



**MINUTES
of the
JOINT
GENERAL GOVERNMENT SUBCOMMITTEE
&
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
TOWN OF SOUTHBRIDGE
April 13, 2023, 2023
6:30pm**

CALL TO ORDER The Southbridge General Government Subcommittee and Town Council met in joint session on April 13, 2023, at Southbridge Town Hall. Chair Steeves called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

Roll Call: 4 voting members present.

Members	Present	Others Present	Present
Gus Steeves, Chair, Council Member	Yes	Charles Blanchard, Interim Town Manager	Yes
Denise Clemence, Citizen Member	Absent	Hannah Prescott, TM Executive Assistant	Yes
Jacquelyn Ryan, Council Member	Yes	Adriana Robaina, HR Director	Yes
Jasmin Rivas, Council Member	Yes	John Daniel, Chair, Town Council	Yes
Martena Shea, Citizen Member	Yes	Michael Marketti, Council Member	Yes
		Victor Roule, IT Director	Yes

Mr. Blanchard provided an overview of how he compiled the budget, saying that based on requests another \$1.5 million would be needed. This could happen but that would require the maximum levy which would be a large tax increase, which he did not recommend. He then reviewed components of the budget that would lower this number.

There was a discussion of the differences between the voting document and the budget documents that were provided to the Committee.

Mr. Blanchard explained that he is recommending a \$15,581,071 for the General Government Operating Budget, down from the original figure of \$15,860,596.

He then reviewed the most significant reductions. He also explained the new structure of the budget book.

Councilor Ryan asked how much the tax levy would need to be raised for the recommended budget. Mr. Blanchard explained an additional \$600,016 would be needed (after other ways of funding the budget). This would still be below the maximum levy and explained this calculation.

Mr. Blanchard also pointed out that there is Free Cash available to help reduce the tax rate and that no override would be needed.

Chair Steeves asked what would happen to the budget if there was a hold on all COLA raises. Mr. Blanchard said he has that information, and this topic was discussed. Ms. Shea, Councilor Ryan, and Councilor Rivas strongly opposed reducing or eliminating COLA raises.

Review the FY 2024 Town Council Budget in the total amount of \$20,650.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town Council as presented.

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Town Council Budget in the total amount of \$20,650.00, as presented. Councilor Rivas seconded.*

There was a discussion of several components of this budget including the Recording Clerk salary, the Conferences & Meeting budget, and the Dues & Subscriptions budget.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

Review the FY 2024 Town Manager Budget in the total amount of \$299,761.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town Council as presented.

There were several clarifying questions asked about various components, which were discussed.

Motion: *Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Town Manager Budget in the total amount of \$299,761.00, as presented. Ms. Shea seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.*

Review the FY 2024 Accountant Budget in the total amount of \$142,701.93 and entertain a motion to submit to Town Council as presented.

Motion: *Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Accountant Budget in the total amount of \$142,701.93, as presented.*

There was a discussion of what the correct amount for this item is, which was confirmed to be \$142,701.93.

There were several clarifying questions asked about various components, which were discussed.

Ms. Ryan seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

Review the FY 2024 Assessors Budget in the total amount of \$256,902.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town Council as presented.

There were several clarifying questions asked about various components, which were discussed, especially a new position to handle the new trash system and which office/budget should host this position. Councilor Ryan felt the position was not affordable at this time, especially since the trash issues has not even been decided, and recommended finding efficiencies in other roles to cover this.

Chair Steeves pointed out that there are positions that are currently being funded by Casella money, which will go away next year, and this issue will need to be addressed.

Councilor Marketti said that if an Enterprise Fund is approved, the funding for the new position would come out of that budget and recommended amending the motion to remove this item. This was discussed along with other questions posed by Councilor Marketti.

It was discovered that the number shown in the agenda is incorrect and should be \$211,902.00 which eliminates the Specialized Services, which Ms. Prescott said she had not intended to request this year.

Motion: *Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Assessors Budget in the total amount of \$211,902.00, as presented. Councilor Rivas seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.*

Review the FY 2024 Treasurer/ Collector Budget in the total amount of \$374,954.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town council as presented.

Motion: *Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Treasurer/ Collector Budget in the total amount of \$374,954.00, as presented. Ms. Shea seconded.*

Councilor Marketti asked why the new Treasurer's salary is somewhat higher than was voted at Town Council. Councilor Steeves, Councilor Ryan, and Ms. Robaina explained what impacts this salary.

Councilor Ryan asked about the Tax Title Advertising Increase, which Mr. Blanchard explained.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

Review the FY 2024 Town Attorney Budget in the total amount of \$117,500.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town council as presented.

There was a discussion of why the projected budget for this is so much higher than this year's actual budget.

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Town Attorney Budget in the total amount of \$117,500.00, as presented. Ms. Shea seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.*

Review the FY 2024 Human Resources Budget in the total amount of \$177,099.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town Council as presented.

