Finance and Warrant Committee

4/5/2018

Dave Roberts, Kevin Hughes, Kevin Preston, John Heffernan, Susan Fay and Marty Lindemann present

Mr. Preston called the meeting to order at 6:35.

The meeting began with a presentation from Tammy Quinn, superintendent of Norfolk agricultural school, and Business Manager Richard Fitzpatrick on the Norfolk Agricultural School budget request.

Ms. Quinn greeted the community and shared some history of the NAS. She explained that 80% of graduates go onto college and many graduate into the workforce. As a county entity, she explained that funding her budget can be complex. Student enrollment is projected at 580 next year, the highest ever.

Mr. Preston asked about the projected budgetary increase of 7.95% from fiscal year 18 to fiscal year 19. Mr. Fitzpatrick explained that FY18’s budget was underfunded due to a mismatch in the rate at which the county dispersed funds. Mr. Preston asked what the percentage increase would be without this mismatch. Mr. Fitzpatrick answered a 2.5% increase in FY18 and a 5.5% in FY19.

Mr. Preston noted that this is a severe increase, especially when compared to our Dedham schools system. Mr. Fitzpatrick stated that there is a reserve increase built into the request to account for possible outcomes in the collective bargaining process currently underway.

Mr. Fitzpatrick explained that the school has undertaken a new budgeting process, more closely communicating with teachers. As a boarding school, they are running their campus 24 hours a day, which comes with its own suite of difficulties and expenses. With programs and after-hours usage of their spaces, costs can up. The NAS is adding a full-time special education adjustment councilor and a full time special education classroom aide. However, this comes alongside another pair of positions being conglomerated, leading to an increase of one full-time position.

Mr. Fitzpatrick said that the school is undertaking looks into alternative funding sources, like a development fund and a solar farm project, to help defray costs.

Mr. Preston asked if they were expecting changes in enrollment. Mr. Fitzpatrick answered that enrollment levels are increasing from 550 to 580. Mr. Preston asked what the budget would do to per-student costs. Mr. Fitzpatrick estimated $22,000.

Ms. Fay asked if the majority of their students lived outside of Norfolk county. Ms. Quinn answered that currently, no, but they are projecting that to be true next year. She explained that their admission process is not permitted to use city of origin as an admission criteria.

Ms. Fay noted that the Dedham’s assessment for the NAS does not appear to be increasing. Ms. Quinn confirmed that.

Mr. Fitzpatrick explained that their goal is to not only avoid increasing the in-county tuition, but to try to get it back down to $0. NAS has the highest out-of-district tuition in the state.

Mr. Lindemann asked how many Dedham students applied but did not get in to NAS. Mr. Fitzpatrick answered that 7 applied, 5 got in and 2 are on the waiting list. He explained that out of in-county communities, Dedham ranks 4th.

Mr. Lindemann asked if they could receive data about the overall budget that has been corrected for the dispersal error that Mr. Fitzpatrick explained earlier. Mr. Fitzpatrick agreed to get that data for the committee.

Mr. Heffernan asked about a $45,000 increase in the equipment budget. He asked if the increase was a one-time investment or just the new baseline. Mr. Fitzpatrick answered that this increase is part of a recent set of implementing classroom Chromebooks, and he expects the expense to remain elevated across 3 years.

Mr. Heffernan asked how far away students travelled from out-of-district . Ms. Quinn answered that they have to be in-state, but come from a wide range of communities.

Mr. Lindemann asked the graduation rate. Ms. Quinn answered 100%. 80% go on to 2 or 4 year schools, 2-3% go to the military, and the rest go into the workforce. Mr. Lindemann asked how long they track students who have graduated. Ms. Quinn answered that they are currently tracking up to 5 years, but it can be very difficult.

The NAS concluded their presentation.

Drew Pepoli and Mike Podalski, the Chairperson and vice Chairperson from the capital expenditures committee, joined the committee to discuss the proposed capital expenditure.

Ms. Fay asked what had changed in the town recommendation since she last saw it as a member of the CEC. Ms. Terkelsen explained that funds for painting the Endicott had increased and the asbestos abatement fund was increased back up to the initial request of $75,000. The DPW exhaust system request has been recommended at 0.

