

Location: In-person at Lunenburg Town Hall and broadcast on Zoom

Present: Chairperson Evan Watters (arrived late), Vice-Chair Chris Menard, Jay Simeone, Tom Gray, Tom Balish, Caesar Nuzzolo

Guests: Town Manager Heather Lemieux, Lunenburg residents John Fortune, and Joanna Bilotta

**1. Call to Order**

Mr. Menard called the meeting to order at 7p.m. and read a statement concerning the Open Meeting Law, and how all public meetings are legally being held remotely.

This meeting was recorded and is viewable on YouTube at [https://youtu.be/G\\_gNfRE8my4](https://youtu.be/G_gNfRE8my4)

**2. Public Comment:** none

- 3. Town Manager Preliminary Budget Presentation:** In her presentation, Ms. Lemieux explained that the FY2024 Target Budget includes revenues for property taxes included adding 2 ½ percent to the previous year's levy, \$200,000 for New Growth, and debt exclusion amounts. State Aid was level funded based on FY23 State Aid figures approved in July of last year. Local receipts included a \$50,000 increase over last fiscal year's estimate for Motor Vehicle Excise tax, but level funded other receipts.

Projected Revenues totaling \$47,321,389 for FY24 include: \$31,422,519 in property tax (66%), \$10,500,128 in State Aid (22%), \$3,160,153 in Local Receipts (7%), and \$2,238,588 in other available funds (5%).

For Expenditures, Ms. Lemieux used FY23 amounts regarding cherry sheet offsets, state and county charges, and choice/charter assessments. FY24 will use stabilization funds to offset the 8.5 percent increase in health insurance, as well as a 5 percent rate increase for retirees. Expenditures also include an additional \$50,000 for pavement management, known principal and interest debt payments for FY24, a 5 percent increase for general insurances for the police and fire departments, a 13.55 percent increase for Worcester County Retirement, and a 2.5 percent increase for Lunenburg Public Schools and Monty Tech. Unknown expenditures for the Overlay Account, which covers abatements, will affect how certified free cash is spent for FY24. More information on expenditures as follows:

- General Govt: Funds increase in hours for Asst Town Manager and Treasurer/Collector and increases IT internet costs for fiber, an increase in line item for replacement of workstations, security upgrades, and increased costs for email hosting. Overall increase of **\$101K**.
- Police- Does not fund request for additional officer (second Detective); increases in FY24 wage related per new Police CBA and In Service/Specialized Training. Decrease in Lock-Up Expenses. Overall increase of **\$197K**.
- Fire – Funds an increase in costs for equipment maintenance and EMS supplies line items, Fire specific IT software, and hydrant expense line item. Overall increase of **\$32K**
- Radio Watch- Overall **decrease of \$3K**.
- Animal Control- Increase of **\$4K** for kennel behind PSB for vicious dogs.
- Facilities- Funds a \$15K in the Facilities Contracted Services, \$5K Parks and Recreation programming salary line, and an increase of \$8K Parks and Recreation Contracted Services. Overall increase of **\$84K**
- DPW- Includes additional \$50K for Pavement Management A \$10K increase in Cemetery expenses, an overall increase in the General Highway account for drainage related costs, purchase of services, and ADA Public Rights of Way expenses totaling \$20K. An increase of \$5,000 for Snow & Ice. Tree Removal increase of \$4K. Overall increase of **\$60K**.
- COA- Funds increase in hours for the Outreach Coordinator and a new 10 hour/week Outreach Assistant. Moves Asst Meal Site Manager Salary entirely to operating budget. Overall increase of **\$35K**
- Library- Change of one position from Staff Librarian to Asst Lib. Director, increase in programming line, operational costs and exceeds the min. 16% towards Library Materials. Funds request for replacement copy machine in Central Purchasing account and security upgrades in the IT budget. Overall increase of **\$35K** in library budget.
- Worcester Reg. Retirement: 13.55% increase or **\$228K** more than the previous FY.
- Unclassified-Currently includes an 8.5% rate increase for active employees and 5% rate increase for retirees. The impact is \$448K. The other insurances are estimated at 5% and the Salary Reserve is increased by \$36K. The overall increase is **\$536K**.
- Debt Service- Due to expiring debt, our overall debt is **decreasing by \$979,711**
- Lunenburg Public Schools – Recommendation fully funds the Superintendent’s Proposed Budget of 3.1% increase for an additional **\$691K**
- Monty Tech- Recommendation includes a 2.5% increase or **\$26K**
- Solid Waste/Recycling Program- Increases this account by **\$40K** based on this year’s recycling expenses.

