

Advisory Committee – Capital Subcommittee
FY24 Budget Review: Department of Public Works/Water & Sewer
Enterprise Fund
Public Hearing (virtual) March 8, 2023

Attendees: Subcommittee members Carlos Ridruejo (chairman), Harry Friedman, John Doggett, Alok Somani;
Commissioner of Public Works Erin Chute Gallentine, Deputy Commissioner and Director of Highway and Sanitation Kevin Johnson, Director of Parks & Open Space Alexandra Vecchio, Director of Engineering & Transportation Robert King, Director of Water & Sewer Jay Hersey, Assistant Town Administrator for Finance Charlie Young;
Hugh Mattison, Arlene Mattison, John Bowman, Fran Perler, Abby Swaine, Shonali Guadino, Emily Jacobsen, Nancy O’Connor.

The recording of the hearing can be viewed here:

https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/Fuf_d-RwD0M8YZ7R7Vvr5Lm5j7ScvV6HP6DpAmp8-y2h_mUeVkDuJO3AAMNUDB_8.WQf0L8KmDptOyHvz

Passcode: embedded in link above.

Presentation

The Commissioner gave a presentation summarising the department’s guiding principles, the accomplishments of the past year, and the goals and objectives of FY24.

Accomplishments—Among the FY23 accomplishments were:

- Update the website to make it a more useful space for citizens to obtain current, informative and accurate information
- Completed a Financial Plan Report for the Water and Sewer Enterprise Fund
- Completed the reconstruction and safety improvements to Woodland Road
- Nearing substantial completion of the Carlton Street footbridge
- Hired Brookline’s first Zero Waste Program Manager (ZWPM) responsible to improve service, manage costs, address regulatory compliance, and reduce the Town’s impact on the environment associated with solid waste management. (This position was funded by grants, and the expectation is that an increase in fees associated with waste removal/sanitation program will fund this in the future.)

Goals—Among the goals for FY24 are:

- Complete the regular 4-year reaccreditation process for DPW
- Implement a grant to review and update DPW job descriptions and compensation plans to ensure that they are appropriate for the market and can attract and retain qualified and competent employees
- Manage the Washington Street Corridor Complete Streets DOT TIP Project
- Begin development of an updated Open Space Plan
- Improve the tracking of water usage on private and public accounts to identify potential leaks/losses, bolster water conservation efforts, and increase customer participation in water management through public education and awareness.

Employees—DPW has 166 employees and at the time of the presentation had 21 vacancies across all Divisions. There are three positions that were cut during Covid budget reductions: the Horticulture Supervisor in the Parks and Open Space Division, a Motor Equipment Operator: CDL Class B Driver in the Highway Division and a Motor Equipment Operator: CDL Class B Driver in the Sanitation Division. This budget proposes to restore the CDL Class B Driver in the Sanitation Division. This position is one of the drivers for the trash routes and has to be filled to complete daily trash collection. The cut in this position meant that someone had to be pulled every day from another Division to complete this task.

While this budget does not restore the other two positions it does add positions through the sanitation fee or override that address other community priorities, services, needs, and functions that have been discussed regularly in public meetings.

Water & Sewer Enterprise Fund Operating Budget

FY22 Actual Expenses*	FY23 Budget	FY24 Budget (with or without override)	% Change
\$30,281,686	\$31,358,359	\$32,522,728	3.71%

Despite the fact that in an enterprise fund, revenues equal expenses, in FY22, revenues were actually \$31,539,688.

The expenses of the Water and Sewer Enterprise were lower than originally budgeted due to the number of vacancies, benefits associated with those positions

and reallocating \$400,000 budgeted from the Water and Sewer Enterprise to ARPA funding for Stormwater infrastructure. The adjustments were made to support the Water and Sewer Reserve that had been significantly impacted during the pandemic. Revenues that exceed expenses are retained earnings and can help support capital infrastructure work and the health of the reserves.

Almost 70% of this budget, \$22.7M in FY24, is for our MWRA assessment. It is expected to increase approximately .5%. In fact while the water portion of that is expected to rise (\$528,715), this will be mostly offset by a decrease in the assessment for sewers (\$417,773). This is attributable, in part, to the ongoing sewer lining project where the Town is reducing inflow and infiltration into the sewer lines.

The department is adding an IT Systems manager (\$90,823), due in part to the water meter replacement project and upgrade of meter reading software. There is also a lead service/pipe inventory and replacement project about to commence. The Department will audit service pipes (the pipes that feed off the main pipe that goes down the centre of the street and into residences) that are made of lead, with the first step being an inventory, with the intent to develop a program to remove all lead service pipes in Town. The Town will map all of the service pipes and develop a phased plan for removal. The Town is planning to apply for funding through a loan forgiveness program from the Clean Water Trust administered through DEP.

The department is one of the last to absorb credit card fees, and this year will start having the public pay for the fees. This causes the budget to decrease by \$34,000.

Discussion

Question on how the water meter refurbishment is being funded. Answer: a capital project already in the budget.

Question on new water meters. Answer: the new meters are the latest technology and much more accurate than the old ones.

