



**TOWN OF  
BROOKLINE, NEW HAMPSHIRE  
FINANCE COMMITTEE**

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**Brookline Finance Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, August 18, 2020**

- 1 \*Meeting Held Virtually Under Emergency Order #12\*  
2  
3 Committee Attendance: Brian Rater, Dennis Comeau, Matthew Mailloux  
4 Public in attendance: None  
5  
6 **Meeting called to order: 7:04pm**  
7  
8 Brian Rater (BR) – Welcomed all attendees to the August meeting of the Brookline Finance  
9 Committee. BR announced that the meeting was being held under the provisions of Emergency  
10 Order #12. Under this emergency order each member in attendance is required to announce the  
11 reason for attending virtually, their location, and if anyone other than themselves is in the room.  
12  
13 BR- Attended virtually due to social distancing guidance, BR is the only person in the room.  
14 Dennis Comeau (DC) - Attended virtually due to social distancing guidance, DC is the only  
15 person in the room.  
16 Matthew Mailloux (MM) - Attended virtually due to social distancing guidance, MM is the only  
17 person in the room.  
18  
19 BR reiterated the requirement that all votes must be recorded by roll call under the emergency  
20 order provisions.  
21  
22 BR asked if there was any public input at this time.  
23  
24 **There was no public input.**  
25  
26 BR reviewed the meeting agenda and asked if there were any adjustments to the published  
27 agenda.  
28  
29 **BR mentioned additions of the town budget summary and budget recommendations to the**  
30 **Selectboard. There were no other adjustments.**

DC moved to approve the minutes from the July 8 meeting. BR asked if the Committee had any changes to the draft minutes. There were no amendments to the minutes.

**DC moved to approve the minutes as written. BR seconded. BR entered the voting mode and voted yes. DC voted yes. MM voted yes. The motion carried 3-0, and the minutes from July 8 were approved.**

BR advanced the agenda to review committee appointments. BR mentioned that the Committee still needed to formally appointment DC to the solar committee following MM's recusal.

**MM moved to appoint DC to the Solar Committee, BR seconded. BR entered the voting mode and voted yes. DC voted yes. MM voted yes. The motion carried 3-0, and DC was approved to the Solar Committee.**

BR reviewed other appointments to various town boards. There were no adjustments to current appointments to town boards.

BR advanced to hear an update on the Budget Committee Study Committee.

MM provided an update on the committee's work, including recent qualitative data collection from peer towns finance and budget committees. MM reiterated that the quantitative data the committee has reviewed does not reflect any statistically significant patterns between the two forms of government.

BR agreed with the assessment from other peer communities that finance, and budget committees vary based on the personalities of the elected members, stating that some years have been more contentious than others.

MM also reported that some boards have cited recruitment challenges, but others have established very involved measures to ensure a healthy flow of potential members year after year.

BR advanced the agenda to provide an update on the DPW committee.

BR mentioned that the DPW committee has been meeting weekly working to establish a price estimate, approximately \$2-\$2.4 million. The Committee has not yet established a guaranteed maximum price for the project and is working to obtain subcontractor bids. The committee is weighing its options to reduce the total cost of the project. The requirement to install a fire suppression system has increased the total cost. The next phase the DPW committee is targeting is public education of the committee's work and benefits of the project as depicted.

BR advanced the agenda to hear an update on the Solar committee.

DC mentioned that the Solar committee has met 3 times so far. The committee has been working with Dick Henry at two of the meetings to better understand the process ahead. Henry has been helpful with past projects in the area including the SAU renewable energy projects. So far, the Committee has worked to understand the basic structure of municipal projects, including the importance of a baseline energy audit for town buildings. The town should first maximize its investments in energy efficiency before pursuing solar installations to ensure they maximize the value of the investments.

81  
82 BR advanced the agenda to provide input on 2021 budget recommendations.  
83  
84 BR explained that the Selectboard needs to provide direction to department heads for the  
85 budgeting process. In past years the guidance has been to achieve flat or declining budgets. BR  
86 explained that there are caveats from 2020, including two new positions added at town meeting,  
87 including a police officer and a second DPW employee. BR speculated that these positions alone  
88 will lead to a 2% overall increase. Additionally, BR mentioned that the New Hampshire  
89 Retirement System (NHRS) is reviewing statewide contributions from municipalities this year.  
90 NHRS conducts a 5-year lookback on investments and requires towns to meet any potential  
91 shortfall. BR said the town is expecting a significant cost increase related to this in the next  
92 budget.  
93  
94 BR explained that these increases do not account for an annual salary increase for town  
95 employees. In past years the process has been to compare Brookline's peer towns for their  
96 projected increases, normally between 2-3% per year.  
97  
98 MM added that since local taxes in NH are property tax dependent, the state is better insulated  
99 from recessionary impacts than other states. Nonetheless, at the state level the State is projecting  
100 substantial agency budget cuts as a result of COVID-19. In light of this MM asked if it is  
101 possible to hold any positions open, however BR explained both positions are already filled.  
102 MM recommended the town shoot for a 5% budget decrease as a hedge against unexpected  
103 expenses and/or revenue shortfalls due to COVID-19.  
104  
105 BR agreed that the State will likely experience a substantial budget shortfall, and this may impact  
106 the State's ability to provide revenue to towns, especially for education costs. This potential lack  
107 of revenue will likely impact Brookline's property tax rate. BR warned about the fragility of state  
108 funds.  
109  
110 DC mentioned that a 2% cost of living increase is often not applied to the first year of a new  
111 position. DC added that raises should reflect economic conditions broadly speaking. NH's job  
112 market is very fluid, with unemployment spiking to 17% at the height of the pandemic and since  
113 recovering to 8.1%. DC said it was hard to get a sense of where the economy will go from here.  
114 DC added that wages may still soften, and he was not in favor of skipping this year's salary  
115 increase."  
116  
117 BR said that Congress has propped up the economy with numerous supports. BR said that the  
118 police union salaries are set through a collective bargaining agreement (CBA), which is out of the  
119 preview of the Committee's recommendations. BR recommended providing conservative budget  
120 guidance to prepare for a bad situation. BR said that given the new positions and the NHRS cost  
121 increases, even conservative guidance would likely result in a net budget increase. BR  
122 recommended a focus on essentials only, but with leeway for emergency expenses. BR  
123 recommended a similar approach to town salaries as well.  
124  
125 MM added that this approach was consistent with the Committee's recommendations earlier this  
126 year regarding town expenses.  
127  
128 DC concluded that this was a matter of unknowns. BR said it will be important not to overextend  
129 the town. DC recommended that maybe 2022 could be a catch-up year for salaries or provide a

130 smaller cost of living adjustment next year, saying at this point we don't know how deep the  
131 trough will be.  
132  
133 BR mentioned that the school district budget contains a contingency fund that is approved  
134 separately from the budget. A public hearing is required to spend contingency funds. BR  
135 mentioned that the Selectboard decides budget recommendations values between November and  
136 January.  
137  
138 **BR recommended the Committee punt, with concerns swaying in both directions given the**  
139 **current uncertainty. BR said recommendations are due to Tad Putney by 8/27. BR asked**  
140 **the Committee to plan to attend the Selectboard meeting to review the recommendations.**  
141  
142 BR asked if there were any other reports from other committees. There were no other reports.  
143  
144 **BR stated that the committee's next scheduled meeting is for September 16.**  
145  
146 **BR asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. MM moved to adjourn; DC seconded.**  
147  
148 **BR entered the voting mode and voted yes. DC voted yes. MM voted yes. The motion**  
149 **carried 3-0.**  
150  
151 **The meeting was Adjourned at 7:40pm**