



Town of Paxton
Board of Selectmen
697 Pleasant Street, Paxton, MA 01612
(508) 754-7638 – phone (508) 797-0966 – fax
dparsons@townofpaxton.net

Regular Meeting Minutes

Monday, September 11, 2023

**Meeting Location: Training Room of the Public Safety Complex
576 Pleasant Street, Paxton, MA 01612**

Members Present: Julia N. Pingitore, Chair
Kirk R. Huehls, Vice Chair
Carol L. Riches, Clerk

Town Administrator: Heather M. Munroe, Town Administrator

Attendees: see Attendee List

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

CONSENT ITEMS

- 1. Approve the meeting minutes from the Regular Meeting held on August 22, 2023
- 2. To recognize the vacancies created on the Paxton Days Committee, DPW Building Committee and the Bay Path School Committee due to the recent passing of Robert Wilby.
- 3. Accept the resignation of James Robert as the Local Superintendent of Insect Pest Control
- 4. Accept the Cable and Communication Committee's recommendation to accept the RFP from FY24-08 Cable Equipment from TELVUE and award a contract to TELVUE in the amount not to exceed \$103,000.
- 5. Award a three-year contract to OpenGov for the Towns permitting software from July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2026, as a sole source provider.
- 6. Appoint Jeff Wentzell to the Zoning Board of Appeals for a two-year term.
- 7. Approve the request from Anna Maria College (AMC) for the 5k road race to be held on 9/16/23 from 8am to 10am.
- 8. To approve submission of a notice to the Town Clerk to have the Bay Path School committee and the Library Board of Trustees vacant positions placed on the ballot for the next election.
- 9. Accept the lease resolution for the new 2023 Chevrolet Silverado for the DPW Department.
- (JP) Hearing no other comments, all consent items have been approved.

UPDATE FROM TOWN COMMITTEES/BOARDS/DEPARTMENTS

- **Kateri Clute** – Assessors update
- After a state mandated interim update, based on sales in 2021, the total taxable valuation as of January 1, 2022 for Fiscal Year 2023 was set at **\$706,088,541.00**. At this point it is unknown what assessments will do for FY24. We are still finalizing the sales analysis with Vision. Hoping to have those numbers by 2nd week of October.
- Average Single Family Residence Valuation was \$412,579.00.00 for FY 2023. FY 2023 tax rate was \$17.58 which equates to an average tax bill of \$7,253.00.
- Current sales listings:
 - Seven houses
 - 5 parcels of land (of which 4 have been on market for 18mos +).
 - Thirty-five sales in the calendar year 23 so far.
 - Five were private sales not listed on MLS, including one land sale.
 - 1 Foreclosure sale
- New construction, additions, and alterations thru June 30, 2022, were \$5,059,952.00. (as reflected in FY23 filings with DLS)
- Equaled growth of \$96,038
- Currently for FY24 - 3 NSFR have been 100% completed, 3 homes that were partially completed in FY23 are now at 100% completion. These numbers will be reflected in the FY24 growth #'s.
- Real Estate and Personal Property abatements had a total valuation of \$379,700.00.
 - The Board received ten abatement requests of which five were approved and processed.
 - FY23 Exemption Filings- Veterans & Senior
 - \$40,797.83 (41 filings) reimbursement from state is 11,712.50
 - \$750.00 senior work off
 - Five vets missed filing deadline for FY23 exemption (\$2,600)
- **Mark Love – Finance Committee update** – The Finance Committee should start meetings again in October. We have not met yet over the summer. On September 5th, the Attorney General's office approved the Finance Committee Bylaws. It was a long process but has now been accepted.
- **Mark Love – Capital Improvement update** – We met in June to reorganize. We will meet again in October as well. Packet to the Department Heads has been sent out. It's looking for a one-year information form from all the department heads. It is going to be a tough year. \$600,000 deficit right out of the gate, so capital needs will be tough.
- **(KH)** Are we looking at two different perspectives given that we are looking at a tough budget next year.
- **Mark Love** The department heads should give us one budget which is the leanest budget that you could get by with.
- **Travis Thibault – Water Department update**
Pass over until the next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

- Review application(s) submitted and make an appointment to the Bay Path School Committee.
- (JP) Originally 3 applications, one withdrew and now we have two applications left.
- **(KH) motion (CR) second to appoint Jeffrey Wentzel to the Bay Path School Committee until the annual town election in May 2024. Unanimous. All in favor. (KH) yes, (CR) yes, (JP) yes.**

To appoint Kirk Huehls as the Local Superintendent of Insect Pest Control.

- **(CR) motion (JP) second to appoint Kirk Huehls as the Local Superintendent of Insect Pest Control. (KH) abstained, (CR) yes, (JP) yes.**

Plan and coverage for the Town Administrators upcoming expected Parental Leave.

