

TOWN OF BROOKLINE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Administration and Finance Subcommittee Report
Town Clerk FY24 Budget
Public Hearing held via Zoom February 25, 2023

Overview	FY23 Budget (Revised)	Proposed FY24 Budget	
Request	\$848,668	\$882,621 (\$848,668 without an override)	<i>4% increase over FY23 should an override pass; level funded otherwise</i>

Recommendation: The Administration and Finance Subcommittee, by a vote of 4-0, unanimously recommends favorable action on the Town Clerk’s proposed budget of \$882,621 (\$848,668 should the override fail.)

Hearing Recording: Click on the link below and enter the passcode when prompted to view the recording of this hearing. The Town Clerk’s budget starts at 1:27:47.

Recording: <https://bit.ly/3SGCB6w>

Access Passcode: 96ydj@%k

Attendance: Ben Kaufman, Melissa Goff, Lincoln Heineman, Charles Young, Kelly Hardebeck, Neil Gordon, Joslin Murphy, Harry Bohrs

On February 24, 2023, the Administration & Finance subcommittee of the Advisory Committee held a meeting and public hearing related to the proposed FY 2024 Town Clerk’s Office budget.

In summary and by comparison, the proposed budget is as follows:

FY 22 actual	\$530,082
FY 23 budget, as revised	\$848,668
FY 24 proposed – override passes	\$882,621 (+4% vs. FY 23)
FY 24 proposed – override fails	\$848,668 (level funded vs. FY 23)

The meeting began with a short presentation by Ben Kaufman, the Town Clerk (copies of slides attached).

Notable points of discussion were as follows:

The Department has three government mandated subprograms - Public Records, Elections, and Voter Registration.

Both the FY 23 and FY 24 (proposed) budgets include funds to fill the position of Assistant Town Clerk, fill otherwise vacant positions vs. FY 22 actuals, and provide funds for increasing cost of elections, including provisions for early voting. In common with other departments, the Town Clerk has difficulty filling open positions, including the Assistant Town Clerk position, and retaining staff, due to less than competitive compensation as compared to peer communities.

The Moderator, responsible by statute for running Town Meeting, has no staff; the Town Clerk's Office provides needed support, which, as planned, will return to the High School auditorium in May. Support includes staffing check in tables, arrangements (including devices) for early voting, and more.

An ongoing project is codification and "clean up" of the Town Bylaws, expected to be completed by the end of 2024. In the interim, the Town Clerk's Office is implementing an interim method of more easily identifying amendments and additions to the Bylaws which have not yet been integrated into the text of the Bylaws as posted publicly (a particular issue vis a vis warrant articles proposing further bylaw amendments).

Recently passed (by Town Meeting) provisions to provide voters with ballot question information has not been budgeted, but will likely be funded through a Reserve Fund transfer.

Spending from year to year is significantly impacted by the number of elections. The budget impact is in part mitigated through an Election Reserve Fund, i.e., state reimbursements held for this purpose. (The Election Reserve Fund may also be used to provide needed funds should the planned override fail to get voter approval.) (The amount the state will reimburse Brookline for implementing the VOTES act is unknown, but the Town Clerk submitted for \$75K.)

There was brief discussion of the year to year variability in the Town Clerk's due to the number of elections in any particular year. It was suggested that we might find an opportunity to smooth the budget, e.g., fully funding the Town Clerk's Office when there are multiple elections, but diverting those excess funds in quieter years, and vice versa. By way of example only, quiet years might provide an opportunity for greater contributions to pay down pension or OPEB liabilities, or contributions to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, with those amounts scaled back in years there are multiple elections. (The average paid for pension, OPEB or for affordable housing over a multiple year cycle wouldn't change; only individual years would be "smoothed.")

Following public comment and discussion by the subcommittee members, the subcommittee voted unanimously to recommend Favorable Action on the Town Clerk's Office FY 24, either as proposed (presuming passage of an override), or as otherwise proposed should an override fail.

An additional note regarding a recent "pilot" meeting held recently by members of the A&F subcommittee, on behalf of the AC's budget review committee. The purpose of the meeting was to engage with the Town Clerk on matters of operations, more so that the traditional winter meeting where the focus is, of necessity, focused on the budget. The consensus of those attending was that the operational review was worthwhile, and added significant value, and efficiency, to the subsequent budget review meeting.