# FY2024 Expenditures-

## Conclusions

- State Aid figure level funded at FY23 amount- This unknown will become known by March 1st
- Fully funds all contractual obligations and increased costs for non-personnel related expenditures.
- Current recommendation draws \$271K Health Insurance Stabilization Account-Revise Active Health Insurance figure with rate renewal amount and Governor's State Aid figure will allow to revisit this recommendation.
- Maintains existing staff with additional IPTE town employee and seasonal recreational staff.
- Preliminary budget same as Superintendent's proposed FY24 budget.
- Current recommendation leaves a balance of \$2.8M of Free Cash that once amount determined for the Overlay Account, TM will present recommendation on use of any available free cash. Typically used for the Capital Plan, OPEB Trust Fund, stabilization accounts, and monetary ATM articles. Typically recommend leaving a portion to fall to next year's free cash.

4. **Tax Abatement/Assessment Discussion:** Mr. Menard explained that the finance committee is the only legislative body in town, and its job is to advise Town Meeting on the budget. Mr. Fortune informed the committee that those with waterfront property have formed the Lunenburg Lakes Action Committee, and around 420 people have filed abatements after the real estate tax bills went out. Mr. Fortune opined that if no mistake has been made by the assessor's office, then the people with waterfront property have been singled out as their property values have gone up 77 percent on average, while other properties in town have gone down, or only risen incrementally. Mr. Fortune explained that no one foresees the tax rate going down in FY24, and property owners will have to file for abatements again. Mr. Fortune added that if a clerical error has been made by the Board of Assessors, they can admit the error, and go to the Department of Revenue to have that error corrected. Ms. Bilotta added that she has spoken with four other assessors in the area, and all explained that when property values increase, taxes should increase incrementally. Ms. Bilotta talked about the people who have been living in town for several years, and are now on a fixed income, and asked how they're supposed to afford a 135 percent increase. Ms. Bilotta also added that all who've filed abatements could attend Town Meeting and vote no on all the articles. Mr. Menard urged the Lakes Action Committee to send any ideas or questions to the Finance Committee and Select Board to discuss with the state delegation at the March 7 meeting.
5. **State Representative Meeting Preparation:** Topics raised include: funding formulas, such as Chapter 70, and vocational schools, and real estate appraisal. Mr. Watters suggested sending questions out to the delegation before the meeting so they can prepare responses.
6. **Minutes:** Mr. Watters motioned to approve the minutes from the January 26, 2023 meeting. Mr. Nuzzolo seconded. On vote, motion carried unanimously.
7. **Future Meetings:** March 30 Public Hearing on FY2024 budget.
8. **Public Comment:**
  - a. **Board Comment:** Mr. Gray commented that he hopes 420 people don't show up to Town Meeting to vote everything down, and suggested that taking that kind of action won't solve any problems.

**9. Upcoming Meetings:** 2/23: COA, Land Use, and Library budget presentations. 3/2 IT, and Police Department, 3/7 Joint meeting with Select Board and School Committee with state delegation, 3/9 DPW and Facilities Department.

**10. Adjourn** At 8:24 p.m., Mr. Balish motioned to adjourn, Mr. Gray seconded. On vote, motion carried unanimously.