

TOWN OF PEMBROKE  
APPROVED  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES  
25 FEBRUARY 2021

Linda Peterson, Chairperson opened the meeting of the Advisory Committee via Remote ZOOM/PACTV and read the statement pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law at 6:00PM on 25 FEBRUARY 2021.

Also present were: Stephen Walsh, Sandra Beaton, Kristi Cullinane, Matthew Norton, Matthew Rushing, Tim Landy, Robert Kenney and John Scholl

**Guests:** William Chenard, Town Manager; Michael Buckley, Town Accountant; Kathleen McCarthy, Town Collector/Treasurer; Catherine Salmon, Chief Assessor

Linda welcomed Bill Chenard, Town Manager for a continued discussion of FY22 Budget.

- Linda asked Bill when he thought Town Hall may reopen. Bill said they're currently having discussions but today Pembroke saw 15 new cases of COVID-19 and are now back in yellow. He noted that February is Pembroke's 3<sup>rd</sup> highest month for COVID-19 cases. He recommended monitoring the Pembroke website for updates.
- Linda recognized Robert Kenney, the newest member to join Advisory.

Bill started his presentation by sharing his screen outlining his budget review process with Advisory. Tonight he invited three members of his Finance team to present an overview of their department and responsibilities, Michael Buckley, Town Accountant; Kathleen McCarthy, Town Collector/Treasurer; Catherine Salmon, Chief Assessor.

In addition, Bill will discuss Legal Services, Municipal Inspectional Services, Plymouth County Retirement, Debt Services and Unemployment Compensation.

In the upcoming scheduled meetings with Advisory, Bill will review FY22 Budgets for:

- Select Board, Town Manager, Town Wide Utilities, Insurance, Medicare & Information Technology
- DPW, Snow & Ice, Boards, Committees and Commissions
- Police, Fire, Animal Control and Emergency Services
- Recreation/Community Center; Library; Council on Aging; Board of Health; Town Clerk/Elections; Veteran's Services

Michael Buckley, Town Accountant shared his screen with the committee:

- Mike shared his organizational chart. He is part-time in his Town Accountant role and has a full time Assistant Town Accountant.
- The Town Accountant is responsible for maintaining the town's financial records.
- The Town of Pembroke is the largest business in town with 600+ employees; 123M in revenue; 34M in payroll; 89M in expenses; 180M in Assets; 123M in Liabilities.
- No payments can be made by the Treasurer without approval of Town Accountant and Town Manager. At the same time the Town Manager and Town Accountant can have nothing to do with the Payroll system and Banking. Town Meeting gives each department up to a certain amount to spend and it's against the law for the department to go over that amount. There are exceptions for snow & ice, pandemics, etc.
- The town is regulated by the DOR; report to them multiple times a year. The town gets the tax rate certified by the DOR annually.
- His office is also an internal resource to the Town Manager, Town Departments, Board and Commissions, Residents and Taxpayers.
- Ongoing goals; recently converted to MUNIS accounting system and hope to have all departments using. They also plan to rewrite the Chart of Accounts and have a restart. CARES reimbursement is close to being tapped out  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way there. Professional Development of staff.

Questions: Kristi Cullinane asked how long it will take to have all town departments using MUNIS. Mike said about one year.

<sup>1</sup>The Chairperson did not vote on this motion

Catherine Salmon, Chief Assessor shared her screen with committee:

The Board of Assessors is responsible for the valuation of real estate and personal property for the purpose of levying the property tax.

