

**Note: These proposed minutes should be considered preliminary until they are approved by the board at a future meeting.**

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**FINANCE COMMITTEE  
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2024  
REGULAR MEETING: TOWN HALL  
DRAFT MEETING MINUTES**

Members Present: Chair Dan Campbell (DC), Bernie Porada (BP), Sue Kaczinski (SK), Tony Matteo (TM), David McCarthy (DM), Gail Weiss (GW)

Members Absent: none

Others in Attendance: Town Administrator Andrea Llamas, Bee Jacque, Northfield Fire Chief Floyd M. "Skip" Dunnell III, Northfield Fire Assistant Chief David Quinn, Jr., an unnamed member of the Northfield Fire Department

***I. CALL TO ORDER***

Chair DC called the meeting to order at 6:01pm.

***II. DEPARTMENT BUDGET MEETINGS***

***a. Fire Department / Capital Article***

The Finance Committee had previously requested Mr. Dunnell return to the Finance Committee's budget meeting with more information on the Fire Department's capital requests.

Mr. Dunnell agreed to send the Fire Department's vehicle inventory to the Finance Committee, as per BP's request.

A discussion ensued on whether the Fire Department should purchase one new, dual-purpose vehicle, or two used vehicles, and on other sources of the department's funding beyond tax appropriations. Highlights included:

- The department has already received some gift funds from an estate, and they used it to purchase items that improve firefighter safety. They anticipate receiving approximately \$200,000 more from this fund once the estate's process has finished.
- The department would like to reserve some of this gift to use for a potential future fire facility's needs.
- Details on the proposed truck's water capacity, the limitations on the truck's size due to the current fire station's size, the history of apparatus purchases, research the department staff conducted on a new truck, and how the potential future facility informs the department's options for new trucks.
- The department's recommendation is to purchase a good-quality used brush truck that will fit in the current station. They found one, and its purchase price is \$300,000. Mr. Dunnell, Mr. Quinn, and their colleague shared details of the many uses this truck would provide.
- DC recommended the department plan for conditions now, rather than plan for a new facility that does not yet exist.



- How the fire department purchases now, and in the future, will affect taxes.
- The pros and cons of buying new versus used fire vehicles.
- The cons of buying a new vehicle are mostly about its size: new firefighting trucks are too large to fit into the current fire station, they are also too large to fit in some of Northfield's rural roads and driveways. Also, the new technology included in these trucks requires additional resources and training, which the department finds burdensome and unnecessary.
- Is it worth it to wait, or get another truck now? Mr. Dunnell noted the current brush truck is 38 years old. The truck they have found is the one that will suit the town's needs, and will likely provide 15-20 years of service.
- Details on the lengthy research and inspections the firefighters conduct to ensure a new (used) truck is appropriate for the town.
- BP requested specs on the used vehicles the firefighters have found, as well as specs on a new truck.
- How to present this subject to voters at Annual Town Meeting.
- DM asked how long it will take to get a used truck versus a new truck. Used: approximately three weeks, depending on alterations needed to get it ready for use in Northfield. New: well over a year.

### ***III. BUDGET DELIBERATIONS BEGIN***

DC reiterated the Finance Committee's role: it is a recommending committee. It oversees and interrogates the budget and its development. The Finance Committee does not create the budget; neither does it set any department's rates. Departments set their own rates. Voters have the ultimate authority on the budget; they approve it at Annual Town Meeting.