- (HM) I am scheduled to go on maternity leave in December. It is up to the Board if you wish to put someone in place as the acting TA, or who do you put in charge if you leave it status quo.
- (JP) How long are we expecting to be out on leave?
- (HM) MGL covers 8 weeks.
- (JP) 8 weeks in the middle of our busy time in the budgeting process. Important to maintain leadership during this.
- (KH) Looking at the schedule of major tasks it looks pretty thorough. If we can stay on task with those items prior to Heather going out and communicate that with Donna. Perhaps she can step in a little bit while Heather is away. Donna can advise us on any issue that we can look at.
- (JP) You are asking a lot to put that on someone else. There are a couple of different ways to look at this. In my view we can look for an interim and then we need to look at funding or look at a department head to fill in but that is a big ask.
- (KH) Whatever came to Donna we could have her bring it to the board and then assign that to the board.
- (CR) My issue is that January and February is a lot of sorting out of the budget and the day-to-day business. I think we should have someone, maybe not for 40 hours but for part-time assistance.
- (JP) There are people that come in to do just that and step in as an interim person. If we are thinking that it is important to have a person, then we need to set up a posting.
- (CR) We do not need a full 40 hours we just need to put out a posting and start looking.
- (JP) Talk about what is available for funding and see what we have.
- (KH) We do not want an interim having a discussion with personal issues.
- (JP) Lets work on getting that posted at 19 hours a week, it is not benefitted, and it is temporary. See what we get in and talk about a time frame for when we want that posted. Get it out there in the next two weeks or so and set a date for the end of October.
- (HM) You may not need to leave it up that long, and it may be worth just reaching out to the handful of people that would be able to fill this position. Line it up so it falls on the second Select Board meeting in October to meet with any candidate that will come in and then give them notice so they can line up their schedule.

OLD BUSINESS

- **FY25 Budget direction and review of FY25 Budget Calendar.**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Actor(s)</u>	<u>Description</u>
Aug 22nd	Town Admin	Presentation of 5 Year Budget Forecast at SB Meeting Recommendations for FY25 Budget Process
Sep 11th	Select Board Fin Com	Review Draft Direction for FY25 Budget Process, subject to Fin Com Review Review FY25 Budget Timeline Discussion of FY25 Non-Union COLA
Sept 1st	Capital	Review annual Capital Forms, timeline, and process
Sept ?	Fin Com	Review of and finalize FY25 Budget Process and timeline
Sept 8th	Town Admin	Disseminate annual Capital Forms and Instructions
Sept?	Town Admin	Disseminate FY25 Budget forms and guidance to all departments
Oct 2nd	DUE DATE	Capital Forms due back to Town Administrator for compilation
Oct?	Capital	Meetings to review Capital Project request, and to score and rank
Oct 10th	Select Board	Open Fall Special Town Meeting Warrant
Oct 23rd	Select Board	Close Fall Special Town Meeting Warrant
Oct 31st	DUE DATE	Capital Committee complete with Capital Needs list for next 5 years
Nov 15th	DUE DATE	Budget forms must be completed by this date
Dec 1st	DUE DATE	Town Administrator's meet with each department and review recommendations
Dec 15th	DUE DATE	Town Administrator's final balanced budgets due to Fin Com
Jan??	Fin Com	Meeting to review budgets - Needs Budget and Failed Override Budget
Jan?	Fin Com	Meeting with any requested departments
Feb?	Fin Com	Finalize budget
Feb?	FinCom/SB	Joint Meeting on budgets
Mar	Select Board	Open Warrant for Annual Town Meeting and set date
Mar 31st	ALL	Articles due for annual Town Meeting

Apr? **Select Board** Review and finalize articles for Annual Town Meeting

May? **ALL** Annual Town Meeting

- **(JP)** There are a lot of numbers that are estimates but I do not want to make people anxious about this.
- **(HM)** So we have had some conversation and are trying to get everyone on the same page. Looking at the budget from two different angles. One budget which would be this is what we need to be a hundred percent whole. The other budget would be looking at last year's numbers and level fund last year's numbers minus a certain percentage. We only have one union contract that is due this year. All the personnel numbers are solid. Give Finance one budget book with two sets of numbers and let them see what we can actually afford. Do we need an override or not. It might behoove us to move up our election and Annual Town Meeting in case something does have to be reduced.
- **Mark Love** We will get the information before Heather leaves. We do not want to say no to anything. Personally, I think it is a little confusing but maybe when we see it will not.
- **(JP)** Logistically it is difficult to ask the department heads to submit two budgets. It is hard to pin it down because the numbers are such a moving target.
- **Mark Love** Some will take it seriously and some may not. It could create a problem.
- **(JP)** Take into consideration that there are recurring costs. You have a discretionary and non-discretionary budget.
- **Mark Love** The school is 50% of the budget and 80% of that is non-discretionary so you are left with a small amount to work with.
- **(KH)** It is a tough look ahead, but it is a tough look that we need to make.
- **(JP)** Glad that we have a chance to already start looking at this.
- **(KH)** We are in tough shape, and we need to be honest about this as well.
- **(JP)** It is not that we have not been there before, and as a town we have always come together to figure it out. We do need to have some direction for the departments, and we should talk about what we want to say. What you absolutely need. I would defer to Heather on this to put together what the language should be, so it is not open to interpretation, and they know. Be prepared to potentially have a cut budget ready if needed.
- **(KH)** In rough math could we get some order of magnitude of what we do have control of.
- **(HM)** 4.5 million that we do control.
- **(JP)** Any cuts need to be evenly distributed.
- **(KH)** What would an override look like on an assessment?
- **Kateri Clute** In order to look at how it would work on an override we would have to wait until a tax rate was set for next year. Then pull up the current average value and then you plug in what your total override would be. In Rutland they passed a 2-million-dollar override and when you plug in based on their tax rate it increased almost \$600.00 a year on the average home.
- **(JP)** Any other input on the budget calendar. Some things may end up being a moving target.
- **Mark Love** I think if there was a disclaimer in the calendar that it is flexible. We may get capital requests that say this quote is good for 30 days. Just a little flexibility for extenuating circumstances.
- **(JP)** Asked Heather to add that notation. Heather, can you put together some guidance and we can vote on it at the next meeting?