Mr. Kern explained that after the CEC recommendations come in, he makes his recommendations as the town manager.

Ms. Fay explained that the economic process analysis study is not endorsed by either the CEC or the Town Manager. Mr. Podalski explained that there didn’t seem much backup for the request. Mr. Kern stated that he feels it is a worthwhile but not urgent endeavor. He noted that he does not feel anything on the capital expenditure request that is unreasonable to do. Rather, the goal is to account for financial realities and make priorities.

Ms. Fay explained that the police vehicle purchase was supported by the CEC as part of staying on the vehicle replacement schedule. Mr. Kern noted that police vehicles undergo a great deal of wear and tear through a very large aggregate idle time. The town acquires police vehicles through a collective bid.

Mr. Preston made a request to see benchmarking data on vehicle replacement schedules in other communities.

Ms. Fay stated that both the CEC and town manager supported the purchasing of updated communication equipment for the police department.

Ms. Fay noted the CEC support a $27,000 request for police computer hardware, replacing 2011 computers.

Ms. Fay explained that the police requested upgrades to the rifles held in the police vehicles. Mr. Walsh, Dedham police sergeant and firearms instructor, explained that the police department is updating out-of-date weaponry and armaments with patrol rifles. He explained that the upgrades will allow the rifles to be more effective in low light and at night.

Ms. Fay stated that the fire departments requests are all recommended to be fully funded by the CEC and town manager.

Ms. Fay noted that there is a request for improvements in the manor square area. This is a project to improve and renovate sidewalks and create ADA compliant ramps.

Mr. Kern explained that in 2016 $10,000 was appropriated to do a study and afterwards the engineering department engineered a solution to issues around the square. He felt that some of the elements of the project were not a good investment at this time. Mr. Kern is recommending a $120,000 appropriation and the CEC is recommending not funding it.

Mr. Preston asked if the CEC felt the work should not be done, or if the plan was simply lacking and needed to be remedied. Mr. Pepoli answered that they do agree something needs to be done in that location. Ms. Fay stated that they got the sense that the community in the area of the proposed renovations was not satisfied.

Mr. Maher explained that the project can be done well for $120,000, and the $70,000 involving the manor fields crosswalk should never have been in there. He clarified that they have been working to inform the public as much as possible, and he is surprised to hear that any resident in that area has complained about the issue. He explained that the project has been in limbo for a very long time, and the issues with lacking ADA compliance have grown out of hand. He noted a willingness to involve the ADA.

Mr. Lindemann asked Jason Mammone if he believed the public had been given the appropriate level of public input and design review. Mr. Mammone answered yes; he has done as much if not more than he would do for a normal public project.

Rose Beverly, a member of the public and citizen of the Hooper road area spoke in favor of the project. As a citizen in the area of this proposed project, she was vocally in favor of these improvements to the area in the name of safety and foot-traffic accessibility. The vague setup of the area creates traffic difficulty.

Mr. Roberts asked if the CEC’s primary motive for voting against it was lack of clearer design information. Ms. Fay explained that they lacked the opportunity to meet with the full representatives of the project.

Mr. Leahy, Lancaster road area resident asked if the proponents of the project could present to the board again.

Mr. Hughes asked why Mr. Kern put it back into the budget after the CEC removed it. Mr. Kern answered that he felt that less the $70,000 funding for the elements being removed, he feels the project at $120,000 addresses a necessary issue and addresses it satisfactorily.

Mr. Matt noted that he originally heard a quote of $215,000.

Ms. Fay brought attention to a facilities request for a boiler that was not recommended by the CEC or the Town Manager. Mr. Kern explained that the Endicott estate could pay for it out of the closing enterprise fund.

Ms. Fay noted that the CEC recommended the porch and deck renovations, while Mr. Kern recommended against them.

Ms. Moroney explained that the deck and porch renovations are no longer a priority for the Endicott Estate, giving the time constraints on getting them done this year.

