unions and those that have contracts with the town. The town doesn't have a robust HR department or an HR department. Part of it's in the Town Manager's office and part of it's in the Town Treasurer's office.

**How many open positions do we have?**

We have five town wide; this does not include the schools.

**Town Accountant** budget is lean and mean but they do a great job. Wages & Salaries are contractual. General Expenses – Computer Maintenance is the largest expense; general expense total going down from last year.

**Michael Buckley** said he has been with the town for a while. He has an Assistant Town Accountant. The success of his office is all departments work well together. His office manages the financial records, balance sheet, budget and prepares the accounts payable warrants. The Treasurer signs the checks for the warrants weekly but the Town Accountant and the Town Manager must approve before the checks go out. One is done for Accounts Payable and one for Payroll. The Town of Pembroke is the biggest business in Pembroke and the largest employer. Last year our Payroll was 34M town and school; our expenses were 94M. The Treasurer took in 123M last year. He reports to the Town Manager, Department of Revenue, Standards and Poor for our bond rating and an there is an external audit completed each year.

MMA and Lieutenant Governor put out a report a couple years ago on a real shortage in our field. Kids don't go to college or get of high school and say they want to be a Town Accountant or Town Treasurer. The officers of Governor, Lieutenant Governor and the MMA are working on trying to attract more people into the industry. That's an issue that Bill is working on. The discussion continued with Bill and the members of the committee.

**Questions:**

**Why the increase in Computer Maintenance 2020 – 2021?**

This was due to the implementation of a new financial system, Munis. We are all now on the same system. This was worth the money spent.

**Did the Chamber of Commerce meeting take place?**

Yes – last Friday, 3/4/22.

**Information Technology** – Is managed through a contract. The licensing line item is for software.

Computers had to be upgraded and we will be going through another round of upgrades. We will purchase robust laptops and use the keyboards and mice instead of desktop computers. We were able to use CARES ACT funding last year. The total budget is \$104,900.

**Questions**

**Did the upgrades include the Schools?**

No – just the town; they were already on it.

**Will the IT budget stabilize?**

Yes – it should stabilize in the next year or so after we get the community center up and running.

**Town Wide Electricity** – Bill always analyzes utility costs and looks for ways to save money. We have a large solar array; he is a big fan of Solar. We will be introducing a new array of solar on the town side is the Hobomock one where we're going to save \$2400 a year.

He shared a list of town buildings for municipal energy. He plans to start combining department energy costs so he can look at trend lines. The budget of \$205,350 is a good number. He's doing an analysis on the Library and Fire Department to look at their numbers.

Bill took a look at solar and shared a graph he put together to outline how Solar is producing. The town receives a credit every month. If we have a good year the overall savings would be \$91,455. If we have a bad year it would be down around \$17,000.

### **Questions**

#### **How is the National Grid Aggregate doing with residents?**

It's working out great – the cost per kilowatt hour range from \$.12- \$.14 a kilowatt hour. The solar aggregate for the town is right around \$10.5.

#### **Residents are receiving information about solar?**

Bill said Mass works is offering solar. If any resident is considering this they should do their research, check references on the companies. He is very knowledgeable about solar and is available to anyone that has questions.

#### **Why the fluctuation with Street Lighting?**

No meters on street lights and the rates did change. We don't have solar street lights yet but we are working with National Grid to potentially upgrade those. We're going to look at the solar credits. The way it's billed is on the average hours of the season. We have mostly high-pressure sodium lights that are starting to age out. Maybe one or two Mercury that use a lot of energy. We want to move these to LED.

Bill said next week he will review the FY23 budgets for Animal Control, Fire and Police.

Linda and committee members thanked Bill, Peg Struzik, Cathy Salmon, Kathleen McCarthy and Michael Buckley for their presentations tonight.

Upon motion moved by John Scholl and 2<sup>nd</sup> by Robert Kenney to approve the meeting minutes of March 2, 2022

**VOTED:** To accept the meeting minutes of March 2, 2022. John Scholl, Robert Kenney, Liz Benotti, Sandra Beaton, Linda Peterson supported the motion. Mathew Rushing and Stephen Walsh abstained.

Advisory received an updated copy of the Annual & Special Town Meeting Warrant. Linda asked members if they would like to review on their own and the committee could discuss at a later meeting. Advisory's recommendation is due by April 19, 2022. Liz Benotti asked about the "recall" vote on the Citizen's Petition. Linda said we can't change this but the committee will vote, yes, no or Town Meeting Floor.

Bill said he should have an updated Warrant with all the information for Advisory's next meeting.

The next Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 16, 2022 at 6:30PM Town Hall. Advisory adjourned at 7:45PM.

Respectfully submitted

Stephen Walsh, Clerk