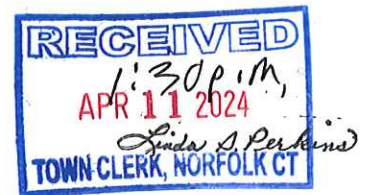


**NORFOLK BOARD OF FINANCE
MINUTES OF APRIL 9, 2024 MEETING**



Members present were: S. Anderson, J. Bickford, M. Kwast, G. Mudge, J. Tarrant and alternates L. Battis and M. Klimkosky.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by S. Anderson.

L. Battis was appointed to fill in for M. Sconyers.

The March 12, 2024 minutes were approved on Motion of J. Tarrant, second by G. Mudge and unanimously approved.

Under correspondence, the Tax Collector's requests for refunds were approved on Motion of J. Bickford, second by J. Tarrant and unanimously approved.

The Tax Collector's Suspense List was approved on Motion of L. Battis, second by J. Tarrant and unanimously approved.

The First Selectman reported that the Town is only spending on essential things because of the flooding last July. The Town needs to address the potential of a significant washout on Ashpohtag Road due to the guardrail leaning severely and the need for shoring up with cement blocks. Evergreen Construction together with the Town crew will accomplish this work.

It was a good winter with \$96,000 used from the salt budget, for which \$160,000 was budgeted. The Town did have to buy a little more with the last two (2) storms and borrowed some, which will need to be replaced at the DOT garage.

The Treasurer reported the Tax Collector is at 98% for all collections; and demand notices and lien notices have been sent out.

The First Selectman reviewed portions of the proposed 2024-2025 Budget, including the Income Summary, through conversations with Chairman Sconyers and G. Sinnamon \$250,000 BOF funds will be put in, rather than the usual \$150,000, in order to bring the increase down, resulting in a mill rate increase of approximately 2.92%.

The General Town Government budget includes a capital item of \$6,000 for a brush truck conversion as the 2010 Ford pick-up is rotted. The school budgets have increased approximately \$572,000, \$230,000 for Botelle and Region 7 has increased approximately \$342,000.

The First Selectman distributed a handout with projects highlighted that Public Works will be doing. The total allocated for roads was \$546,000 and \$40,000 for tree removal. Chip sealing will be completed as well as work on Mills Way, due to damage as a result of the gas spill. The balance in the road budget is \$132,000. Two repairs need to be addressed on both Estey Road (approximately \$36,000) and Roughland Road (estimated at \$150,000). Major tree work will not be able to be accomplished this year, usually the Town spends approximately \$60,000. Minor things will be completed including the sidewalk from the post office to Berkshire Store with Jim Kochiss assisting the town crew.

After elimination of the Defined Benefit Plan, there is approximately \$1.2 million available to pay down debt for the school windows and doors and the ambulance garage at \$367,000; the Town was paying \$135,000 per year, which is no longer in next year's budget.

The First Selectman is working to renegotiate/refinance the loan for Maple Avenue, which is a yearly cost of \$390,000, in order to potentially save \$50,000 per year. The current interest rate is 5.87%.

The Local Capital Improvement Program "LoCip" line has been confirmed at \$47,500.

BOTELLE BOE PRESENTATION:

The Botelle Board of Education amended and passed their revised budget one hour prior to the BOF meeting.

The Botelle BOE has approved a budget increase of 9.54%. The BOE had originally approved a 3.35% increase, however a further 6.9% increase became necessary. The BOE indicated that the previous fiscal year there was less than a 1% increase. Northwestern Regional 7's proposed budget is up 3.78%, with the Town's share up 18.95%, an increase of \$341,847. Many of the increases are due to subscriptions, supplies, contract costs, insurance, etc. The BOE has in the past placed \$22,000 in the non-lapsing account. The BOE recognizes how having fewer students impacts the learning experience and is invested in providing the best education. The actual increase from last year versus this year is \$230,630 with a total budget of \$2,649,086.

The BOE continually applies for grants and tries to keep the budget as tight as possible, even with contractual increases and health insurance nearly doubled. Employees pay a cost-share of 25% for health insurance premiums. Grants help to cover updated educational materials.

The BOF asked that the BOE email the updated budget. One member inquired about sharing services. While the BOE did not recently explore this avenue, the Superintendent indicated many things are shared across the district and a list of shared services will be provided to the BOF. Enrichment is possible through the use of part-time teachers for specials.

The BOF indicated it is a yearly challenge that despite diminishing enrollment, the BOE budget remains stable or increases. The Superintendent relayed that since she began there has been a reduction in classroom teachers, secretaries and custodians and that the enrollment projection for September is higher.

There was a short discussion regarding the new statewide policy changing the entry age for Kindergarten with the Botelle BOE indicating they do not have a blanket policy regarding exceptions.

There was nothing under 2/3 vote.

Under public comment, the First Selectman and BOF discussed a special BOF meeting prior to the April 30th Budget Hearing.

On Motion of J. Tarrant, second by G. Mudge and unanimously approved, the meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer M. Ryan, Secretary