Ms. Fay noted that the DPW exhaust system was recommended by the CEC but not by the town manager. Mr. Kern explained that after conversing with the DPW head, he concluded that the approach to implementing an exhaust system may not be the best solution.

Mr. Heffernan asked about the Endicott maintenance vehicle. Ms. Moroney explained that it is 10 years old. Mr. Heffernan asked what its mileage was, and raised the concern that it may not be in need of replacement. Ms. Fay explained that this is why the CEC did not recommend it.

Ms. Fay noted the demolishing of the unused pool tower was also not recommended by the CEC.

Mr. Preston asked if the replacement for the sprinkler system was legally mandated. Ms. Moroney answered that it is not legally necessary but there is currently not a sprinkler system present in every room.

Mr. Heffernan asked if the Endicott has to shut down to repair the sprinkler system, could they use the time the estate will already be shut down to perform other renovations into it for the sake of convenience and savings. Mr. Kern answered that the timing is not as much an issue as funding is.

Mr. Lindemann asked if there was a plan to investigate the pool building. Ms. Moroney answered that a structural study was done on the whole building.

Ms. Fay explained the items in the school department that the CEC voted to recommend. Mr. Kern explained that he agreed with the CEC’s recommendations, but once money was freed up by the removal of the DPW exhaust program, he thought some could be re-allocated to asbestos abatement.

Ms. Fay explained the items in the Parks & Recreation department that the CEC voted to recommend. She noted that the new Dump Truck was not recommended by the CEC. The committee got the impression from the department head that this expense could be put off by a year.

Mr. Kern noted that there is a request for $30,000 for a study of foot and automobile traffic in Dedham square.

Mr. Roberts asked how the figure of $30,000 was reached for the traffic study in Dedham square. Mr. Kern answered that this figure is based on previous experience engaging similar firms for similar studies. The process for procuring a firm for this sort of project can be complicated.

Mr. Lindemann noted that there is 1.8 million dollars not recommended to be funded in this Capital budget. Mr. Kern stated that he feels department heads do a good job of identifying the needs of their departments. He stated that he is not overly concerned with the unfunded elements of the capital budget.

Ms. Fay asked what has changed from our previous Dedham Square traffic study that leads to a need for a new traffic study. Mr. Kern explained that the decision to undertake this study is the result of input from the public. Ms. Fay asked if there was still an opportunity to tweak the previous designs. Mr. Kern answered that we may be past the point of minor tweaks.

The committee moved to discussion of Article 5.

Ms. Terkelsen presented Article 5. She explained that Article 5 is the “cleanup” of $239,000 worth of items that were previously funded but went unspent. They can now close this money out to free cash or repurpose it towards this year’s budget without the restrictions of bonding. Sometimes projects simply do not happen, and sometimes an amount appropriate for purchasing winds up not being spent in its entirety.

Mr. Heffernan asked if any of the line items in Article 5 were the result of zero appropriated funds being spent. Ms. Terkelsen answered yes, and gave the example of a $30,000 emergency operations special article in FY13.

Mr. Lindemann asked why these funds hadn’t simply reverted at the end of the year. Mr. Kern explained that money appropriated by an article has to keep the money within the bounds of an article, meaning that typically the funds have to be repurposed if the town doesn’t go through with it.

The committee moved to discussion of Article 7: Line Item Transfers. The requested transfers total to $212,000. Several transfers are coming out of the Endicott estate because of a related article requesting to shut down the Endicott estate enterprise fund.

A police salary surplus due to vacancies is also requested to be transferred to various other town needs. This is the last year that the town will have a salary surplus in the police department, because the vacant positions have been removed from the budget.

Ms. Pransky explained that the council on aging has been striving to increase access to transportation for senior citizens, and this has created increased costs and resulted in the hiring of a per diem bus driver.

Mr. Preston asked if the council on aging tracks usage statistics, and asked what the percentage increase in transportation usage was in the past year. Ms. Pransky estimated a 20% increase.

Ms. Terkelsen reviewed the next requested transfer, for facilities supplies. Ms. Moroney explained that the libraries had to purchase 2 new snowblowers this year to replace their 20+ year old snowblowers. Furthermore, she discovered the libraries custodial supplies budget was less than 10% of the typical custodial supplies budget.

