

Minutes of the Meeting of the Norfolk County Advisory Board Finance Committee
Wednesday, May 6, 2020
via GoToMeeting Teleconference
2:00 p.m.

Welcome/Call to Order

Chairman Joseph Reardon of Milton called the Meeting of the Norfolk County Advisory Board Finance Committee to order at 2:07 p.m. Mr. Paul Connors, Chairman of the Norfolk County Advisory Board, opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. Chairman Reardon called for a moment of silence in honor of Avon Selectman Robert F. Brady Jr. who had served as a member of the Norfolk County Advisory Board.

Chairman Reardon explained that given the global COVID-19 pandemic the meeting was being held via teleconference. He noted that in a public meeting all participants would be seen but given the nature of the proceedings he would request all participants identify themselves.

Chairman Reardon then called the roll of Norfolk County Finance Committee members:

Joseph Reardon of Milton - Present
Carl Balduf of Plainville - Present
Elizabeth Childs of Brookline - Present
Paul Connors of Randolph - Present
Owen Dugan of Wellesley - Present
Helen Donohue - Present

Chairman Reardon then identified other individuals on the call:

Norfolk County Commissioner Francis W. O'Brien
Norfolk County Commissioner Peter Collins
Norfolk County Commissioner Joseph P. Shea
Norfolk County Director Michael Mullen
Assistant County Director William Buckley
Manager of Personnel Services Michelle Labadini
County Treasurer Jim Timilty
County Accountant Joe D'Auria
NCAHS Trustee Michael McFarland
NCAHS Trustee Edward Little
NCAHS Superintendent/Director Tammy Quinn
NCAHS Business Manager Rick Fitzpatrick

Register of Deeds William O'Donnell
1st Assistant Register of Deeds Richard Kennedy
2nd Assistant Register of Deeds Marguerite Lee

Chairman Reardon noted that 2 participants on the conference call declined to identify themselves.

A motion was made by Mr. Connors, and seconded by Mr. Balduf, to approve the Minutes of the NCAB Finance Committee Meeting of April 22, 2020 as submitted.

On a roll call vote:

Joseph Reardon of Milton "yes"
Carl Balduf of Plainville "yes"
Elizabeth Childs of Brookline "yes"
Paul Connors of Randolph "yes"
Owen Dugan of Wellesley "yes"
Helen Donohue of Norwood "yes"

VOTED: To approve the Minutes of the NCAB Finance Committee Meeting of April 22, 2020 as submitted.

A motion was made by Mr. Connors, seconded by Mr. Balduf, to approve the Minutes of the NCAB Finance Committee Meeting of April 29, 2020 as submitted.

On a roll call vote:

Joseph Reardon of Milton "yes"
Carl Balduf of Plainville "yes"
Elizabeth Childs of Brookline "yes"
Paul Connors of Randolph "yes"
Owen Dugan of Wellesley "yes"
Helen Donohue of Norwood "Abstained"

VOTED: To approve the Minutes of the NCAB Finance Committee Meeting of April 29, 2020 as submitted.

Chairman Reardon said there were two departments, the Registry and the Norfolk County Agricultural High School wishing to make presentations to the Finance Committee this afternoon.

He then invited Register O'Donnell to begin his presentation.

Review and Discussion of FY21 Registry of Deeds Budget Request

Register O'Donnell began with overall comments describing the cuts to his budget, specifically in Groups 2,3,5 and 6 as impacting the core of Registry functions. He explained his budget, as submitted on February 7, was level funded. His facility has remained open during the pandemic continuing to generate funds for the County. He stated that Group 2 should not be cut, but rather increased. In the event of a COVID-19 type situation the Registry did not have the funds needed to do deep cleaning of the Registry Building. This will require a \$50,000 transfer in FY20. From a personnel position, the Register noted the Registry is operating under the County wide hiring freeze.

Register O'Donnell went on to say that to close out FY20, there was an assumption made of no revenue from April, May, and June of this fiscal year. The Register reported strong April recording and Deeds Excise Fees. He highlighted that the County is now approximately \$780,000 over projection in the current fiscal year and said that May and June historically are strong months for the real estate market. Register O'Donnell argued against the cuts to his budget with the positive revenue picture he referenced.

Chairman Joseph Reardon thanked Register O'Donnell for his presentation. He then called upon members of the Finance Committee for comment and questions.

Dr. Childs of Brookline asked about Point #1 on the Register's Outline provided to the Finance Committee. She noted the April revenues and asked the Register for his sense of May and June numbers.