- Cathy shared her Organizational chart – her team includes herself, Chief Assessor; Assistant Assessor; Principal Clerk, Principal Lister. She reports to both the Town Manager and the Elected Board of Assessors.
- Everything they do falls under Mass. General Law and are regulated by the DOR.
- FY21 Budget – amount raised 71.5M/62% comes from the property tax
- The town has 6,943 parcels of property – FY21 value was over 3B dollars
- The Assessors are responsible to value and revalue each and every parcel each and every year.
- Data Collection – keep strong public awareness of what's happening. Stay up to date on Mass General Laws and communicating those laws to the tax payers. Inspections, Projects and entering Data collection.
- Data Analysis – real estate/sales market and economic factors/investment market.
- Evaluation development
- Data Quality Reviews
- Tax Commitments/Reconciliation with Tax Collector
- Abatements
- Motor Vehicle Excise Tax
- New Growth
- Property Tax Exemptions
- Tax Exempt Organization filings
- Chapter 61, 61A, 61B filings and Liens (farm land, open space and forestry plans)
- Abutters List
- Registry Recordings – Deeds, Plans
- Subdivisions, Plans, Mapping Addresses

Questions:

Linda asked if property assessments are completed every three years and when you contact a home owner do they ever say they won't let you in. Cathy said in the early 90's it changed to revalue every year, it's too long to go three years to stay up with the market level. Assessors are required to go out and get into a property to value it but the homeowner is not required to let them in. Cathy said you'd be surprised by the amount of homeowners that allow them in. What she has found over many years is that people don't want to pay taxes but they want to know that the taxes they pay are fair. She lets them know that they're trying to get the data correct. Sometimes people won't let them in but it's infrequent.

John Scholl asked if the line item on the Assessment budget includes the Assessment work. Bill said yes.

Kathleen McCarthy/Treasurer/Collector shared her screen with the committee

Kathleen shared her organizational chart – her team includes herself, Treasurer/Collector; Assistant Treasurer; Assistant Collector and three Principal Clerks.

- Town's Main Revenue Collectors and billing cycle: Real Estate \$42,238,159 (4 Quarters); Personal Property \$603,605 (4 Quarters); Motor Vehicle \$2,748,644 (different cycles); Water \$2,982,598 (twice a year); Trash \$2,163,920 (semi-annually).
- Collection Process: payments received through direct mail; online payment; lockbox; in person; drop box. Normal billing; demand cycle; warrant cycle; registry flagging; real estate liens; tax taking.
- Trash Collection Process is handled by the Tax Collectors office; billing, abatements, new construction research, collections, liens, refunds, issuance of bins, recycling center passes.
- Weekly/monthly/annual balancing
- Unpaid Real Estate Taxes AKA tax title – proceeds go back to free cash.
- Issuance of Municipal Debts and maintaining debt budget
- Payroll/Benefits – expensive and time consuming – just under 800 employees 39M annually paid out
- Treasurer Cash Handling – handles every single penny that comes through the town

<sup>1</sup>The Chairperson did not vote on this motion

- Septic Betterment Program Administration (through Mass Clean Water Trust) – approximately 70 accounts – it's very good for the town.
- Pond Treatment Administration
- DOR reporting

Bill shared his screen and will talk about what it costs to fund these three departments:

**Town Accountant** budget on page 71 of the FY22 budget book. Computer maintenance is for MUNIS; the chart of accounts was set up differently; early next year the chart of accounts will be updated. He noted that the town doesn't have an IT staff on site; we rely on contractors for that.

**Chief Assessor** – has a dual reporting structure; Elected Board of Assessors and to Town Manager. They are one of only two elected boards that are paid. General expenses – most are not changing but wanted to talk about certification expense for mapping software. Cathy and staff found this mapping software (NearMap) and they were able to obtain and install. This software provides new growth information. He credits Cathy and her staff for finding this software and getting it installed. This software is used by several departments such as Planning Board, Municipal Inspections, Zoning enforcement officers, Town Manager's office, DPW and Police. This software will be a permanent addition.

**Treasurer/Collector** – salaries are contractual. General expenses; Bill and Kathleen McCarthy took a look at historical data and reviewed several times, we're comfortable with the budget numbers.

#### **Questions:**

Linda asked if Dept. Head salaries are set by contracts. Bill said yes - this is something we may change but the previous Town Manager executed several contracts that the town is responsible for over the next 3-5 years. John Scholl thanked all presenters for the quick overview. He asked if there are any additional fees and charges relating to extra projects in that department and on the treasury side as well. For example, Assessors fee when someone buys a new house. Bill said the town does not get an assessors fee. Massachusetts does not do it; he believes it's restricted.