- (CR) I do not think that we can bring the Town meeting any earlier than it is.
- (JP) I agree. We are one of the earliest ones as it is, and I do not think it can be moved forward any more than that. Try to stick with our first Monday in May timeline.

TOWN ADMINISTRATORS REPORT

Boards, Committees, Commissions

- **Board of Appeals** – There is a vacant associate position available for the Board of Appeals. Please see the Town's website for more information.
- **DPW Building Committee** - The Town of Paxton has reconfigured its DPW Building Committee to update the charge and membership. This Committee will be instrumental in matching the Department of Public Works building infrastructure needs with the Town's financial constraints and the Community desires. There are currently four resident vacancies. Please see the Town's website for more information.
- **Historic District Commission** - The Historic District Commission is a group of individuals committed to maintaining the historic integrity and aesthetic appeal of Paxton's treasured landmarks. We work to ensure that our town's rich history remains an integral part of its future. There is currently one opening. Please see the Town's website for more information.

See the Town's Website for all openings and how to submit an application.

COMMUNITY HAPPENINGS

Check out the Town's Website for the latest programs.

- **COA Annual Health Fair** – Join the COA for their annual Health Fair on September 27th from 10 am to 1 pm at the Council on Aging, 17 West Street. For more information, check out the COA's newsletter.

DEPARTMENTAL UPDATES

- **Town Administrator**

I had the opportunity to attend a webinar on Fraud Prevention and Awareness hosted by the Inspector General's Office this week. When we next look at policies, we will want to start evaluating our current fraud prevention and risk assessment policies to ensure that they are up to date and that we are broadly educating all of our employees on fraud and counseling everyone on how to report suspected fraud. The key take away from the training is that while fraud awareness is hard, fraud prevention is a good area to focus. I will be out of the office next Thursday and Friday for the annual Mass Municipal Human Resource Conference at the Cape.

Earlier today, the Town submitted some basic information to CMRPC to submit collectively with other communities in support of legislation that would create a similar funding source to the Schools Building Authority MSBA to help fund Town Buildings. As quoted from the CMRPC email: "S.1489/H.3802 creates an independent public authority, similar to the MSBA and the MBLC grant programs, to provide matching funds for local municipal and public safety buildings. The legislation sets up a process for the state to establish criteria, have independent experts evaluate proposed renovations or new buildings, and recommend funding based on available resources. This Act is a response to the dire needs and challenges many municipalities face to repair and construct new municipal and public safety buildings. [...] More information about the bill and how to testify here: <https://malegislature.gov/Events/Hearings/Detail/4664>"

Capital forms and materials for FY25 and the upcoming four successive years has been sent out to all department heads with a turnaround date of October 2nd. Once received, we will compile the materials and submit in their entirety to CIPC.

We will be working with the EDC members to set up a meeting date for the first meeting of the reconstituted committee over the upcoming weeks.

We have received interest in two of the four currently open DPW Building Committee seats. We will work to do some outreach to find a few more interested parties to be considered at the September 25th SB meeting for appointments.

Town Clerk

On September 5th, the Attorney General's Office has sent notice of approval for the General Bylaws for alcohol use on Town Property and a revision of the Finance Committee Bylaw as approved at Town Meeting.

FINANCES

Grants

FY24

Recreation Earmark – In the FY24 final budget, the Governor approved an earmark for \$27,000 for enhancements for the recreation department to include the following:

Playground Repair and Mulch (\$4,000)

The Town owns one public playground next to the Paxton Center School. During school hours, the students use the playground for recess. After hours, the playground is utilized during the afterschool program and by members of the public. The playground needs more odds/ends maintenance to keep all parts safe. In addition, because of the after-school program, we must maintain a minimum level of nine inches of mulch around all potential fall zones.

