



SELECT BOARD BUDGET WORKSHOP

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, January 15, 2025

6:00 PM

Acton Town Hall, Room 204 and Virtual

Select Board Members Present: , Fran Arsenault, Dean Charter, Alissa Nicol, David Martin, Jim Snyder-Grant

Finance Committee Members Present: Jason Cole, Roland Bourdon, Christi Andersen, Stephen Noone, Scott Sullivan; Dave Wellinghoff, Corrine Hogseth, Allison Jones, Greg Jarboe, Gang Chen

Ms. Arsenault called the Select Board meeting to order at 6:08 PM. Mr. Cole called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:08 PM This was a joint meeting with the Finance Committee.

I. **Budget Workshop**

Mr. Mangiaratti informed both the Select Board and Finance Committee that budget presentations will follow the current FY26 Budget Book table of contents.

1. Administration and Finance

Marianne Fleckner, Director of Administration and Finance, Kristen Caouette, Interim Town Accountant, Jennifer Archembault, Asst. Town Accountant, Ellie Anderson, Budget Manager, Brandi Rando, Asst. Treasurer Collector. Ms. Fleckner recognized the Finance Department employees, announced that the town has maintained its AAA rating and could borrow at 2.4% due to the rating. She noted a total turn back this year of \$70K. Decreases in small budgets, workers comp down 8.7%, unemployment insurance claim down 54%, increase in medicare by \$20K due to employees that retired that were exempt and now have to pay into it, health insurance 8% retiree health insurance increase 25.5%. Ellie Anderson, Budget Manager explained the work of the budget team and efforts to improve the budgeting processes, noting the lowest turnback amount in FY24.

- Accounting

Kristen Caouette, Interim Town Accountant – explained the work of the Accounting Division, and highlighted some plans for improving accounting practices including implementing time entry for employee payroll.

- Assessor

CJ Carrol, Principal Assessor – acknowledged staff members of the Assessor Office and the work to ensure fair property valuations and provide tax relief programs. The only increase is in the professional services of \$16K for data collection – a 69% increase

- Treasurer Collector

Brandi Rando, Assistant Treasurer Collector – acknowledged staff members and outstanding customer service, processed over \$80K in bills



per year and collected \$7M from taxes and building permits, moved money around for the best return on investment, implemented online permit processing which allows for importing financial data and noted the highest real estate tax collection rate at 99.6%.

- Human Resources

Maribeth Zabek, Human Resources Manager – acknowledged staff members, highlighted accomplishments noted beginning a compensation study to comparable communities to attract and retain employees, health insurance transitions, and hiring a part-time benefits staff member

Mr. Martin – asked why the number of taxable parcels in FY25 went down – the Select Board voted personal property taxable minimum that amount to \$2500 and if the valuation is below \$2500 it is deemed not worth taxing
Mr. Jarboe – asked what the metrics are used to evaluate progress towards goals; Ms. Fleckner noted deadlines are a driving factor and the goal is to stay below 1% in turnbacks, ensuring meeting the GFOA certificate of excellence. Mr. Jarboe asked how the Finance Division can do the same with less going forward – Ms. Fleckner mentioned if there is a vacancy to look at different ways of defining the job description and benefit packages, and job titles, and consider the possibility of cross-department use to be more efficient.

Mr. Noone – asked how the commercial sector is doing; Mr. Carroll noted they are doing well. Mr. Noone also asked about the percentage of Middlesex Retirement assessed value; Ms. Anderson noted that the assessment is set to increase through FY2028 and predicted to be fully funded by FY2036

Ms. Hogseth – asked if the pension being fully funded depends on the stock market; Mr. Mangiaratti noted that the pension system is run by a board who are more conservative with their investments, and do an actuarial analysis every 2 years and recalibrate the schedule

Ms. Nicol – noted the medical opt-out increased by 36%; Ms. Fleckner explained if employees that don't opt-in for insurance with town the employee is paid a stipend each pay period. She also asked if the assessment practice changes to 10% of parcels each year over 10 years, what is impact to tax payer; Mr. Carroll noted the project doesn't impact annual adjustments and will make process more equitable. Ms. Nicol asked for reasons the tax collection rate is down .2% and whether there are actions to address it; Mr. Carroll will consult with Ms. O'Leary. She also asked if the general interest income fund is double because of doing things differently or the interest rate changed; interest income has increased due to actively seeking higher yield accounts

Mr. Cole – voiced concern about switching to a bill payment service for taxes which changed to a Boston PO box return address and experienced an error in billing and asked what is being done to prevent any further



errors, Ms. Rando noted it is a cost-saving effort measure and time-saving for staff and still learning about working with the PO box. Mr. Cole asked about the transition to an online credit card payment system for tax payments; Ms. Rando noted the division is leaning towards that option in the future.

Mr. Snyder-Grant asked how Acton's employee turnover rates compares with other municipalities and Massachusetts trends. Ms. Fleckner noted that other municipalities are experiencing the same turnover, especially when the job requires special licensing.

Mr. Bourdon – noted that state pensions have better returns than Middlesex and asked if Acton could fall under the state pension; Ms. Fleckner noted that there are 54 different pensions in the state in MA and Acton is required to belong to Middlesex County Retirement.

Mr. Chen noted the funding ratio for Middlesex is at 55.21% which indicates costs going up for the next 14 years

2. Land Use

- Building Division

Ed Mullin, Building Commissioner – 4 customer service admin, 5 inspectors, PT electrical, and shared wire inspector with Littleton, online permitting was released in October, which can extract information and reports quickly.

