

**Town of West Boylston
Finance/CIB Committee
Meeting of April 11, 2024**

A meeting of Fincom and CIB was convened at 6:00 pm on Zoom. Attending Fincom and CIB members were Chris Berglund,, Ray Bricault, Mary Foley, Pete Murphy and Greg Zakarian. Cliona Archambeault and Jason Brockway were absent. Town Administrator, Jennifer Warren-Dyment, also attended the meeting.

Chair Chris Berglund read the standard State statement on Zoom meetings.

The minutes of meeting for April 4 were not yet available.

The Fincom Education Opportunity task group met on Wednesday, April 10, and will meet again on Tuesday, April 16. The presentation is being developed and was briefly discussed, including comments on the draft Powerpoint.

The Town Administrator presented the draft FY25 operating budget:

- The School operating budget is \$16,685,337, an increase of 5.82%. The town proposes to fund \$14,137,414, an increase of 2.2% or \$300,000. The balance of the budget is funded from other sources such as state aid and school choice. These funding sources are more limited in FY25 and the proposed budget deficit is \$1 million. The Schools and School Board are reviewing how to close this funding gap.
- The draft town operating budget for FY25 was presented:
 - General government expense increased 1.64% or \$103,000. Expenses increased for computer hardware and software, early voting, planning board administration, and salary promotion.
 - Public Safety expense increased 5.12% or \$184,000. The increase included salaries for a new police contract and the cost of the regional dispatch system. New funds were included for a new regional building inspection system that will share inspectors between three towns and provide for full time administrative management. Funds were also included for a regional animal control office in Rutland, servicing multiple towns in the county. The current part time approach for both inspection and animal services has not been providing good service to the town, and regionalization is expected to provide needed improvement to these services, even if at greater expense.
 - The Highways/DPW/Parks expense increased 10.5% or \$189,00. DPW salaries are still in negotiation, so the salaries budget is an estimate of a 10% increase. Parks expense increased 8.3% and snow and ice increased 40% in anticipation that less free cash will be available in coming years.

- The Solid Waste contract expires at the end of FY25. The new contract cost is expected to significantly increase for FY26, but no impact on FY25. Negotiation strategy is being reviewed for both companies to consider and a 3 or 5 year contract term.
- Employee benefits expense increase 3% to \$6.7 million. This budget is 25% of the town budget expense and has experienced more significant increases in past years due to health insurance cost increases. FY25 appears to be a temporary reprieve and larger cost increases are expected.
- Other increasing expenses included a chef of the Council on Aging Senior Center, and utility costs at the library.
- The Town Administrator believes this operating budget is austere and contains no further potential reductions without a significant reduction in services. In addition, neither the town nor the schools have any significant remaining reserves to apply to the budget.

An override May town meeting warrant article is being prepared by the Select Board and the Town Administrator. Approximately \$2 million in taxing authority is expected to be requested by the town, plus the Schools request, which is also being prepared. If granted, the increased taxing authority is not expected to be fully applied in FY25, only between 25 and 30%. As costs rise in future years, more of the authority will be used through the budget vote at town meeting. The override, together with increased tax revenue from new property, is expected to last 5 years.

The override cost will be approximately \$100 in additional taxes on the average house for each additional \$300,000 in taxing authority.

The FY25 Capital requests were reviewed:

- DPW/Fire building campus study \$200,000, funded by CIF.
- DPW two trucks \$540,000, funded by authorized internal debt.
- Fire generator \$75,000, funded by CIF.
- Two library boilers \$67,000, one funded by CIF and one by ARPA.
- Two vans for the Schools \$82,000, funded by CIF.
- Nault study \$21,000, funded by ARPA.
- Town hall HVAC replacements \$50,000, funded by CIF.
- Parks courts resurfacing \$70,000, unfunded due to CPC not applicable.
- Total Capital requests = \$1,085,000; including CIF \$440,500; Debt \$540,000; ARPA \$54,500; Unfunded \$50,000.

- The CIF current balance is \$850,000. The Town Administrator offered that up to \$300,000 in free cash may be available to offset some to the CIF expense
- The CIB elected not to vote on any of these requests until more information is available:
 - Mary Foley will confirm the Fire generator cost.
 - Chris Berglund will determine if the school vans can be staggered with one in the fall, if the library intends to proceed with both boilers now this summer, and what funding will be used for the Parks project.

The next meeting of Fincom/CIB will be on Tuesday, April 23, in person at town hall at 6 pm.

Ray Bricault moved to adjourn at 8:10 pm, seconded by Mary Foley. All voted in favor 5-0

Pete Murphy
Secretary, Fincom and CIB