2. Adjustable Basketball Hoops at the Paxton Center School (\$18,000)

The Recreation program runs a basketball program at the Paxton Center School. The current basketball hoops do not allow for younger kids to play and require volunteers to tediously attach and manually lower basketball hoops for each game, which brings with it its own safety risk. If we were to replace current hoops with four adjustable hoops, that would make them versatile, serve both the basketball program and the students at the Paxton Center School, and would alleviate the chance of injury through manual adjustments.

3. Wentworth Bathroom Repairs (\$5,000)

The Recreation and Town own a bathhouse out by our Wentworth field. The bathhouse is used during games and during the Summer Program. The building is old and in dire need of repairs.

Town Common Earmark – In the FY24 final budget, the Governor approved an earmark for \$50,000 for a design, feasibility, and traffic study for the town common/town center.

Outstanding FY23

Community One Stop – Applied for West Street. Expected decision late Fall 2023.

Ambulance Certified Public Expenditure Program –\$62,566 - Pending

Libraries Transforming Communities: Accessible Small and Rural Communities. \$20,000 project to support Sensory Processing Disorder.

Community Compact (IT) Grant –\$115,000 to support conversion to records management system, including scanning and electronically filing records.

Community Compact Grant “HR Procedures” – Turnover in staff at Collin’s Center. Working with them to finish up the project. Completed.

Hazard Mitigation Planning Grant –\$4,455 reimbursable grant to update the Town’s Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Small Bridge Grant (2019) – Planning Grant Black Hill Road, extended until December 2023.

State Earmark of Funds – Zoning Bylaw rewrite, underway.

Procurement:

Richards Memorial Library Low Slope Roof – Quotes are due back on 9/13 at 12 noon. The Library Trustees will review at their meeting on September 12th and determine any next steps.

Richards Memorial Library HVAC Controls Update - Quotes are due back on 9/13 at 12 noon. The Library Trustees will review at their meeting on September 12th and determine any next steps.

Richards Memorial Library Gutter Replacement - Quotes are due back on 9/13 at 12 noon. The Library Trustees will review at their meeting on September 12th and determine any next steps.

Cable Access Equipment – The RFP for Cable Access Equipment was awarded by the Select Board on September 11th to TelVue in the amount not to exceed \$103,000. We received a total of 3 RFPs for this project.

To do:

- Records Building – Fence
- Town Common area drainage

PROJECTS

Black Hill Bridge Grant – This project began in 2020 when the State approved a grant for the study on Black Hill Bridge with CHA. We have been through two extensions for this project with MassDOT and have been assured by CHA that we will be able to complete the work before the end of this calendar year, which will line us up to apply for a construction grant.

While the study is underway, the State DOT and our consultant CHA both recommend consideration of closing the road over the bridge for safety reasons.

DPW Earmark – We are in the process of getting started on the State Earmark we received in the Spring for \$200k for the DPW building improvements. We are working closely with vendors for accurate quotes to include a replacement/new septic system for the DPW, two bathrooms, and some other modifications that will last for the long-term.

JOB OPENINGS

Police Officer – There is one opening for a police officer.

Temporary Full-time benefited Mechanic/Heavy Equipment Operator- The position for a temporary mechanic/heavy equipment operator has been posted. This person will fill in for our mechanic who will be on military leave for the next 12-18 months.

Public comment

- None

ADJOURN

- Motion (KH) seconded (CR) to leave the regular meeting and entered into Executive Session at 8:24pm and we will return to the regular meeting for the purpose of adjourning. (KH) yes, (CR) yes, (JP) yes.
- Returned to Regular Session at 9:03pm
- Adjourned Meeting at 9:03pm, Unanimous all-in favor. (KH) yes, (CR) yes, (JP) yes.
- The next meeting is scheduled for September 11, 2023, 7:00pm.

Documents from the Meeting filed in BOS office:

Agenda

Attendance list

Town Administrators update

Meeting minutes

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Graf-Parsons

Executive Assistant

**COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
WILLIAM FRANCIS GALVIN
SECRETARY OF THE COMMONWEALTH**

WARRANT FOR 2023 SPECIAL STATE PRIMARY

WORCESTER SS.

To either of the Constables of the Town of Paxton

GREETINGS:

In the name of the Commonwealth, you are hereby required to notify and warn the inhabitants of said Town who are qualified to vote in the Special State Primaries to vote at:

WARD: 0 PRECINCT: 1

**PAXTON CENTER SCHOOL
19 WEST STREET
PAXTON, MASSACHUSETTS 01612**

On **TUESDAY, THE TENTH DAY OF OCTOBER 2023**, from 7:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M. for the following purpose:

To cast their votes in the Special State Primaries for the candidates of political parties for the following office:

SENATOR IN GENERAL COURT. FOR THE WORCESTER & HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT

Hereof fail not and make return of this warrant with your doings thereon at the time and place of said voting.

Given under our hands this 25th day of September 2023.