Mr. Jarboe – what are the key metrics for performance; online permitting numbers

Mr. Cole – asked if the Fire Inspector is funded through Building Division; yes out of Building revolving fund

Mr. Snyder-Grant – asked if the specialized code and fossil fuel free bylaw had impacted the Building Department workload; Mr. Mullin noted there is slightly more work, and more applications have been coming in under the new requirement, but online permitting frees up time processing.

- Planning and Conservation Division

Kristen Guichard, Planning Director and Zoning Enforcement Officer – oversees Planning Division and Conservation Division and acknowledged all staff. Permitting is fully online. Highlighted accomplishments for FY24 and large projects between Planning, Conservation, and Sustainability Offices. Olivia Barksdale, Conservation Agent provided an update on the conservation restriction and the purchase of the Wetherbee property. The Planning budget proposes a 2.58% increase which is based on salaries. Conservation lists a 2.9% decrease in the budget by reorganizing the budget.

Mr. Jarboe – what adjustments have been made towards the unknown; staff collaboration is useful when needed.



Mr. Cole – what is the finish date for Kelley’s Corner; Ms. Guichard noted Fall of 2025

Mr. Noone – asked if the tower and cars on Wetherbee parcel have been removed; Ms. Barksdale noted the towers will be removed and one part of a car has been removed from the vernal pool.

3. Town Clerk

Leo Mercado, Town Clerk – gave an overview of the operations and responsibilities of the Town Clerk Office, recent elections and Special Town Meeting were highlights of the office’s accomplishments, and listed goals for FY26.

Mr. Jarboe questioned the decrease in population; Mr. Mercado noted due to return rate of town census from residents, will follow up with those outstanding.

Fire

Anita Arnum, Fire Chief, and Chris Sammett, Deputy Fire Chief – 46 FTE, 35 FTE funded in general fund, 11 FTE funded ambulance enterprise fund. 7 vacancies and 2 impact paramedic shifts. Fire prevention position is funded through the Building division. Goal is to increase efficiency

Mr. Jarboe – asked about performance indicators and whether mutual aid response is same as the rate provided to Acton; total incoming mutual aid is 161, outgoing is 236.

Ms. Hogseth asked about request for 2 more EMTs despite 7 vacancies; pilot program will allow efficiencies with the resources currently staffed.

Mr. Noone –asked about any problems with longer response times; much better in North Acton with the most requests for service, and response times have improved. He also asked what NFPA recommends for staffing level for Acton; need 17 on duty firefighters to fight a single family home.

Mr. Cole – asked if adding 2 additional personnel will decrease overtime; even with additional personnel there is always vacation, personal time, and sick time that would have to be covered.

Mr. Martin – is fly car paramedic staff only to respond to BLS ambulance calls; yes. Mr. Martin also asked if the department bills for service to supplement the ambulance enterprise fund; two level billing for ALS 1 and ALS 2 depending on the level of care of service. Mr. Martin asked if the Fire Prevention Officer deals with red flag conditions or just hazardous materials and fires; will look at all risks within the community. Mr. Martin also inquired when the last time added FF/Medic position; 8 personnel in 1988.

Mr. Cole – asked to confirm that there are 46 FTE listed in budget and currently 39 FTE with 7 vacancies; Ms. Arnum confirmed.

Ms. Nicol – asked on OT FY26 goals is to add additional Lieutenants; Ms. Arnum noted the goal is also adding additional staff per apparatus. Ms. Nicol referred to 10 years of performance matrix of fires extinguished and noted a drop between FY22 to FY24



Mr. Lunz – what are the trends the town is taking to fill vacancies; Ms. Arnum noted the need to change operational models on staffing the 4 stations

Mr. Snyder-Grant – asked whether there is an expectation for future use of electric vehicles for ambulance; Ms. Arnum noted long charge periods, considering the usage of lights, AC, heat, sirens, long idle times on scene - technology needs to improve

Mr. Martin – what brand of equipment expect to buy for new engine; there is a apparatus coordinator and working group that looks into what is needed

4. Police

Jim Cogan, Police Chief and Doug Sturniolo, Deputy Chief – department consists of 46 FTE, 42 sworn officers, 2 FT clinical responders, Business Manager, Records Clerk and service dog. Accomplishments include reaccreditation, implementation of body worn camera program, purchase of a Ford Lightning pickup truck in service, and currently 3 openings. Budget costs are personnel, Key Performance Indicators listed – requesting an administrative Lieutenant position to oversee daily operations, monitoring body camera program, grant coordinator, and employment recruitment. Adding an additional FTE dispatcher beginning July 1, 2025. Animal Control budget has not changed.

Mr. Cole – do grants for speed monitors require data to be shared with the state – no. Asked if data from monitors is accurate – the Highway Department would be involved with the accuracy of the speed limit.

What budget do the special police officers get paid out of – depends on the detail they are assigned to noting that utility companies pay directly, and the July 4th event is paid out of the recreation fund.

Mr. Bourdon – is regional dispatch center still on the table combining with other communities; not at this time.

Mr. Sullivan – suggest a study to see if that is a future possibility

Mr. Snyder-Grant – acknowledged direct connection with pedestrian safety and traffic control, and asked if the increase in Clinical Responders will mean clinical support for more hours per day of coverage; yes.

Mr. Martin moved, seconded by Mr. Snyder-Grant to adjourn and approved 5-0-0. Mr. Cole moved, seconded by Mr. Bourdon to adjourn and approved 9-0-0.

Meeting adjourned at 9:40 PM

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Agenda, January 15, 2025
- Town Manager Budget
- FTE Count and Funding Sources
- Budget Workshop Answers to Question