There were several clarifying questions asked about various components, were discussed, especially recruitment needs, activities, and costs.

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Human Resources Budget in the total amount of \$177,099.00, as presented. Councilor Rivas seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.*

Review the FY 2024 Town Clerk Budget in the total amount of \$212,462.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town council as presented.

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Town Clerk Budget in the total amount of \$212,462.00, as presented. Councilor Ryan seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.*

Review the FY 2024 Elections Budget in the total amount of \$89,206.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town Council as presented.

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Elections Budget in the total amount of \$89,206.00, as presented. Councilor Rivas seconded.*

There were several clarifying questions asked, which were answered.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

Review the FY 2024 Cable Budget in the total amount of \$213,370.80 and entertain a motion to submit to Town council as presented.

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Cable Budget in the total amount of \$213,370.80, as presented. Ms. Shea seconded.*

There were several clarifying questions asked, which were answered, including renegotiating the Charter agreement, and the status of the Administrative Assistant position.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

Review the FY 2024 Administration Budget in the total amount of \$627,550.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town council as presented.

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Administration Budget in the total amount of \$627,550.00, as presented. Councilor Rivas seconded.*

Councilor Marketti asked about the cost of the Audit. Mr. Blanchard said that perhaps there was a surplus last year, but he and Ms. Prescott were not sure how this number was determined. They will look into this so an adjustment can be made if needed.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

Review the FY 2024 Data Processing Budget in the total amount of \$329,194.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town council as presented.

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Data Processing Budget in the total amount of \$329,194.00, as presented. Ms. Shea seconded.*

Mr. Roule and Mr. Blanchard spoke about the request and explained how this amount was determined. This was discussed, especially the problems with the Munis system. There was also a discussion of the effort to integrate the Fire system with the Town Hall system.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

The Subcommittee recessed at this time (8:05pm) and returned at 8:12pm.

Review the FY 2024 Council Reserve Budget in the total amount of \$100,000.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town Council as presented.

There was a discussion of the remaining amount in this budget and whether or not to reduce the requested amount.

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to reduce the FY 2024 Council Reserve Budget to \$80,000 and submit to Town Council.*

Mr. Blanchard pointed out that this fund is for unexpected expenses and recommended keeping it at \$100,000 especially since it reverts back to Free Cash. This was discussed.

Chair Steeves seconded.

The discussion of what amount to recommend continued.

The motion passed 3-1 by a show of hands vote with Ms. Shea opposing.

Review the FY 2024 Personnel Budget in the total amount of \$4,667,206.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town council as presented.

Ms. Robaina explained how this budget was developed. It was determined that because of a typographical error, the agenda amount should be \$467,206 (rather than \$46,67,206).

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Personnel Budget in the total amount of \$4,677,206.00, as presented. Ms. Shea seconded. The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.*

Review the FY 2024 Group Health & Life Insurance Budget in the total amount of \$4,299,600.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town Council as presented.

Ms. Robaina and Mr. Blanchard answered several questions about this budget, especially about the Health Insurance number. It was determined that the amount should be increased by \$500,000, and they explained why this budget needs to be increased to approximately \$4.8 million. Chair Steeves said an actual number is needed. Mr. Blanchard recommended using \$4,750,552.

***Motion:** Councilor Rivas moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 FY 2024 Group Health & Life Insurance Budget in the total amount of \$4,750,552.00, as presented. Ms. Shea seconded.*

Councilor Ryan recommended using \$4,800,000 to accommodate any possible errors in tonight's discussion.

Postponing this item was discussed.

After some discussion, it was decided to proceed with the \$4,750,552 recommendation.

The motion passed 3-1 by a show of hands vote with Councilor Ryan opposing.

Review the FY 2024 General Insurance Budget in the total amount of \$719,000.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town Council as presented.

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to postpone this item to the next posted General Government Subcommittee meeting. Councilor Rivas seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.*

Review the FY 2024 Other Assessment Budget-Central Mass. Regional Planning in the total amount of \$5,471.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town council as presented.

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to approve the FY 2024 Other Assessment Budget-Central Mass. Regional Planning in the total amount of \$5,471.00, as presented. Councilor Rivas seconded.*

There was a discussion of whether or not this item should be in the P&D Budget in the future.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

Review the FY 2024 Historical Commission Budget in the total amount of \$500.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town Council as presented.

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Historical Commission Budget in the total amount of \$500.00, as presented. Councilor Ryan seconded. The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.*

Review the FY 2024 Licensing Commission Budget in the total amount of \$500.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town Council as presented.

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Licensing Commission Budget in the total amount of \$500.00, as presented. Ms. Shea seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.*

Review the FY 2024 Special Articles Budget in the total amount of \$93,100.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town Council as presented.