Question on whether the lead pipe service lines are public or private. Answer: could be either. Past surveys mostly picked up the public service lines, which are from the main line to the property line. After that, they are usually the property owner's responsibility. We are trying to do a complete comprehensive inventory.

If a line predates 1940, we know there is a good chance it is lead. The Town will apply to programs to help pay for the removal and replacement of these lines.

Recommendation

There was a motion to approve the Water & Sewer Enterprise Fund operating budget in the amount of \$32,522,728. This passed 4-0-0 on a rollcall vote.

DPW Operating Budget

FY22 Actual Expenses	FY23 Budget	FY24 Budget (without override)	% Change	FY24 Budget (with override)
\$16,736,731	\$17,121,906	\$17,684,901	3.29%	\$18,353,740 (6% from FY23)

The major monetary changes in the non-override budget are as follows:

- Solid Waste Disposal +\$193,213—as in past years, the cost to dispose of trash and recycling has gone up.
- Sanitation Overtime Costs +\$105,000. The sanitation OT budget has been historically underfunded and thus pulling from other Division budgets to cover sanitation OT resulting from state/federal holidays, amnesty weeks, special events (marathon), and seasonal hours for leaf pick-up during heavy season.
- Zero Waste Programme Manager +\$80,741
- Inspectional Services/Code Enforcement +\$80,471—this is for personnel due, in part, to the rat problem. The individual will be responsible for regulatory compliance, education, research and implementation of the Solid Waste Regulations, and inspections of waste storage, issuance of citations, and following up on program areas. The person can also deal with other code enforcement issues, such as leaf blower complaints.

If the override passes, the following items, mostly investments in sanitation control due to more trash in the parks and rats, and Urban Forestry management/maintenance to provide for more oversight, grant writing, regulatory review and operations to manage the Town’s 60,000+ trees would be the major additions to the DPW budget. The override also restores some of the cuts made to the DPW fleet budget during the pandemic and allows capacity for additional roadway rehabilitation that would be reflected in the capital budget:

- Purchase of a small packer truck +\$140,000—this would enable trash to be collected more frequently as a second shift would be added to extend collection at parks, public grounds, schools, and commercial areas (currently areas of high complaint).
- Operator of small packer truck +\$63,839
- Tree Warden +\$98,374
- Forestry Bucket Truck (3-year lease) +\$89,267

Discussion

Question on Pay As You Throw (PAYT) rates. Answer: The Town currently has a Pay as you Throw model for trash based upon the size and number of the waste-carts per household. Included in the fee is the recycling program and individualized services such as special and bulky waste pick-up. This past year the DEP mandated that mattresses be collected and processed separately for recycling. For FY24 we are introducing charges for disposing of mattresses, bulky items and white goods (appliances). This is a special service utilized by some residents. We have tried to keep these rates low, and feel they are competitive both with other municipalities and with other means of disposal.

Question whether in buildings not on town service, do the private haulers have to offer recycling and abide by regulations covering things like the disposal of mattresses and textiles. Answer: Yes, and the Town checks to be sure of compliance through their annual permit.

Question on how we are doing with street trees, especially new ones, having enough water. Answer: For new trees, we used to have a one-year, and later a two-year warranty. But that did not guarantee that the trees would be watered, because it was often cheaper for the contractor to let the tree die and then replace it. So, we have looked at different options, like the gator bags. We don't have sufficient staff to keep up with watering. We plant 350 to 400 trees per year. We use the watering truck for just the first two years.

Question on staff funded by Host Community Agreements (HCAs). As the HCAs disappear, how will we fund the staff: Answer: The HCAs will continue to carry positions into 2024. We will try to phase some people into the DPW budget and work on the rest.

Question on how high up on the priority list the override items are. Answer: High. The urban canopy requires resources for which the Department has identified for

years, but the Town was not able to fund. The additional trash truck and operator, while a new request, is critical. Covid has stressed the trash situation in our parks. The volume of people using and dining in the parks has increased significantly. The amount of trash and food remnants has also increased. This is a situation that has been experienced in urban parks across the country. The trash receptacles must be emptied with greater frequency to keep up with the volume. This will serve public parks, grounds, school grounds, and commercial areas as the priority locations where there are the greatest complaints of overflowing trash cans.

Question from Fran Perler regarding the rodent crisis. I thought increased trash fees would fund inspectors, but it looks like increased enforcement is only in an override budget. Answer: The code enforcement manager is in the base (non-override) budget. The request for more Bigbelly trash receptacles is in the ARPA proposal and is also included in each park renovation request. The override would fund the new packer truck and its operator for increased trash collection.

Comment from Abby Swaine noted the need for continued maintenance of sidewalks, kerb cuts, etc.

Question from Park and Recreation Commissioner Nancy O'Connor on whether there would be a trash amnesty day this year. Answer: Yes.

Question from Fran Perler if there would be fees if one brought hazardous waste to the town dump? Answer: There would not be a separate fee if it is an item accepted during Household Hazardous Waste Day.

Recommendation

There was a motion to approve the base (non-override) DPW operating budget in the amount of \$17,684,901. This passed 4-0-0 on a rollcall vote.

There was a motion to approve the override DPW operating budget in the amount of \$18,353,741. This passed 3-1-0 on a rollcall vote, Harry Friedman being the No vote.