

**TOWN OF LAKEVILLE
Select Board Meeting Minutes
March 6, 2023 – 6:00 PM**

**Lakeville Police Station Meeting Room
323 Bedford Street, Lakeville, MA**

On March 6, 2023, the Select Board held a meeting at the Lakeville Police Station Meeting Room and the meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Vice Chair Fabian. Members present were Vice Chair Fabian, Member LaCamera and Member Carboni. Also present was Ari Sky, Town Administrator, Todd Hassett, Town Accountant and Christina Cotsoridis, Assistant to the Town Administrator. LakeCAM was recording the meeting for broadcast.

Present for the discussion were Brian Day, Chairman; Katherine Desrosiers; and Christopher Plonka, members of the Finance Committee. Finance Committee Chairman Day called the Finance Committee to order at 6:01 PM.

Review and possible vote to approve Finance Committee Minutes of November 2, 2022

Upon a motion made by Ms. Desrosiers and seconded by Mr. Plonka, it was:

VOTED: To approve the Finance Committee meeting minutes for November 2, 2022 as presented.
Unanimous in favor.

Upon a motion made by Ms. Desrosiers and seconded by Mr. Plonka, it was:

VOTED: To approve the Finance Committee meeting minutes for February 13, 2022 as presented.
Unanimous in favor.

**FY2024 Proposed Budget Overview/Update with the following Departments:
Accountant; Treasurer/Tax Collector; Board of Assessors; Town Clerk; Human Resources;
Animal Control; Town Administrator and Council on Aging**

Mr. Hassett said the Governor has released the initial State budget for FY24. That is critical to our Regional School Districts. The Cherry Sheet revenue is about \$100,000 less than projected due to a lower Smart Growth payment. We have been in contact with the Department of Revenue and have been assured there will be a correction in the next budget iteration. The Regional Schools experienced additional Chapter 70 and 71 aid. Both Old Colony and Freetown/Lakeville's operating assessment should come in below what we expected. Mr. Sky said the F/L Superintendent stated that the number will be at or below our proposed budget number. Mr. Hassett said the Old Colony assessment is going up \$10,000 and our enrollment is level. We confirmed that we have one (1) fewer student going to Bristol Agricultural, which will be reduced about \$37,000. They did indicate that they have had a lot of interest in potential students attending in the fall. We have received a detailed line item budget from Old Colony. Mr. Sky said the

overall budget was up 3-4%. Mr. Hassett said we have a small surplus on our overall budget. If State Aid does improve on Smart Growth, we can look to trim the Local Receipts estimate a bit. The Capital Expenditures Committee met and reviewed the requests and five-year plan. Certain items in the FY24 column are not planned on being presented in May at the Annual Town Meeting and would suggest that they are items for the Fall Special Town Meeting or later. There will be a separate item at Town Meeting to consider funding a feasibility study to look at Old Colony's facility. Our share is estimated at \$135,000. The debt associated would be apportioned to us over a number of years with a debt assessment. Finance Committee Chairman Day asked if the feasibility study stops if any of the Towns do not approve. Mr. Hassett said yes, however, we have been meeting with the member Towns and they seem pretty supportive. Finance Committee Chairman Day asked if the Town thinks the \$100,000 correction will flip back or be somewhere in between. Mr. Sky said they did not indicate what it would be coming back to. The overall funding for 40S in FY24 is the same number as last year.

Accounting

Mr. Hassett said there is one (1) union full time staff person and he is part time on a contractual basis. There is a 3.5% increase in salaries. Mr. Hassett said he is paid from the financial services line. There is a modest amount for training and education. Office supplies increase related to printer cartridges. It is a fairly static expense budget with a 1.4% increase. Member Carboni asked about auditing. Mr. Hassett said that line item has been moved to the Select Board's Administrative Expenses. Last year, this year and the following year we will have additional audit funding due to CARES and ARPA monies. It is about \$5,000, but when the Federal funding drops away, it should be down.