Selectboard of Paxton

You are directed to serve this warrant by posting attested copies thereof in two or more public places, one of which shall be at the Post Office, as required by Town Bylaws, at least seven days before the day set for holding said election.

Constable

_____, 2023.
(month and day)



The Town of Paxton Exemptions from the State Ethics Commission Education and Training Requirements

Positions which may be exempted from the distribution of summaries and the online training requirements:

- Unpaid volunteer positions in which employees do not have or exercise governmental authority and do not participate in or have responsibility for government decision-making, contracting, hiring, investigation or any other discretionary governmental action.
- Short-term temporary or seasonal compensated positions in which employees do not have or exercise governmental authority and do not participate in or have responsibility for government decision-making, contracting, hiring, investigation or any other discretionary governmental action.

The following is a list of positions in Paxton that are exempt from the State Ethics Commission Education and Training Requirements starting in 2023 and continuing until further notice.

- Poll Workers (paid or unpaid)
- Senior Work-off Employees
- Seasonal/Temporary Employees of the Recreation Department in non-supervisory roles
- Library Pages/Circulation Assistant Subs
- _____
- _____

Approved by vote of the Board of Selectmen on _____, 2023.

Select Board, Chair

Date



09.20.2023

TO: PAXTON SELECT BOARD

FROM: HEATHER M. MUNROE, TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

SUBJECT: SPECIAL TOWN MEETING NEED

As previously mentioned at prior SB meetings, we have a few items that could benefit from having a special town meeting this fall. Below is a list of current items to be considered as warrant items, a proposed date for the meeting, and a draft timeline for the STM.

Items to be addressed

1. ***Acceptance of Public Way – Olivia Knoll.*** Last step in process, check to PMLP paid, work to be done to switch out poles by PMLP and then complete.
2. ***Prior Year Appropriation*** – Payment from Retained Earnings for FY23 Water usage bill to Worcester for around \$25k.
3. ***5-year contract.*** Permission by Town Meeting to enter into a 5-year contract with Pitney Bowes for the postage machine.
4. ***Enterprise Account.*** Establishment of an enterprise account for Trash.
5. ***WRSD Agreement.*** Request from WRSD for a revision in the agreement pertaining to number of seats and weighted votes.
6. ***MBTA Bylaw.*** The steering committee has been working with CMRPC to draft the state required zoning MBTA bylaw to comply with the requirements for rural adjacent MBTA communities. The next step is to place the bylaw before the Planning Board for their processes and then send it to Town Meeting.
7. ***Water Regulation Bylaw.*** Conversion of current water regulations to a bylaw to allow for the Water Department to have the authority, in the event that it is needed to turn off water.

Proposed Date

To avoid conflicts with the special election in November, and to have sufficient time for free cash and retained earnings to be certified. The date that we are currently looking for is November 20th. Donna is verifying with PCS that the 20th would be available for the Town to utilize the space.

Draft Timeline

September 25 th -	SB Open STM Warrant
October 16 th -	All Articles due to TA by 4pm
October 23 rd -	SB Close and approve STM Warrant
October 24 th -	Post Warrant
November 10 th -	Last Day to Register to Vote



TOWN OF PAXTON
697 Pleasant Street, Paxton, MA 01612
(508) 754-7638 Ext 20 Fax: (508) 797-0966
Heather Munroe, Town Administrator
hmunroe@townofpaxton.net

Interim Town Administrator (Approx. 8 weeks)

Town of Paxton (population 5,000) is seeking and experienced, thoughtful, and skilled leader with strong communication and collaborative skills to serve as its Interim Town Administrator. This is an interim position, commencing with the scheduled leave of the Town Administrator and concluding upon the return of the Town Administrator, estimated to be 8 weeks. The Interim Town Administrator will support and advise a three-member Select Board and manage day-to-day operations of the Town and Town Departments under the purview of the Select Board, consistent with duties and responsibilities identified by the Town Charter.

Duties will include assisting the Finance Committee, Select Board, and Department Heads with the annual budget process and managing any open projects.

The ideal candidate will have at least a bachelor's degree, preferably in public administration or related field and at least five to ten years of relevant municipal management experience, with demonstrated skills and abilities in managing staff, personnel administration, use of technology, an understanding of Massachusetts municipal law, labor regulations experience, and skilled in intergovernmental relations and communications, both internal and external.

Details

This position is expected to begin around mid to late December and last through most of February. This is a part-time 19 hour a week non-benefited position. The days and hours for this position are flexible and will be set with the Select Board during negotiations with the chosen candidate. The Town of Paxton is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

To Apply

Please submit a letter of interest with salary requirements and a resume, as a single pdf file by email to hr@townofpaxton.net. Applications will be reviewed when received. The position is open until filled, with a preference for applications received before October 5th at 12 noon.



09.20.2023

TO: ALL DEPARTMENTS

FROM: HEATHER M. MUNROE, TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

SUBJECT: FY25 BUDGET GUIDANCE

Intro

At the Select Board meeting on September 25th, the SB reviewed FY25 budget guidance that I drafted for their review. At their request, I am sending this out to all departments for utilization in their FY25 budget process.

