

Budget Practices Review Ad-Hoc Subcommittee  
of the Advisory Committee  
September 18, 2023  
Room 103 Town Hall

In attendance: committee members, Neil Gordon, Susan Granoff, Amy Hummel (chair), Lee Selwyn, Katherine Florio and Stephen Reeders were present; Harry Bohrs was absent. David-Marc Goldstein (AC/TM Pct. 8) was also present.

During the September 18, 2023 meeting of the ad-hoc subcommittee on Budget Practices Review, a quorum of the committee briefly discussed the items on the agenda, noted below.

*Recall: The purpose of the Budget Practices Review ad-hoc subcommittee is to explore how the Advisory Committee might engage in the budgeting process earlier in the cycle in order to:*

- *more effectively and efficiently carry out its duties;*
- *better serve the Town; and*
- *better serve Town Meeting, without improperly overstepping the Advisory Committee's charge.*

*See prior meeting notes for more context.*

## **Agenda**

1. Refine 2023 recommendation(s) to present to the full Advisory Committee based on the Spring 2023 pilot
2. Discuss Next Steps
3. Adjourn

**1.** The ad-hoc sub-committee spent the bulk of the meeting reviewing guidance to share with the AC for pilot 2.0 this fall based on prior conversations and in-light of takeaways from the mini-pilot in winter 2023.

### **Rolling out the Fall 2023 Pilot (pilot 2.0)**

After a brief review of the ideas and concerns expressed in previous meetings, the ad-hoc subcommittee agreed on basic guidelines to share with Advisory Committee subcommittee chairs to follow in the fall of 2023. A summary of those guidelines appears below:

The BPR ad-hoc subcommittee recommends the following preparation and meeting format\*:

- meetings (not hearings), will be informal and in person (unless impossible);
- no recordings, to encourage candor when discussing concerns;
- subcommittee chairs will ask for expansion requests and grant and outside funding resources from the department head(s);

- chairs will prepare by reviewing a minimum of three years of past AC subcommittee reports as well as review the final AC report (over several years) in order to identify on-going concerns or themes;
- chairs will share a list of questions provided by the BPR ad-hoc subcommittee, in addition to relevant questions of their own subcommittee (related to operations, not budget). These additional questions will come from the sub-comm chair's experience, and the committee's review of past budget reports.
- Minutes will reflect the subcommittee's take-aways, and rather than focus on individual speakers, will focus on areas of concern and ideas.

*\*BPR has created a separate guidance sheet with specific questions and more detail.*

Who will participate?

- The AC chair may help determine the subset of the AC subcommittees (all or some) that will pilot an operations review this fall.
- The subcommittee chairs themselves, possibly along with the AC chair, (not the BPR ad-hoc) will determine which department heads to engage this fall.
- In future years, some subcommittees (such as Capital) may have regular fall operations discussions, while other subcommittees may need only meet every-other year.

The BPR ad-hoc recommends:

**1. selecting a few departments with budgetary needs that have consistently been cause for concern** based on on-going funding concerns the Advisory Committee has identified or that Town Meeting has struggled with, in the past few years. *That said, because this fall is light in warrant articles, it is a good time to have many of these conversations.*

**NB:** The BPR is still awaiting the TA and SB to share the priority list the TA will use as he discussed the budget with department heads this fall. To date, that list of priorities is still a work in progress; however, the salaries of middle managers and staff, street repair and the cost of the recent police settlement will all weigh heavily in those continuing discussions.

**2. The BPR also recommends that some subcommittee chairs meet with their full committee and others use smaller working groups,** in order to get a sense of whether one format is more useful and effective than another.

This work **may be undertaken** by a **working group(s) of subcommittees**, and not the entire subcommittee, simply to begin to test questions and the concept generally, **but BPR is leaving that decision to individual subcommittee chairs**, who will report on the outcome to the full advisory, who will, in time, determine if full subcommittee meetings, rather than smaller working group meetings are most efficient.

## Restated Concerns of Note Regarding Tone and Tenor and Conversation Content

- It is important to the majority of the committee that whatever form this pilot process takes, the questions **focus on operating concerns and departmental needs**, and **avoid** becoming some form of **budget review or a lobbying forum**.
- The School Department Budget is the elephant in the room regarding the Town's budget overall. **The School Committee is responsible for the school budget**, and while the Advisory Committee can and does review the budget and ask questions, the School Superintendent and the School Committee are responsible for setting school priorities and spending.

## 2. Next Steps

- Schedule a meeting to report subcommittee discussions to the full Advisory Committee
- Separately, the AC in some constellation must attempt **identify a baseline of needs (need to have v. nice to have) measured against SB priorities and AC identified concerns this fall**, to share and act upon. *This item is an action item for the Budget Process Review subcommittee.*
- **Capture, collate and communicate key findings, concerns, and additional questions** with the deputy Town Administrator, Town Administrator and other relevant parties. *This item is an action item for the Budget Process Review subcommittee to recommend/discuss with the AC chair and full AC.*
- **Create or identify a process to record and track progress in areas of concern overtime.** *This item is an action item for the Budget Process Review subcommittee.*
- Continue to review and refine pilot process.

## Items for (possible) future discussion

- Identifying unfunded Town Meeting Resolutions
- Possible funding the Advisory committee might use to address issues of high concern