Treasurer/Tax Collector

Erika Correia, Treasurer/Tax Collector, was present for the discussion. Ms. Correia said there are three (3) full time staff members in her office. She is asking for an increase in tax title and in-state travel. She has a new staff member, so she would like to send her and the Assistant for training. Vice Chair Fabian asked about the tax title properties. Ms. Correia said a lot of people have made payment plans. A tax title attorney is required for others. Vice Chair Fabian asked why the computer services line is not in the IT budget. Ms. Correia said that is on-line platform monthly billing, and we have a specialist that comes in to help with the Assessors Office and ours with billing. Mr. Plonka asked if all three (3) positions are union? Ms. Correia said she is not. Mr. Plonka asked about the 6.7% increase for the Assistant Treasurer. Mr. Sky said there is a step involved.

Mr. Hassett spoke about Debt Service. We have the final payment on the Library this coming year; that was an excluded debt exclusion. The Police Station, which is an exclusion, matures in FY34. Outside of the Debt Budget, we have one (1) Regional School piece of debt, paid through an assessment that matures in FY26. The Route 79 reconstruction debt exclusion project has been slow moving to date in terms of spending, so we have only borrowed \$500,000 to date. We typically pay off the ambulance in three (3) to four (4) years. We do have in the capital plan in the next five (5) years two (2) ambulances. The septic loan program is paid back through homeowner loans. Ms. Correia was successful obtaining financing at a low rate. New in FY24 is the

Assawompset Window and Door project with construction happening this summer. We have paid for the feasibility study and design is starting. We have spent about \$185,000 of the \$2.4 million so far. Our share will be \$2.1 million; this is not excluded and is inside the levy limit. Finance Committee Chairman Day said a common question from residents is are we still paying for this? Can we list the debt projects someplace so that residents can see it? Mr. Sky agreed and noted that was provided last year.

Board of Assessors

John Olivieri, Chairman of the Board of Assessors, was present for the discussion. Mr. Olivieri said there are four (4) items that have significant increases. Professional and revaluation services has a 25% increase from \$4,000 to \$5,000. We were underbudgeted a bit last year. Contracted assessment services for Regional Resources Group increased 2.7% which is contractual. Computer and GIS services increased from \$14,000 to \$17,500. We moved from an onsite server to the cloud to host the valuation database. We looked for other vendors for assessment software and received two (2) responses. One (1) is not taking on more municipalities and the other was Patriot which was in the ballpark of \$50,000 for set up and migration then the additional annual service fees which are comparable to what Vision is charging us now. There is a 25% increase for Vision of \$3,500, but based on the marketplace, it is probably the best option. Our maps upgrade increased \$1,500, which is a standard industry increase.

Member Carboni asked if Cartographic Associates, Inc. has been responsive to requests from the Assessors. Mr. Olivieri said they have been when asked. We are a bit off on what the Town's plans were. There were meetings a few years back with Departments, but with COVID, we haven't really been doing much of that. Member Carboni asked is there an opportunity to get that realigned and back on track. Mr. Sky said he has set up a meeting next week to discuss this. Member Carboni said we invested in that and it is a great resource for residents and staff. Finance Committee Chairman Day said a few years ago, DPW was added for layers to happen and it did not. Has this been sorted out? Do all departments rely on the same contract for their needs? Mr. Sky said the purpose of this meeting is to get this jumpstarted. Finance Committee Chairman Day said most of the software items are in the IT budget. Is there a reason to keep it separate? Mr. Sky said it is relevant to show this in the Assessors. Member LaCamera said we were supposed to get together and get this done. Is this the responsibility for the Assessors? Mr. Olivieri said their responsibility to facilitate. Member LaCamera said the GIS software is way out of date. There are State things available at no cost; all they need to do is update the layers. If this company can't do it, we need to do something else. Member Carboni said Mr. Sky has put together a coordination meeting next week. Member LaCamera asked who is responsible to make sure the layers get updated on a regular basis. Vice Chair Fabian said she believes it is the Assessors' responsibility to select the system, but she thinks everyone is supposed to contribute. Mr. Sky said it is one area with some dysfunction, and he is trying to get this moving. Member LaCamera said we spent a significant amount of money last year and we are putting more money into it. Member Carboni asked Mr. Sky to report back to the Board on this. Mr. Hassett said Mr. Olivieri mentioned this year with the full valuation certification process a few lines were underbudgeted and we will be coming to the Finance Committee for a transfer later in the year to shore up this year's budget.