FY25 Budget Forecast Takeaways

As presented at the Select Board meeting on August 22nd, we reviewed the FY25-FY29 Financial Forecast and key takeaways for the FY25 forecast.

In FY24, I estimated additional expenses of around \$667k for the major budget drivers. We expect the regional school budget to come in around a 5% increase (\$362K) and vocational to come in consistently with about (\$78k) more than FY24. We also know that we will be responsible for 75% of our Regional Dispatch Assessment for FY24, for the first time, bringing us a bill of around \$38k more than FY24. We expect that Retirement will increase by approximately 13% (\$102K); Health Insurance by around (\$75k); and central purchasing will be higher with inflation (\$12k).

To generate healthy free cash in FY25, that we so heavily rely on to cover our expenses, we will need to be conservative in our revenue estimates for FY25. We also will need to be very conservative regarding our expenses in FY25. Current revenue projects forecast a \$215,479 increase in revenues for FY25 compared to FY24. If you remove stabilization transfers, the increase is \$320,474 increase, or a 2% increase. Our expense forecast shows an increase, taking out of comparison special articles and capital, of 5.87% or \$916,797 more than the FY24 budget.

At their meeting on September 11th, the Select Board directed my office to put together budget guidance directing departments to prepare a “make whole” budget. A make whole budget would include financing amounts needed to staff coverage during vacations, actual needs of the department, and repairing deficits experienced by the departments over the past several years. The Select Board also made note that while the focus will be on a “make whole” budget, departments should be prepared to submit a budget that could account for up to a 10% departmental decrease from their approved FY24 budget.

FY25 Budget Dates

An approved preliminary FY25 budget calendar is attached. Please note that dates are subject to change as the process proceeds. At this time, please complete your budget no later than November 15th. Donna will reach out to schedule a date to review your department's budget with the TA in the second half of November.

FY25 Budget Guidance – Make Whole Budget

The current recommendations for FY25 budget prep are below. Please note that as the FY25 budget develops, changes may occur in the guidance. We will work closely with the Select Board and Fin Com as we know more.

1. **Level-Funded Budget.** Please prepare a budget where the departmental bottom line is no more than the FY24 approved departmental bottom line.
2. **Non-Union Employees COLA.** For FY25, all non-union employees fall onto the wage/comp chart approved by the Select Board. For FY25, the wage/comp chart has been updated to reflect a 2.5% wage adjustment. This will allow, unless there is an extraordinary reason, for employees to remain on the same step, but have the entire chart undergo a 2.5% overhaul.
3. **Stipends.** For FY25, board/committee/individual stipends should be level-funded (same amount in FY24); and
4. **Capital Requests.** There are no funds predicted to be available within the FY25 operating budget and all capital needs would need to be funded through either capital or debt exclusions.

FY25 Budget Guidance – Reductions

Please be prepared to submit additional budget information to reflect a possible 10% decrease in your budget from your FY24 approved levels. In doing so, please consider the following:

1. **Reduced Budget.** Please locate your total approved FY24 departmental budget bottom line and reduce that amount by 10%.
2. **Staff Hour Reductions.** In the event that you need to reduce staff hours for your reduced budget, please note that as we are self-funded for Unemployment, we will be required to compensate for 50%, in most cases, for all reductions. In other words, if you propose reducing someone's hours by 4 hours to meet your reduction needs, you will need to reduce that person's hours by 8 hours, as we would need to add those four hours budgeting in for unemployment in another line item.
3. **Non-Union Employees COLA.** For FY25 under a reductions budget, the recommended COLA increase would be 0. The recommendation for all personnel, non-union contracts, would be level funded from FY24.

4. **Stipends.** For FY25, under a reductions budget, the recommendation would be to zero out board, committee, commission, elected official stipends.
5. **Explanation.** Please submit an explanation on your letterhead, explaining the reductions and why they are where they are. Please explain the differences in the level of services between the “make whole” and reductions budget.
6. **Capital Requests.** There are no funds predicted to be available within the FY25 operating budget and all capital needs would need to be funded through either capital or debt exclusions.

Budget Forms

Budget forms are available as a complete document, with the link attached to this email. Only those with permission will be able to access the document. A password is required for each department. While you will see other’s inputs in real time, without the password, you will be unable to access/adjust those updates.

Once entered, all of your numbers will filter to the front pages and pre-populate the summary figures.

Next Steps

Please connect with Donna to set up an appointment with me the first or second week of January prior to submitting budgets to the Finance Committee.

Attachments

1. **Non-Union COLA/Wage Chart.** Wage chart incorporates into it a 2.5% overhaul for the Make Whole Budget and a 0% increase for the reductions option.
2. **Approved Preliminary Budget Calendar.** The approved budget calendar is attached. Please note that dates are subject to change as the process evolves.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE

Heather M. Munroe, Town Administrator

September 25, 2023

BOARD/COMMITTEE OPENINGS

Boards, Committees, Commissions

Board of Appeals – There is one two vacant associate position available for the Board of Appeals. Please see the [Town's website](#) for more information.