DC reviewed the budget, line by line, and asked committee members to ask questions or raise objections. Highlights included:

- BP objected to the Northfield Fire Department's lack of a line item for training. He noted Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and the Police Department both have line items for training, and the Fire Department should have this, too, to pay salaries for firefighters who attend mandatory trainings.
- Town Administrator Andrea Llamas said she is awaiting the Tech School's budget. They are scheduled to present their budget at the March 4, 2024 Finance Committee meeting.
- A discussion ensued on the Transfer Station's fees, setting up a revolving fund for it, and their capital expenses.
- A discussion ensued on the Animal Control Officer. Although he is doing his job, he continues to do the work for free and has not billed the town for his hours. This position is supervised by the Board of Health.
- Ms. Llamas explained that all employees who qualify for health insurance are eligible to receive it, even if they do not want it. Thus, the town has to budget for all eligible employees' health insurance costs. Sometimes, an employee's life will change to where they need the insurance, so the town must be prepared for this.
- A reminder that the Sewer Commission alone sets their rates. The Finance Committee only recommends — or does not recommend — their entire budget.
- A discussion ensued on the Water Department's consent order issued by the Department of Environmental Protection, and what this ensues regarding compliance and possible fines.
- A discussion ensued on the Northfield EMS's staffing and administrative needs, as per the Collins Center study, and details on the grant funding that will help support these needs.



#### ***IV. TOWN ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE***

Ms. Llamas reviewed the Annual Town Meeting articles, with discussion on:

- The grant match
- Energy consultants
- Pioneer Valley Regional School (PVRs) capital needs
- EMS radios
- Stabilization funds

#### ***V. THREE-TOWN REGIONAL FINANCE BOARD AND SELECT BOARD MEETINGS***

Ms. Llamas and DC indicated there is interest in this from all three towns, especially for school issues. Officials from Bernardston have proposed a date for this regional meeting: Wednesday, March 7, at 6:30pm, and the Bernardston Senior Center. They would like to discuss the following:

- Six-town regionalization
- The PVRs budget
- Building assessment for master planning
- The School Resource Officer

#### ***VI. REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES***

BP noted the Finance Committee could not approve the minutes for the February 5 meeting at their February 12 meeting because they did not meet quorum.

DC said that because the Finance Committee did not meet quorum at their February 12 meeting, thus they made no decisions, those minutes do not need approval. They can be posted as minutes from a non-quorum meeting.

**MOTION BY BP THAT THE FINANCE COMMITTEE APPROVE THE MINUTES FOR THE FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING THAT TOOK PLACE ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2024, AS WRITTEN. DM SECONDED.**

#### **ROLL CALL VOTE:**

DC YEA  
TM YEA  
DM YEA  
BP YEA  
GW YEA  
SK YEA

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

#### ***VII. REPORT ON MEETINGS ATTENDED REPRESENTATING FINANCE***

BP reported he attended the EMS Building Committee meeting. They discussed the following:

- The Route 142 property as a possible future EMS building location

- A revisit to the fire station and its site
- Other possible sites
- They approved Ms. Llamas to do a site assessment
- The potential for changes to all Northfield emergency services and how that could affect the process of designing and constructing a new EMS building.

TM reported the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) met. They discussed the following:

- They received five project applications
- They voted to approve four of the five; the fifth was rejected due to a lack of adequate information.
- The four approved projects were:
  - A pavilion at Northfield Elementary School for \$15,000
  - Shelving and digitization for the Northfield Historical Society for \$5,000
  - Renovation of the library reading room paintings for just over \$21,000
  - Siding, interior, and kitchen repairs at the VFW Hall for \$90,000.

*The recording of this meeting ended here, so your Board Recorder cannot complete the rest of these minutes. Perhaps someone who was there can fill in the rest.*

#### ***VIII. OTHER ITEMS NOT ANTICIPATED 48 HOURS IN ADVANCE OF THIS POSTED MEETING***

#### ***IX. NEXT MEETING***

#### ***X. ADJOURN***

#### **Documents presented at this meeting:**

- ! Budget Workbook FY2025 with Requests 2-21-2024
- ! FY2025 Line Item Budget with Requests 2-21-2024
- ! Budget Articles 2-22-2024
- ! 10-Year Fire Capital Account FY25

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Respectfully submitted by Wendy M. Levy from minutes taken by Wendy M. Levy.

This represents my understanding of the above dated meeting. If you have any changes, please submit them at the next meeting.