

TOWN OF FALMOUTH
SELECT BOARD
Meeting Minutes
SATURDAY, JANUARY 7, 2023 – 9:00 A.M.

SELECT BOARD MEETING ROOM
TOWN HALL
59 TOWN HALL SQUARE, FALMOUTH, MA 02540

THIS IS A WORKSHOP MEETING – THERE WILL BE NO PUBLIC COMMENT.

Present: Nancy Taylor, Chair; Onjalé Scott Price, Vice Chair; Sam Patterson; Doug Brown; Scott Zylinski.

Others Present: Peter Johnson-Staub, Interim Town Manager; Timothy Smith, Fire Department Chief; Ed Senteio, Finance Director.

1. Chair Taylor called the open session to order at 9:00 a.m.
2. Upcoming calendar was discussed.
 - 1/10/23 Falmouthnet; Mr. Brown and Mr. Patterson will attend.
 - 1/11/23 Community Forum at Lawrence School.
 - 1/16/23 No meeting due to the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday.
 - 1/18/23 Substance Use round table 2pm with Senator Sue Moran at the library.
 - 1/30/23 Business meeting
 - 1/23/23 Possible business meeting.
 - 1/20/23 MA Municipal Association meeting at the Hynes Convention Center.
3. Budget Workshop – Addressing needs not included in FY2024 Proposed Budget:

Mr. Johnson-Staub said this is a follow up to the 12/19 budget presentation with a focus on department needs not included and not funded within the level service budget reviewed on 12/19.

- o Fire staffing
Funding options for Fire Department, other department needs, then discussion and decision.

Mr. Johnson-Staub made a PowerPoint presentation.

Civil service exit petition has not yet been submitted to the legislature. Fire academy wait may be 6-9 months.

Stabilization fund, any money not needed in the first year to pay costs of hiring new firefighters, gets deposited into Fire Department Stabilization Fund so it can be used in future years for related expenses.

Discussion:

Mr. Patterson noted out-of-district placement costs for students that go up and down, is an example of using a stabilization fund. A stabilization budget helped smooth things out. Housing crisis will make staffing volatile, noting 1,000 families are moving off cape each year.

Mr. Brown would like to know the impact to the average homeowner and put that information out to the community.

Chair Taylor notes it is important to come up with a hard number and how it affects families based on their home assessment.

- Other departments

Mr. Johnson-Staub noted the strategic planning session in the fall, and presented a PowerPoint presentation of the following needs identified by Department Heads. He has not vetted these needs as he would have if they were part of the budget.

- Conservation Department: half time position that was filled two times by qualified individuals, but who left for full time positions. Part time positions do not have benefits.
- Solid Waste Advisory Committee would like to see the Solid Waste/Recycling Coordinator increased to full time.
- Two Custodians.
- Electrician, one will retire and they could use two.
- Coastal Resiliency Coordinator, have the sustainability coordinator positions this year.
- Assessing Department Administrative Clerk.
- Chief Procurement Officer because there is no process for compliance and support.

Chair Taylor noted that Town Meeting approved the Hatchville station, and the Select Board has committed to a six station model, but we cannot hire enough firefighters for all stations within the current budget and levy limit.

Mr. Zylinski asked about any idea on how long it will be to have more information on those positions not included in the budget. Mr. Johnson-Staub said that could be done within a month or two, but it will not be in time for Spring Town Meeting.

Mr. Brown noted they have a clear picture of what the Falmouth Fire Department needs, but other needs are not as clearly outlined at this time. More than one override is needed in this Town in the future.

Mr. Patterson feels a clear cost benefit analysis should be made so people understand why they need to pay more in their taxes.

Mr. Brown brought a dredging priority list today, he noted the top 20 priorities do not have permits or a budget yet. The funding is not there to move these forward. There is a clear need, but no funding. Beaches need a nourishment program and he noted importing sand to the beaches. What is being dredged cannot be reused, so we will have to find a source who will take it. There is no monetary value, so it is the cost to get it out and then transport it. The availability of a dredge has been an ongoing issue. A stabilization fund may assist in this need. Mr. Brown noted capital stabilization fund may be an option. Mr. Brown suggested the material be composted, or maybe shared with other municipalities.

- Consider spending reductions and potential override

Mr. Brown made a motion to consider recommending an override to fund the Fire Department at this time in the amount of \$1.5 million as described by Mr. Johnson-Staub.

Mr. Senteio passed around documents outlining a \$950,000 override and a \$1.5 million override.

Chair Taylor's concern is that if they go for the \$1.5 million and it does not pass because of the amount, we will be in trouble with Fire Department staffing.

Mr. Patterson noted the need for fire services has been high in the citizens' mind. They need to make sure there is a strong case and improve the communities' quality of life.

Mr. Brown would like to look at other towns across the cape, noting that Sandwich has a beach nourishment program and their beaches held up well to a recent storm.

Mr. Johnson-Staub noted that at the fiscal year 2023 tax rate, for a typical family house assessed at \$750,000, and an override of \$950,000, it would be a \$45 impact. An override of \$1.5 million, would be a \$67.50 impact. That is not a huge difference, but those who do not like having taxes raised will point out this is on top of a 2.5% increase every year. The actual annual tax impact difference is modest, but there is the reality of the difference in the impact.

Mr. Johnson-Staub said the Select Board needs to make a decision by January 30, 2023. The Select Board may take more time and make a decision on the amount of that override by January 30, 2023.

Mr. Johnson-Staub noted options for those having difficulty paying taxes include elderly individuals of a certain income, veterans and blind individuals of a certain income. There is not a program for those over 65 years of age. Mr. Zylinski noted this is a lot of money to some people, and we have to address their concerns as well. There is a menu of options already available through State law and assessor's office informs people of. The residential exemption is a complicated issue.

Mr. Brown motioned to submit to voters a request for \$1.5 million to fund the fire department as described by Mr. Johnson-Staub. Second Mr. Patterson. Yes-2. No-3. (Chair Taylor, Ms. Scott Price, Mr. Zylinski).

Chief Timothy Smith commented that this approach and all that has been done to provide the information based on all they discussed over the last few years is a great segway to improve staffing. Option 1 seems to be the best approach and he welcomes the support. The \$950,000 approach could get part of the work done, but not reaching the goal of having the staffing at the start of shift.

Mr. Johnson-Staub noted under both options, the Chief would be authorized to fill all positions right away. The tradeoffs that come in are all the other Town departments, if the economy does not do well, how will they allocate funding across all departments. The question is about budget sustainability and flexibility. The new money will go to the Falmouth Fire Department, and there will be unmarked money to fund other Town needs.

Ms. Scott Price noted in the option 2 override plan, the \$950,000, there are places to make up the difference between the \$1.5 million.

The Select Board talked about getting more information about the numbers. Mr. Johnson-Staub needs a decision by 1/30/23. Mr. Brown asked him to outline the deferment options.

Ms. Scott Price would like more information about looking at the taxes of other communities before the January 30, 2023.

Mr. Johnson-Staub noted there are other factors that make comparison difficult, we can get the tax rate for each community. However, the average tax bill for those municipalities with a residential exemption will not be a direct comparison, they do not publish the tax bill. Those with fire districts and water districts do not include those services in the tax bill.

Mr. Zylinski motion to adjourn at approximately 10:30 am. Second Ms. Scott Price. Vote: Yes-5. No-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Chaves
Recording Secretary