Cable & Communications Committee – There are currently two positions available on this committee. This committee is responsible for running and maintaining cable access TV channels, live streaming and recording government and community meetings. The committee currently meets monthly. Please see the [Town's website](#) for more information.

DPW Building Committee - The Town of Paxton has reconfigured its DPW Building Committee to update the charge and membership. This Committee will be instrumental in matching the Department of Public Works building infrastructure needs with the Town's financial constraints and the Community desires. There is currently 1 resident vacancies for someone with a marketing/advertising background available. Please see the [Town's website](#) for more information.

Historic District Commission - The Historic District Commission is a group of individuals committed to maintaining the historic integrity and aesthetic appeal of Paxton's treasured landmarks. We work to ensure that our town's rich history remains an integral part of its future. There is currently 1 opening. Please see the [Town's website](#) for more information.

[See the Town's Website for all openings and how to submit an application.](#)

COMMUNITY HAPPENINGS

Check out the [Town's Website](#) for the latest programs.

COA Annual Health Fair – Join the COA for their annual Health Fair on September 27th from 10 am to 1 pm at the Council on Aging, 17 West Street. For more information, check out the [COA's newsletter](#).

DEPARTMENTAL UPDATES

Building Department

In August, the Building Department had 27 permits pulled, which is six less than in July and nine less than the months of August in both FY23 and FY22. The eight building permits consisted: a deck, a basement bulkhead removal, windows, three roofs, and two bathrooms.

Fiscal Year 2022														
Permit	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	22-Jan	Feb-22	22-Mar	Apr-22	1-May	Jun-22	TOTAL	
Building	9		11	10	9	11	9	7	6	15	12	8	13	120
Electrical	8		8	16	9	13	10	5	3	9	6	8	12	107
Gas	2		10	3	7	3	2	5	5	5	4	2	5	53
Plumbing	1		7	5	3	5	2	4	3	7	1	6	7	51
Sheet Metal	0		0	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	2	0	1	8
Wood Stove	1		0	3	2	3	3	0	1	1	0	1	0	15
TOTAL	21	36	37	30		36	28	21	19	38	25	25	38	354
Fiscal Year 2023														
Permit	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	June	TOTAL	
Building	9		11	11	14	5	6	11	8	3	15	15	9	117
Electrical	8		8	9	8	3	5	8	4	4	8	6	16	87
Gas	2		10	3	5	5	2	3	2	3	3	1	0	39
Plumbing	1		7	4	5	5	1	7	4	2	3	2	2	43
Sheet Metal	0		0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
Wood Stove	1		0	0	1	5	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	12
TOTAL	21	36	27	33		23	18	30	19	12	29	25	27	300
Fiscal Year 2024														
Permit	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	TOTAL	
Building	16		8										24	
Electrical	9		14										23	
Gas	1		0										1	
Plumbing	5		4										9	
Sheet Metal	0		1										1	
Wood Stove	2		0										2	
TOTAL	33	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	60	

Library

The Library Trustees met on the 12th of September and reviewed the submitted procurement documents for the Library Roof, Gutters, and HVAC control system upgrades. After reviewing all applications, they opted to move forward with the quotes for the gutters and the low slope roof area replacements in hopes of addressing the water leak concerns. The next step is to submit documentation to the Local Historic District and review with CIPC, if there are any concerns.

IT

As time continues, Suzor IT has been working through individual concerns and issues as they arise with departments. They looked at the COA internet/network issues the week of the 20th and will be making recommendations on how to proceed, as several groups have had trouble connecting to the guest network at the COA.

Suzor is working with the Police Department to upgrade the body camera server setup in advance of the technology upgrade. We have ordered a new laptop for the treasurer/collector and our assessor. We are in the process of transitioning over to VADAR cloud (finance software conversion from the server to the cloud) in October. We are also working with Suzor to get a

handle on our IT grant for records management software and start sourcing a new Town Hall printer within our budget constraints.

Town Admin

I am recommending that the Select Board hold a Special Town Meeting in November to address one potential zoning bylaw update, acceptance of Olivia Knoll as a public way, and some housekeeping matters. During the month of September, I completed all annual performance reviews with department heads in accordance with Section 10(o) of the Town Charter.

FINANCES

FY23 Year End

The required paperwork for FY23 Year End has been submitted to the State along with our certification requests for Free Cash and Retained Earnings. We expect to hear back from the State around the end of October.

FY23 Audit

The Auditors expect to visit Paxton and begin the FY23 audit around Thanksgiving. The TA's office has submitted all required documentation from our office, outside of availability of files, as requested to the Auditors.

Grants

New

ADA Grant – We submitted a grant again for FY24 for ADA improvements at the COA, with the same details as last year and updated costs totalling around \$25k. We do not expect to hear back until the late fall.