Town Clerk

Lillian Drane, Town Clerk was present for the discussion. Ms. Drane said there are two (2) staff members in her office. Her budget did increase regarding salaries. There was a step for the Assistant Town Clerk for a 7.12% increase. Her other increase went to Town Clerk expenses for in state travel for her Assistant who will be attending more mentoring classes located throughout the State. Elections increased for Repair and Maintenance for the voting equipment for poll packs. She increased postage in Elections due to sending media cards by overnight mail and Attorney General mailing. Registrations were increased due to printing. The census books and the census has increased due to paper costs, so there was an increase of \$400.

Ms. Drane said she did not ask for a part-time person; she is hoping for that next year. The mail in voting has created a huge need. She cannot continue what she is doing. Member Carboni said next year is going to be a busy year. If we fund this position in 2024, will you be able to get that person up and running prior to next year? Ms. Drane said yes. Member Carboni said we know how busy that office is with the increases in the election process. She is ready to fund that position this year to get that office level. Finance Committee Chairman Day asked what is the part time salary. Mr. Sky said we can come back with a proposal. Member Carboni said there is a part time position in the Building Department budget already, but it has not been filled. That would release that floater position, which would help. Member LaCamera said the budget is really tight and there are some things going on that we cannot make any decisions on this. Logistically where would this person be. Member Carboni said that should not be the reason we are not funding a position. Ms. Drane said she cannot continue in her office with the space that she has. Member Carboni said the Town Clerk works extended hours to ensure that the residents are well serviced. Member LaCamera said we don't like employees to be in the building alone. Member Carboni said we will have to look at that. Vice Chair Fabian asked why is the position at the Building Department unfilled. Mr. Sky said the Board did not approve the job description. Member Carboni said we can put a placeholder in the budget for next year. Finance Committee Chairman Day asked would this position be in the front servicing the window. Ms. Drane said she would like this person to work in the front, but for now it would be backend administrative. Finance Committee Chairman Day said if it wasn't the whole year, when do you need them there to get them ready for the busy season. Ms. Drane said as soon as possible. Member Carboni said we are leaving it right now that we know there is a need.

Human Resources

John Viarella, Human Resources Director, was present for the discussion. Vice Chair Fabian asked are the part time hourly wages for the floaters? Is that a 6.6% increase? Mr. Viarella said he budgeted 19 hours a week as a worst-case scenario. Vice Chair Fabian asked if there are step increases. Mr. Viarella said no. We increased advertising for open positions, which has increased. Subscriptions have increased due to rate increases. For training, he needs to maintain his Human Resources certification. He would like to see his assistant get some formal Human Resources training. Member Carboni asked how is the new payroll system running. Mr. Viarella said very well. Implementation was a bit rushed by the vendor, but it is much easier to collect data. Member Carboni said contracted services went down. Mr. Viarella said there was a proposal for a classification study and money was budgeted for that. We hope to encumber that for the next fiscal year. Finance Committee Chairman Day asked if the new system is exception based. Mr. Viarella

said yes. Finance Committee Chairman Day asked how many person hours have you saved per week. Mr. Viarella said probably about four (4) hours less for each payroll.

Mr. Hassett asked about employee benefits. Mr. Viarella said he budgeted for a 6% increase, but it may be less. He has a meeting tomorrow to discuss rates again. Mr. Sky said we anticipate a budgetary savings in FY23. Mr. Hassett said we won't enjoy this in FY25. The pension assessment went up substantially and we are looking for a similar increase in FY25. Plymouth County initially issued an assessment about 15% and we had them go back and have them spread that over two (2) years. Member Carboni asked what the Town's liability is now. Mr. Hassett said he will get that to the Board. Finance Committee Chairman Day asked if we are still funding past liabilities. Mr. Hassett said yes and the funding schedule is through 2035. Member LaCamera said the problem is compounded due to stock market problems. Vice Chair Fabian said this is a full year with the new health insurance option. Mr. Viarella said we have three (3) new hires that are on the new Health Savings Account. Finance Committee Chairman Day asked what is the split? Mr. Sky said 65%/35%. Finance Committee Chairman Day said with a year under your belt, do you think the new plan options have hit whatever success metrics you have or is there room. Mr. Sky said because high deductible plans are so much cheaper, we are doing fine from that perspective.