Ms. Terkelsen reviewed the final transfer request, a transfer of $81,000 within the school departments for repairs and maintenance in the school buildings, as part of an ongoing effort to keep repairs in-house to save money.

Ms. Terkelsen noted that the free cash request for snow and ice removal will be updated in time for Town Meeting. She estimated a total expense of 1.17 million dollars.

The committee began discussion of Article 17, relating to the group Dedham 375. Mr. Brian Keaney, chairman of the other Brook 375th anniversary committee spoke on behalf of the article. The Mother Brook committee raised money for a yearlong celebration. With Mother Brook turning 375 years old not long thereafter, they discovered approximately $50,000 that can only be used to celebrate the town’s 375th anniversary. The Mother Brook 375 committee is proposing trail markers in the mother brook area with sign markers. The fundraising between the two 375 committees is insufficient to cover this project. The request is $20,000.

Mr. Roberts asked which committee was going back to work. Mr. Keaney explained that the Dedham 375 committee has been working on finishing some projects using the remaining funds. Ms. Terkelsen explained that in the spirit of celebrating the history of Dedham, the modicum of remaining cash would be transferred through the normal town meeting project to finance the trails.

Mr. Preston asked who owns the lands with the proposed trail. Mr. Keaney answered that it is a mix of the state and town. Some of the land is walkable right now.

Mr. Heffernan asked how much money they expected to go back into the general fund. Ms. Terkelsen said less than $50,000, as the existing committee is continuing to use some funds.

The committee thanked Mr. Keaney for his time.

Carmen Dello Iacono took the floor to speak in favor of Article 28. Article 28 pertains to forming a committee to evaluate software programs for online permitting, payments, and data integration between departments and with existing town software. He explained that after receiving advisement from town counsel, he is requesting that the motion change some phrasing in the article.

Mr. Preston asked what would happen if the town manager disagreed with the selection of the committee. Mr. Dello Iacono said that that would be acceptable, as The Town Manager is the deciding factor in the subject.

Mr. Lindemann asked if a committee would be able to undertake a project of this scope in the span of 6 months. Mr. Lindemann asked if there who the committee is expected to work with to get a practical understanding of the software. Mr. Dello Iacono answered that Milton and Easton are having a good experience with their software, and could be good candidates. Mr. Lindemann expressed skepticism that this process could be undertaken in time for the fall town meeting. Mr. Dello Iacono emphasized the importance of the program, but agreed that it could be difficult.

Ms. Fay raised the issue that this may not be the sort of thing Town Meeting is responsible for determining. Ms. Baker explained that Town Counsel has raised a similar concern, that town meeting should not be influencing daily operations. Mr. Roberts agreed.

Ms. Terkelsen noted that after the ongoing Munis implementation, which is wrapping up in about 8 months, their options will continue to expand with software capabilities. She believes that the process of adopting inter-departmental software needs to be taken at an even pace.

Mr. Kern clarified that previous software packages have not been fully adopted and integrated. An issue with adopting new software is that you require buy-in from participating departments.

Mr. Lindemann raised concerns that if there is a public demand for online permitting the town needs to make it possible.

Mr. Dello Iacono fervently stated that with the town moving into a new location, we need to make sure we are keeping up to date.

Mr. Preston opened the floor for questions from the committee. There were no further.

Mr. Preston raised the issue of scheduling the deliberation meetings.

Mr. Heffern asked if the committee required any more input before going into deliberations. Ms. Baker stated that the committee would have to wait until Thursday, April 26th to deliberate on the ‘Rail Trail’ article, and also to wait for the outcome of the collective bargaining process.

Mr. Lindeman asked about the process of changing articles. Ms. Baker explained that the committee can make a motion that alters the article as printed as long as it remains in the scope of the article. Whether the change is within the scope of the article is up to the Moderator.

The committee discussed scheduling for their deliberations.

Mr. Lindemann motioned to adjourn, Mr. Heffernan seconded. It was voted 5-0.

Meeting adjourned at 9:50