FY24

Recreation Earmark – In the FY24 final budget, the Governor approved an earmark for \$27,000 for enhancements for the recreation department to include the following:

Playground Repair and Mulch (\$4,000)

The Town owns one public playground next to the Paxton Center School. During school hours, the students use the playground for recess. After hours, the playground is utilized during the afterschool program and by members of the public. The playground needs more odds/ends maintenance to keep all parts safe. In addition, because of the after-school program, we must maintain a minimum level of 9 inches of mulch around all potential fall zones.

2. Adjustable Basketball Hoops at the Paxton Center School (\$18,000)

The Recreation program runs a basketball program at the Paxton Center School. The current basketball hoops do not allow for younger kids to play and require volunteers to tediously attach and manually lower basketball hoops for each game, which brings with it its own safety risk. If we were to replace current

hoops with four adjustable hoops, that would make them versatile, serve both the basketball program and the students at the Paxton Center School, and would alleviate the chance of injury through manual adjustments.

3. Wentworth Bathroom Repairs (\$5,000)

The Recreation and Town own a bathhouse out by our Wentworth field. The bathhouse is used during games and during the Summer Program. The building is old and in dire need of repairs.

Town Common Earmark – In the FY24 final budget, the Governor approved an earmark for \$50,000 for a design, feasibility, and traffic study for the town common/town center.

Outstanding FY23

Community One Stop – Applied for West Street. Expected decision late Fall 2023.

Ambulance Certified Public Expenditure Program –\$62,566 - Pending

Libraries Transforming Communities: Accessible Small and Rural Communities.
\$20,000 project to support Sensory Processing Disorder.

Community Compact (IT) Grant –\$115,000 to support conversion to records management system, including scanning and electronically filing records.

Community Compact Grant “HR Procedures” – Turnover in staff at Collin’s Center. Working with them to finish up the project. Completed.

Hazard Mitigation Planning Grant –\$4,455 reimbursable grant to update the Town’s Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Small Bridge Grant (2019) – Planning Grant Black Hill Road, extended until December 2023.

State Earmark of Funds – Zoning Bylaw rewrite, underway.

Procurement:

Richards Memorial Library Low Slope Roof – Three quotes were submitted, with the lowest by FRG in the amount of just under \$30k. Documents are under review.

Richards Memorial Library HVAC Controls Update – One quote was received that exceeded the budgeted amount. Documents are being reviewed and a new process is likely to be started in the next few months.

Richards Memorial Library Gutter Replacement – Three quotes were received, with the lowest quote from Gutters by Mac in the amount of \$15,000. Documents are currently being reviewed.

To do:

- ✓ Records Building – Fence
- ✓ Town Common area drainage

PROJECTS

Black Hill Bridge Grant – This project began in 2020 when the State approved a grant for the study on Black Hill Bridge with CHA. We have been through two extensions for this project with MassDOT, and have been assured by CHA that we will be able to complete the work before the end of this calendar year, which will line us up to apply for a construction grant.

While the study is underway, the State DOT and our consultant CHA both recommend consideration of closing the road over the bridge for safety reasons.

DPW Earmark – We are in the process of getting started on the State Earmark we received in the Spring for \$200k for the DPW building improvements. We are working closely with vendors for accurate quotes to include a replacement/new septic system for the DPW, two bathrooms, and some other modifications that will last for the long-term.

The Hills at Paxton Commons – A few months ago we received concerns from residents about the increase in monthly rates at the Hills. We reached out to legal counsel, our State Representative Kim Ferguson’s Office, and relevant state agencies. In the end, we confirmed that the Town and the Mass Housing Partnership have an interest in ensuring that the rental rates are affordable and comply with the current rent adjustment figures issued by the State. At this time, the Hills at Paxton Commons is in compliance with all requirements. Residents experiencing issues or concerns with rent prices at the Hills in the future are encouraged to reach out to the Town Administrator’s Office.

Zoning Bylaw Earmark – The work under the State Earmark we received in the Spring for \$75k has begun. Our Zoning Bylaw Steering Group met with CMRPC in July and again in August. Our first matter of business was to work on the MBTA Zoning bylaw, followed by conduct a survey of Town Residents, followed by an initial review by (ZBA, Planning, Town Services Coordinator, EDC, and Building Commissioner) on the current Zoning Bylaws and where changes and/or concerns exist.

Earlier this month, we worked with the Light Company to send out surveys to our residents/businesses in Town. Unfortunately, the third party company that does the mailing did not include the surveys in the August billing and it will not be included until September. In the meantime, we sent out an additional 500+ surveys to those who do not get a hard copy bill and have already received more than 50 responses.

JOB OPENINGS

Police Officer – There is one opening for a police officer.

Temporary Full-time benefited Mechanic/Heavy Equipment Operator- The position for a temporary mechanic/heavy equipment operator has been posted. This person will fill in for our mechanic who will be on military leave for the next 12-18 months.