Register O'Donnell underscored that in one day the Registry cleared 607 documents, mostly title transfers and refinances. He noted that once the stay at home order was lifted, hopefully in the traditionally busy months of May and June, that there will be an additional increase.

Dr. Childs said that the explanation was helpful and asked for clarification around the reduction in the proposed FY20 budget and the current proposal of \$742,000 in cuts for FY21. She stated that these did not amount to millions of dollars in cuts and that many of those positions were unfilled.

Register O'Donnell emphasized that in FY21 nine positions were slated to be cut, and that these positions were needed to allow new workers to be trained in the event of a vacancy and that the employees in Grade 9s and 11s are needed to hire and promote employees.

Dr. Childs asked for further information around the length of time each position has been left unfilled in the budget.

Mrs. Donohue asked the Register on average how many documents were processed daily.

Register O'Donnell responded that in some years 135,000 are processed, one year was 150,000. He noted that in March, 728 documents were processed in a single day.

Mr. Dugan asked the Register where his budgeted salaries would come at by the fiscal year's end with the current vacant positions funded in FY20.

Register O'Donnell estimated that approximately \$400,000 in salaries would be unspent in FY20. He noted that there were over \$740,000 worth of cuts in this proposed budget.

Mr. Dugan countered that Register O'Donnell had served for many years and in this current fiscal situation changes must be made.

Register O'Donnell responded that reasonable people can disagree.

Chairman Reardon asked if operations at other Registry of Deeds in other counties could be compared to Norfolk.

Register O'Donnell said it was difficult to pinpoint, but that Plymouth County Register of Deeds describes the Norfolk County Registry as much busier than the Plymouth Registry.

Chairman Reardon asked that comparison information be produced so that the Advisory Board could compare apples to apples. He then asked Superintendent of the Norfolk County Agricultural High School Dr. Tammy Quinn to begin her presentation.

Review and Discussion of FY21 Norfolk County Agricultural High School Budget Request

Dr. Quinn introduced the NCAHS budget as rooted in the mission to deliver quality teaching and learning. She explained the funding sources which make up the schools budget, County Commitment, tuitions, and State Chapter 70 local aid. She also noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic the need to educate students remotely has highlighted the costs of online learning.

NCAHS Trustee Michael McFarland spoke to the attached PowerPoint presentation chronicling the various pieces of legislation which has had an impact on the schools budget over time. He noted that the school now has 290 students and is challenged by its own success with many aspirants seeking admittance.

NCAHS Business Manager Richard Fitzpatrick characterized the NCAHS budget process as one with great strides made to drill down to a bare bones budget prior to COVID-19 outbreak. He noted a number of increasing costs, including transportation and special education. On the expense side, the school has worked hard to maintain staffing and current programs. He then went on to describe the current collective bargaining agreements of 3 ½ COLA as well as steps and columns which are also collectively bargained and contribute to rising operations costs. There is also a debt service increase for the current MSBA project. Mr. Fitzpatrick also described priority efforts to retain students who might choose to leave for a number of reasons.

FY21 Budget Process and Timeline

Chairman Joseph Reardon and Advisory Board Chairman Connors then had a discussion about tentatively scheduling another NCAB Finance Committee meeting for May 13, 2020 at 2:00 pm so that the Treasurer's office could provide feedback. He then asked members to present any questions they had for the Commissioners at next week's meeting.

Dr. Childs asked how staff would be prevented from promotion if empty positions were not funded and expressed her concern about the structural deficit.

Chairman Reardon spoke about the structural issues within the County budget. He said he knew the Commissioners had reached out to the State Auditor, but that he felt strongly that a deeper dive exploring operational best practices was warranted.

NCAB Chairman Paul Connors asked for clarification around needed positions at the Registry of Deeds.

Mrs. Donohue asked for more information about step and grade increases.

Chairman Reardon summarized the discussion from the Finance Committee relating to follow-up questions that would be asked of the Commissioners' Office and the Registry of Deeds, including a comparative analysis between Norfolk County and other Registries of Deeds, to be answered at the following week's meeting.

There being no further business before the Finance Committee, Mr. Connors made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mrs. Abdullah-Donohue seconded the motion. Chairman Reardon called the roll:

On a roll call vote:

Joseph Reardon of Milton "yes"

Carl Balduf of Plainville “yes”
Elizabeth Childs of Brookline “yes”
Paul Connors of Randolph “yes”
Owen Dugan of Wellesley “yes”
Helen Donohue of Norwood “yes”

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting at 4:00 pm.