Linda said in talking about revenues is there was anything we could do to implement or enhance the revenue to the town. Bill said we have local options in economic development and new growth but also the Select Board voted to apply for a grant from the Old Colony Planning Council to help us do some economic development. Master Planning will be presented at future meeting. Linda asked about fee structure. Bill said they look at them regularly.

Linda thanked Michael, Catherine and Kathleen.

Linda asked if Bill could combine these presentations. Bill said he will, it's the first time we did it this way.

**Building Maintenance** – Bill is going to do some consolidation. Town Manager is in charge of building maintenance and covers the Town Hall, Recreation Department, Council on Aging and Police. The Fire department does their own maintenance. There are four custodians; one is on disability due to a work injury. Linda asked about vacation buyback. Bill said you can't buy back 100% but you have to use it or buy it back or you will lose it. Bill reviewed the general expenses and most are associated with Town Hall. Linda let Bill know the document he is sharing is dated February 8<sup>th</sup>. The most recent budget is dated February 20<sup>th</sup>. Bill apologized.

**Legal Services** – Legal counsel is a requirement; we use KP Law. The town has reviewed legal counsel and costs and looked at other counsel options. KP is one of the premiers in the state and represents 35% of the communities in Massachusetts. Their rate is going up \$10 per hour. Bill said this is tracking OK and is watching closely.

**Municipal Inspections** – Bill shared the organization chart (Conservation Commission; Board of Appeals; Planning Board; Board of Health). Software Maintenance increase due to COVID needed to develop online permitting software. Travel meeting line item is combined with mileage, dues, memberships and conferences.

**Debt Service** – Must pay; borrowed the money and if we default our bond rating will go through the roof. Two categories – Excluded Principal & Interest & within Levy Debt Principal

<sup>1</sup>The Chairperson did not vote on this motion

**Plymouth County Retirement Summary** – This is going up. It's based on investments and salaries. They did complete back to back actuarial studies. FY23 we will see a large increase and need to plan and hope for a lot of new growth. We pay in July for an interest savings. Linda asked about return on investment as there was a great discrepancy. Is that related to OPEB? Bill said yes it's over 100 pages and gives you the detail. Stephen Walsh asked if this would be a good time for us to look for another alternative. Bill said we could look at it and undertake that next year. We're tied to Plymouth County Retirement for those employees that have already retired. It's probably not worth it to manage it ourselves. Bob Kenney asked if it is only the interest changing this fluctuation. Bill said its multiple factors such as, number of employees; what they receive; the interest rate and rate of returns. Bob also asked if we are projecting hiring staff in FY22. Bill said no major adds and on the school side due to remote learning we may see some but Bill will let the school speak to that themselves. John Scholl asked if all employees are eligible for defined benefit program. Bill said we have changed our benefit plans. Not all employees are eligible. Most are but quite a few are not such as part-time employees not working enough hours.

**Unemployment Compensation** – some of FY20 costs rolled into FY21; for mid-year reporting we we're in the \$65,000 range. We're going to be under the \$150,000 but could be in the \$120,000 range. Bob Kenney asked if the money goes into free cash if it is not spent. Bill said yes. Linda asked about Snow & Ice deficit. Bill said it's not good but manageable but hopefully we don't get any more storms.

Bill asked the committee to look at the upcoming budget meeting schedule. Linda asked who is scheduled to meet on 3/11/21. Bill had Advisory meeting on 3/8/21 and 3/11/21. The committee agreed to meeting one night that week on 3/11/21.

Linda asked about the Warrant Articles. Bill said he will group some together and present with the financial data but on many of them he's not the expert on the other articles.

