

**Town of West Boylston
Finance/CIB Committee
Meeting of March 21, 2024**

A meeting of Fincom and CIB was convened at 6:00 pm in the Select Board meeting room at Town Hall. Attending Fincom and CIB members were Chris Berglund, Jason Brockway, Ray Bricault, and Pete Murphy. Cliona Archambeault and Mary Foley were absent. Town Administrator, Jennifer Warren-Dyment, also attended the meeting.

The meeting was a hybrid meeting with a Zoom attendance option and Chair Chris Berglund read the standard State statement on Zoom meetings.

Ray Bricault made a motion to approve the minutes of meeting for March 14. Pete Murphy seconded and the vote to approve was 4-0.

The purpose of the meeting was to review the FY25 School operating budget and capital requests. Attending for the Schools were Rich Meagher, Superintendent, Christy Morrison, Business Administrator, and Jim Pedone of School Board.

Operating budget:

- FY25 budget deficit is \$1 million. Cost inflation is the primary problem.
 - Major Edwards salary budget increase of 20% is due to normal step increases plus the addition of one special ed teacher, which is necessary to avoid sending students out of district. No other staff additions are planned for the schools.
 - Chapter 70 State funds have not been fully inflated and other State per pupil funding has only been inflated at 4%. This funding amount is still uncertain and only a guess in the current budget.
 - The deficit will require use of reserves that may cover FY25, but the situation is not sustainable and additional operating revenue is required beyond the expected 2.5% annual increase. It is likely this means an operating override very soon.
- Student enrollment has been stable and school choice space is very limited at Major Edwards. 21% of students receive some Special Education and this is 37% of the budget. 13 students are educated out of district.
- Vocational education is now shown as a separate budget line item because School Choice revenue cannot be directly used as funding as in the past.

Schools capital requests:

- The only FY25 request is for 2 vans, Toyota or equivalent, for \$38,000 each.

- The MS/HS sidewalk repair is postponed until FY26. A quote of \$382,000 was received and cannot be funded this year. A revised design is being reviewed to reduce cost.
- The Collier report phase 1 is still unfunded. The cost estimate of \$5.3 million is now 2 years old. A debt exclusion will be required to advance these improvements.
- Replacement of the Major Edwards school building is now an annual submission request to the State MSBA. The decisions by the State MSBA will be made in August. A new submission will be made next year if the current request is denied. Consequently, any improvement work from phase 1 of the Collier report will be focused on the MS/HS building.
- A new roof for the MS/HS building is being planned and it will be designed to be solar ready.

The Town Administrator discussed the town operating budget:

- The free cash contribution to the operating budget is being limited to 1% of the budget to avoid dependence on uncertain available free cash. With that restriction, the town operating deficit is currently \$225,000. There is only limited potential to reduce the deficit. Together with the Schools, the town operating deficit is currently \$1.3 million.
- An operating override is unavoidable. An operating override must happen in FY25 to sustain the budget, or in FY26 with a package of FY25 service cuts. Both choices will be presented at the May town meeting. The override is expected to be \$2 million. Tax revenue growth beyond FY26 is expected to make the override sustainable for a few more years.
- Many towns in the state are facing override decisions.

The next meetings are scheduled for April 6, in person at Town Hall.

A motion to adjourn was made at 6:55 pm by Pete Murphy and seconded by Ray Bricault. All voted in favor 4-0 for Fincom and 4-0 for CIB.

Pete Murphy
Secretary, Fincom and CIB