Chair Steeves explained that this budget includes Ambulance Billing (\$33,000), Medicaid (\$20,00), OPEB Study (\$51,000), and the Reval (\$35,000). Ms. Prescott said that Ms. Carney, the Principal Assessor, did not intend for the Reval to be included this year. After discussion it was decided to remove the Reval request \$35,000 and change the recommendation to \$58,100.00.

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Special Articles Budget in the total amount of \$58,100.00, as presented. Councilor Rivas seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.*

Review the FY 2024 Debt Service Budget in the total amount of \$3,019,561.00 and entertain a motion to submit to Town council as presented.

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to submit to Town Council the FY 2024 Debt Service Budget in the total amount of \$3,019,561.00, as presented. Councilor Rivas seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.*

Review the Capital Planning Committee's FY 2024 Capital Expense Recommendations and entertain a motion to submit to Town Council as presented.

Please see the CPC's Recommendations starting on Page 7.

Councilor Marketti explained that the CPC had been very conservative in their recommendations, and why this was done. There was a discussion of items that had been cut and how these decisions were made. The FY 2024 Capital Expense Recommendation is \$1,035,000 (see Page 7 for details).

Councilor Rivas said that the Receiver thought the Schools might be reimbursed for the Emergency Repairs (\$350,000) and asked what would happen to these funds if the reimbursement is received. Councilor Ryan explained that it would be returned to the Town because it is Town money. This was discussed.

Councilor Ryan would prefer that DPW receive their requested F350 (\$130,000) in place of the School's Maintenance Truck with Snowplow (\$100,000) because none of the DPW Capital requests were given. Councilor Marketti explained why this decision was made. This suggestion was discussed.

Motion: Councilor Ryan moved to recommend striking out the Maintenance Truck with Snowplow for \$100,000 (under Schools) and replace it with the DPW F350 request for \$130,000 which would increase the total Capital Expense recommendation to \$1,065,000. Councilor Rivas seconded.

Ms. Shea commented that the phone upgrade for the schools is mandated, and the building improvements will be subsidized by the State although they will not be seen for at least 2 years. Therefore, she does not support the motion to replace a school line item with a DPW line item.

There was more discussion on this motion/recommendation.

Councilor Rivas asked why Urban Renewal (\$125,000) is not recommended. Councilor Marketti said Ms. Dean moved it to other funding and felt this was a lower priority to the Open Space & Recreation Plan Update (\$40,000).

The motion failed 2-2 by rollcall vote with Councilor Rivas and Ms. Shea opposed.

Motion: Councilor Ryan moved to add the DPW F350 to the FY2024 Capital Planning Committee's FY2024 Capital Expense Recommendations to make the final amount \$1,125,000. There was no second for this motion.

There was a discussion of the above motion, and how to account for this funding. There was also a discussion of why the Open Space & Recreation Plan funding is located in this budget.

Motion: Councilor Rivas moved to postpone this item to the next General Government Subcommittee meeting. Councilor Ryan seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: Councilor Ryan moved to adjourn the meeting of the Southbridge General Government Subcommittee. Ms. Shea seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote. The meeting was adjourned at 9:51pm.

Respectfully submitted by,
Susan Peghiny, Recording Clerk

**Capital Planning Committee 2024
Capital Expenses**

Favorable Recommendation

The committee recommends the to fund the following requests.

Department	Funding Request
<u>Economic Dev.</u>	
Open Space and Recreation Plan Update	\$40,000
<u>Fire Department</u>	
Radio Replacement Project	\$25,000
SCBA Air Packs Replacement Program	\$100,000
<u>Police Department</u>	
Duty Weapon	\$45,000
Police Cruiser (2 vehicles)	\$150,000
Epoxy Flooring	\$15,000
<u>Library</u>	
Boiler	\$30,000
<u>School</u>	
Phone System Upgrade	\$180,000
Emergency Repairs	\$350,000
Maintenance Truck with Snow Plow	\$100,000
Total	\$1,035,000
<u>Funding Sources</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Capital Stabilization Fund	-\$517,500
Available Funds \$1,500,000	
Free Cash	
Available Funds \$2,990,000	-\$517,500

Department	Funding Request
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Water Department

SCADA I/O Rack Replacement \$265,000

Total	\$265,000
<u>Funding Source</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Water Stabilization	-

Unfavorable Recommendation

The committee does not recommend the following funding requests below.

Department	Funding Request
<u>DPW</u>	
Dump Truck (#6 & 9)	\$270,000
Dump Truck (#7)	\$240,000
Dump Truck (#46)	\$240,000
F350	\$130,000
Skid Steer	\$52,000
<u>Economic Dev.</u>	
Urban Renewal	\$125,000
Wayfinding Signs	\$10,000
<u>Fire Department</u>	
Pumper Truck	\$700,000
<u>Library</u>	
Parking Lot	\$200,000
<u>Water Department</u>	
Ford Escape	\$30,000
Tip Project	\$750,000
Total	\$2,747,000