Tim Landy – asked about the Community Center Committee pushing for a new building but said we also have needs in Public Safety, Fire & Police; where are we with the Public Safety Buildings? Bill said he met both the Chiefs and spoke to the Select Board to form a Public Safety Committee. We don't want to lose the opportunity for the Community Center and the potential savings for that and don't want to lose sight of the Public Safety needs. We also have needs in our schools that are going to be large capital costs and the DPW facility. Linda asked how much leeway we have with the debt limit to do Public Safety if we go with the Community Center. Bill said we have borrowing capacity but they're debt exclusion as they are add ons to the tax levy; there are a lot projects that are coming off and is a savings to the residents if you add the debt at that point. Bill will not support a 50M Public Safety Building cost. We don't need to spend that kind of money and if we start to look at a joint Public Safety Building we could cut that cost in half. The schools have infrastructures needs such as replacing boilers and HVAC. The Library is our newest building coming up on 23 years old.

Linda thanked Bill.

Linda asked the committee if they had any suggestions for upcoming budget meetings with Bill. John Scholl suggested that we list on the agenda the categories that are going to be covered for the budget meetings. Sandy asked Linda how she received the updated FY22 budget. Sabrina Chilcott let Linda know that the updated copy is posted on the website. Kristi asked if we could remind Bill to send us the errata sheet.

Upon motion moved by Stephen Walsh and 2<sup>nd</sup> by Mathew Rushing to approve the meeting minutes of January 14, 2021

**VOTED<sup>1</sup>:** To accept the meeting minutes of January 14, 2021 via **Roll Call:** Stephen Walsh YES; Matthew Norton abstained; John Scholl YES; Matthew Rushing YES; Tim Landy abstained; Sandra Beaton YES; Kristi Cullinane YES, Robert Kenney YES

Advisory attended a joint meeting with the Select Board on February 8, 2021 for the FY22 Budget presentation by William Chenard, Town Manager.

<sup>1</sup>The Chairperson did not vote on this motion

Linda acknowledged the committee needs to devote time on the Warrant Articles. Once we get through the Planning Board Articles, there's not really a lot. She noted one article is to expand the Town Moderator term from one year to three years.

Linda was approached by Andrew Sullivan as he would like to schedule a meeting with Advisory to discuss the Community Center Building Article. Linda asked committee members how they want to handle the warrant articles? Maybe review them at the 3/11/21 meeting and then invite Andrew Sullivan to the 3/25/21 meeting. The committee will also need to invite a member of the Planning Board to attend one of Advisory's future meetings to discuss those articles.

Matthew Rushing said to make sure these articles are clear to the town in speaking with Bill Chenard he said the role of the Advisory Committee may be preparing a robust PowerPoint presentation for town meeting. He said if we do, maybe dive them up now and start putting together a shell. He said they did a great amount of work on the building and commends them for that but they're focused on the building. Advisory needs more information to provide a recommendation. The bigger factor is who's going to manage the building, staff the building; what are the programs; what's the revenue and expenses for Recreation and Council on Aging. No one has done that. Linda suggested we set up a list of questions for Andrew and get back to him. Matt thought Advisory should also invite Sue Roach (Recreation Director) and Gretchen Emmetts (COA). Linda said she would send an email to Sue and Gretchen regarding these questions. Matt has the numbers from Sue from 2019 also what is the plan for not having space for a year while the building is being constructed. Linda suggested the committee keep a list of questions for the meeting will be scheduled to discuss the Community Center Article.

Tim suggested we reach out to the Planning Board to have them flush out their Articles. Linda said they present their own articles and have had their public meetings. We should ask them for a complete warrant article. Tim said it was written the same way last year. Linda will reach out to the Planning Board and invite them for 3/25/21.

Sandy asked about the CPC articles and how it's funded. Linda said the state gives the town a percentage about 20%. You'll see on your property tax bill a small amount about 1% over \$300,000 assessment and the state will match. That's what makes up the Community Preservation funding.

Sandy sent the committee an excel tracking document for the Town Meeting Warrant Articles and Special Town Meeting Articles. It's a blank copy, she is sharing a resource.

Sandy asked if anyone knew about the Article the Select Board submitted on the Silver pilot program. Linda did not have an answer for that one, maybe we ask Bill.

The next meeting is scheduled to meet on Thursday, March 11· 2021 at 6:00pm.

Advisory adjourned at 8:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted

Stephen Walsh, Clerk

<sup>1</sup>The Chairperson did not vote on this motion