

MINUTES
Warrant Committee Meeting
January 11, 2022

Warrant Committee Members	Sharon Tatro (Chair), Robert Sliney, Stephen Callahan, Jill Rafter, Kristine Barton, Ed Vozzella, Jeremy Marsette, Amanda Hall, Mather Eldred	
Guests	Kristine Trierweiler, Nick Milano, Martha Festa	
Meeting Location	Remote meeting via Zoom	
Meeting Times	Meeting convened: 7:06 p.m.	Meeting adjourned: 8:48 pm.
Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> November 7, 2021 – Minutes approved unanimously 	
Operational Budgets (including votes taken)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	
Warrant Articles (including votes taken)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	
List of all documents and exhibits used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warrant Committee Budget Process Town of Medfield Financial Policies – Adopted July 31, 2018, revised November 2, 2021 	
Other Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	
Follow-ups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	
Dates for Meetings including WC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Next meeting date – January 26, 2022 	
Discussion	<p>Call to order for a remote meeting and introduction of current members and of new member Mather Eldred.</p> <p><i>I. Financial Policy:</i></p> <p>Kristine T. gave a background and overview of the financial policy. The goal of the financial policy is to make sure there are enough reserves to get through any downturn to avoid a drop in municipal services and/or layoffs. Additionally, it is also to outline the process for instituting a formalized capital plan as well as a standard to meet at every Town Meeting when the budget is voted on. Prior to 2018, we did not have a formalized financial policy to guide the direction of the budget and plan for the future. In 2018, the Board of Selectmen adopted the first iteration of a financial policy. As the policy was implemented over the past few years, there were some items</p>	

that needed tweaking. These tweaks were discussed in 2021 over 3 or 4 Selectmen meetings.

Steve asked if the Selectmen had any further changes to the ones that the Warrant Committee had previously provided. Kristine T. responded saying that the Selectmen incorporated some of the Warrant Committee edits and recommendations and she didn't think they were any additional items. The Selectmen voted to sign the financial policy and send to the Warrant Committee for approval.

Ed asked a question about unforeseen capital projects that had to be completed in an event of an emergency set forth in the last paragraph of Section II.A.1 of the Financial Policy. The language seems to impose a penalty to the department's operating budget based on the following language: *"In the case of an emergency that could not have been anticipated, if funds are available within the Capital Stabilization Fund, those funds may be used to cover the emergency with the funds to be repaid through the department's operating budget in future years."*

Sharon's interpretation of that sentence is that if there is a capital item, the department should include it in the 5 year budget and if they forget, then there is a penalty for that. The example that comes to mind is the Park and Rec van.

In the third paragraph of Section II.A.1(6), Ed suggested the sentence: *"other items with a useful life of more than 5 years or costing more than \$25,000"* should consist of multiple items (i.e. computers) and the language should be more clear to reflect that.

Kristine T. will bring these items back to the Selectmen for discussion and a potential revote and then bring back to Warrant Committee for a vote.

Jill questioned the amount if the \$25K was an appropriate amount. Kristine T. said historically it was \$5,000 and then it was raised to \$25K.

Recently, a school vehicle plow caught on fire. It was 17 years old. The replacement may be covered by insurance.

On the next Selectmen's agenda, they are hoping to have the free cash certification.

II. Budget Assignments:

Kristine Barton said that Planning and Zoning budgets were combined into a single budget.

Kristine T. gave an overview on the budget process. She also announced that Joy, the Town Accountant will be retiring at the end of the fiscal year.

The Annual Town Meeting Warrant opened in December and will close on

January 25th.

At the next Selectmen's meeting, Kristine and Nick will be presenting the preliminary budget information with revenue projections and initial thoughts on the budget and future goals. Kristine T. had to cut several positions a few years ago and will be looking to restore at least 2 of those positions

The Town put the capital budget on pause while waiting for information and clarity from the Treasury and from Norfolk County on the ARPA funding before any decisions were made on how to utilize those funds. The final rule was issued last week and Kristine will start putting together ARPA spending plan. The Capital Budget committee has met and reviewed all of the budget requests from the department heads and will also be working on determining how to fund the new capital stabilization fund.

Kristine T. and Nick have met with all the Town department heads and will be working with them to present a budget of new items but keeping in mind that there are still deficiencies in the budget from the pandemic.

Kristine T. applied for and received a grant from the State to work with the Collins Center for Public Management to develop a new budget document. This will run parallel with the FY23 budget process and will try to incorporate any information from this fiscal year but it's intended to be fully operational for FY24. This is all very exciting and will give residents more context and insight into the budget and how the department run and work together.

