

North Brookfield Finance Committee
Minutes of meeting held August 24, 2023
Senior Center

Present: M. Zalansky, C. Lubelczyk, R. Locatelli, J. Trentacosta, K. Hubacz, V. Schlegel
Town Accountant S. LeBlanc

The meeting opened at 6:29.

The minutes of the August 17th meeting were reviewed and accepted.

Two evenings previous, three members of the Finance Committee attended a meeting with the Board of Selectmen to discuss the financial situation facing the town. The 2024 budget is in deficit by \$124,588.12; an insurance line item is short \$300,000; we need \$30,895.94 to fund the opioid account. To help “balance” the 2024 budget, \$292,862.89 was transferred from the Stabilization account. Currently, the Fire Department is looking to purchase 18 sets of turnout gear costing \$74,502; or finance the purchase for 4 or 5 years at \$21,466.19/year for 4 years or \$17,580.79/year for five years. The Police Department is looking for cameras at approximately \$50,000, and the Library needs \$9,000 for HVAC repairs.

For the second time, the Finance Committee mentioned the need for an override, something the BoS made fairly plain that they have no appetite for. The BoS suggested reducing the scope of the Huck’s project to only those items that will make Huck’s and the old Highway facility usable. Since the project was approved at the Town Meeting using a debt exclusion, the downsizing of the project will provide no benefit to the budget.

The purpose of this meeting was to brainstorm ideas as to how to close the near million-dollar gap between anticipated revenue and the town’s needs. Certainly, vigilance on the part of department managers regarding their budgets is mandatory, but managers should be actively seeking cost reductions. One example mentioned was road salt use during winter; salt is some 4-5 times more expensive than sand.

More drastic measures were offered; reducing the school budget by \$1,000,000; “tuition out” the high school students and closing or repurposing the building; rescinding the Huck’s project coupled with an override but revisiting the renovation at a later date and, as the BoS suggested, severely limit the scope of the project; and sell town assets.

Finance Committee narratives from previous annual reports were read; going back to the mid-1990’s the town underfunded various line items and relied on free cash to balance the current year’s budget. The budgets at the annual meetings were technically not balanced. In 2006 and 2007, the Committee strongly urged the town to hire a town administrator. Also in 2007, the Massachusetts Division of Local Services reiterated the idea of a town administrator and further urged the town to end its reliance on free cash to balance the current year’s budget. None of this has been accomplished.

The Committee voted the following: Chair; M. Zalansky; Vice-Chair; J. Trentacosta; Secretary; K. Crevier

The meeting adjourned at 8:12.