Animal Control

David Frates, Animal Control Officer, is present for the discussion. Mr. Sky said the biggest increases are rubbish removal and printing was to reflect reality. There are some facility issues that he needs to speak to the Board about in the future regarding repairs to the shelter. This year the Animal Shelter has received \$72,000 in donations. Some of that was vet care and \$49,000 was Shelter donations. Member Carboni asked if the four (4) assistants that are on staff are able to accommodate the schedule seven (7) days a week. Mr. Frates noted they are happy since their stipends were increased last year. Mr. Sky said the assistants have stepped up over the last few months and have done a really good job. Finance Committee Chairman Day asked about the vehicles. Mr. Frates said there is a 2019 vehicle and a 2002, which we just had a major problem with the motor. Bill Frates fixed it, so it is good for a few more years.

Council on Aging

Lori Fahey, Council on Aging Director, was present for the discussion. Ms. Fahey said she has three (3) full time staff and four (4) part time staff. The salary is the same as last year except for COLA increases and a step raise for a van driver. Salary is decreased by \$1,600 due to the hiring of the new full-time clerk at a lower pay rate. There is an increase in the rubbish line and in vehicle gasoline increased by \$1,600 due to a large increase in our vehicle use. Overall the budget has increased by \$237. Finance Committee Chairman Day said if the expansion were to go through, what additional services would you be able to offer? Ms. Fahey said there will be similar programming with an expansion of our food pantry. We would love to get a fitness room. We cannot add anymore weekly programming as we don't have the room for it. Vice Chair Fabian said the Veterans' Agent uses one of the Council on Aging's offices. Ms. Fahey said they would like another office. Member Carboni asked about the volunteer base. Ms. Fahey said we are 80 volunteers and are putting together our volunteer luncheon. We now do Meals on Wheels in house, so we have another 11 volunteers for that. Member Carboni asked if she could put the wish list on your website page so people can see it. Ms. Fahey said she can.

Mr. Sky asked if Mr. Hassett had mentioned Bristol Agricultural and Town Meeting. Mr. Hassett said we have a prior obligation that is under dispute by a non-county community sending students regarding debt being assessed on a per pupil basis rather than being funded by Bristol County, who have the equity interest in the facility. It appears that we do have an obligation that we did not have funded last year around \$54,000 for Lakeville's per pupil share for the new facility. Mr. Hassett said we are asking Town Meeting to consider reducing the Freetown/Lakeville Assessment line because their actual assessment is less than what was approved by approximately \$100,000 and shifting some of the funding it to cover this prior year obligation and keep it in the education budget. Member LaCamera asked if the Town received a breakdown on how this was calculated. Mr. Sky said not yet, but we have received an invoice with the amount. We don't want them holding our students hostage, so we will pay it. Member LaCamera said we are not the only community that this is happening to. Mr. Sky said there are five (5) communities that are objecting to it. There is no transparency with them when it comes to the assessment of the operating student fee, so they give us the same transparency on capital projects, which is not great. Member LaCamera said for the operating side, the State sets the tuition. Mr. Sky said part of the dispute is that you want to charge us for capital that is fine; do it as part of the tuition assessment. Their argument is that there is no requirement for that, and we will just charge you what we are going to charge you. That is what the disagreement has evolved into. DESE came back and said they can charge us that number as part of the assessment. We said okay charge us as part of the assessment. That is when we received the letter from them saying they would not let our students in unless we pay them. Finance Committee Chairman Day said this is for the massive rebuilding program they have going on. Mr. Sky said our number is not that bad compared to some of the other communities. Finance Committee Chairman Day said this is basically an extortion fee. Member LaCamera said there are a few schools that have the same situation. Most of these schools have students that don't belong to their regions. The cost of sending a student to some of these school systems are off the wall. Finance Committee Chairman Day asked if we signed a contract to get our kids in there. Mr. Sky did not think so. We have one (1) student at Norfolk Agricultural. Mr. Hassett said that tuition is \$26,000 a year plus transportation for a total of \$80-\$82,000.

Adjournment

Upon a motion made by Ms. Desrosiers and seconded by Mr. Plonka, it was:

VOTED: To adjourn the Finance Committee Meeting at 7:24 PM.
Unanimous in favor.

Upon a motion made by Member Carboni and seconded by Member LaCamera, it was:

VOTED: To adjourn the Select Board Meeting at 7:25 PM.
Unanimous in favor.

List of documents provided at the Select Board Meeting of March 6, 2023

1. FY24 budget