Ed asked Kristine T. about the ARPA funding and how it gets carried over from last year. Kristine will send an updated spreadsheet.

Jill asked about timing of the process and the major milestones to reach to the Spring Town Meeting. School committee presents their budget at the end of January and once they submit, then we will have the full budget picture. When the Warrant Committee first sees the budget, it is not balanced.

When we get the initial budget from Kristine and Nick, then Warrant Committee members can then meet with their department heads to discuss.

Bob commented that there is a benefit to having all department heads come in to present to the Warrant Committee, no matter how large or small the budget so that the Warrant Committee, as a whole, can get the big picture of the entire budget. Bob also wanted to know that Kristine T's expectations were for meetings with the department heads, specifically, is it the Warrant Committee's role to close the budget gap with their respective departments?

Also discussed was when the financial policy refers to the "Warrant Committee's budget" It is the Warrant Committee's responsibility to bring a balance budget to town meeting.

Steve commented that even though it is the Warrant Committee's responsible to propose a balanced budget, it should not relieve the Selectmen from also submitting a balanced budget. Kristine T. commented that it's difficult because the Town side is only 1/3 of the total budget. Additionally, some of the requests in town department numbers are just estimates until final numbers are released (i.e. health insurance, property insurance, etc.).

Additionally, when departments are submitting budget, cost of living increases has not been assigned yet so those numbers will change as well.

The Warrant Committee starts with the premise that there won't be an override and so our goal is to try to balance the budget without an override. Bob commented that the fiscal discipline of a "no override" objective is very important in that the Town needs to spend within their means. Steve asked if Kristine T. had any indication if there may be an override this year? Kristine T. said that in her opinion, she doesn't think the Selectmen would be in favor of an override nor does she think the residents would either.

Prior to 2018, Kristine had discussions with her department heads that there were structural deficiencies within the budget and that the request would be in excess of what the revenue brought in and Kristine was prepared to address that but then COVID hit and it put everything on hold. While we've been able to work through some of those deficiencies with ARPA funds and Cares Act money, those are one time payments. By the time we get to 2025, we will have to make some hard decisions about our revenues and expenditures.

There was a discussion concerning free cash. It was reiterated that free cash is in financial policy to not use for operating items. Free cash should be used for non-recurring items and not recurring operating items.

III. Review Town Meeting Process:

Martha Festa joined as a guest to discuss her thoughts about the Town Meeting process and her unease of people presenting financials which have not reviewed by the Warrant Committee. Those numbers are not objective since it favors that side's argument and she thinks it should be vetted by the Warrant Committee prior to being presented at Town Meeting. She thinks that these numbers should not get the same credibility as financials that have been vetted by the Warrant Committee.

Scott McDermott did not think it needed to be an amendment to the Charter but possibly added as a Town Meeting policy.

There was a discussion about not being the only Town presented this this type of issue. Medfield can't be unique in the process and there must be other towns that have dealt with this same issue. Some ideas that were thrown around we: (i) numbers must be presented to the Warrant Committee prior to Town meeting, (ii) Warrant Committee review the

presentation prior to Town Meeting or (iii) if none of the above are possible, then some caveat that it has not been vetted by the Warrant Committee.

Jeremy will reach out to other members of the Association of Town Finance Committee to see how they may have dealt with this issue at their respective Town Meetings. Jeremy added that there is a difference between open town meetings and representative town meetings. Additionally, some towns go longer than one night and for example, in Natick, if somebody does present some financial information, then that article is put on hold to be reviewed by the finance committee and then brought back to town meeting on a successive night.

This proposed policy would be a recommendation to Scott McDermott, the Moderator, who would then take it into account, as he runs the Town Meeting.

Jeremy also suggested that a document called "Town Meeting Time" be reviewed. This document is published by the Massachusetts Moderator's Association.

IV. Scheduling for the Spring:

Next Warrant Committee meeting will be held next Wednesday, January 26th instead of January 25th.

In past practice, our schedule has been to meet every other week in January and February and then every week in March heading into Town Meeting. This year, Town Meeting is the first Monday in May. Kristine T.'s goal is to print the Warrant at the end of March. Kristine T. will provide us with the date of the Warrant Hearing which needs to be held at least 30 days before Town Meeting.

Selectmen have been clear that they will not take up anything with respect to the State Hospital at the Annual Town Meeting. That topic will need to be presented at a Special Town Meeting.

Sharon will send out a doodle poll for February and March meetings. We will skip meeting during the February vacation week.

Respectfully Submitted: Kristine Barton

Approved minutes to be sent to: nmilano@medfield.net