

Town of Brunswick, Maine

**Finance Committee Meeting
Monday, October 12, 2021 at 5:30 PM
85 Union Street – Council Chambers
and by electronic devices**

Meeting Minutes (Approved 11/8/21)

Elected Officials: Councilors Dan Ankeles
Stephen Walker (remote)
Dan Jenkins (remote) – left meeting at 6:00 PM

Staff: Julia Henze
Branden Perreault
John Eldridge (remote)

1. Acknowledgement that meeting was properly noticed

DA called meeting to order. JH confirmed the meeting was properly noticed.

2. Adjustments to agenda / Public comment

None.

3. Approval of meeting minutes from 9/13/2021

SW moved, DJ seconded, all in favor.

4. Property Tax Assistance Program

JH presented a number of documents to enable the FC to fully review the program, and consider options to make changes. These included:

- a. State Statute - MRS Title 36, Section 6232, Chapter 907-A: Municipal Property Tax Assistance which allows the Town to offer a property tax assistance program, and includes certain limitations.
- b. Article IV Brunswick, ME Code of Ordinances – Property Tax Assistance. Any amendment will require a public hearing
- c. The results of our survey of programs currently active in eight municipalities in Maine. JH noted that Gardiner seems to have discontinued its program, and Portland recently amended its program to more closely follow the State's PTFC program
- d. Data from the State's Property Tax Fairness Credit Program with the credits received by Brunswick residents for 2017 to 2020 tax returns. BP explained the data, and reviewed how the State's program changes in the income eligibility and the 'affordability' percentage affected the number of credits in 2020. For the 65 and older group, the number of credits increased from 255 in 2019 to 415 in 2020.
- e. Actual results from Brunswick's Property Tax Assistance Program for FY2020 and FY2021, with estimates for FY2022. BP reviewed the data and explained the assumptions of the FY2022 projections. With 37 applications received to date, estimated credits will total \$29,843, and staff estimates that an additional 20 applications will qualify for credits of approximately \$17,743, for an estimated total of \$47,586. JH pointed out that this estimate is for 9-10 more applicants than the prior year.

- f. Brunswick's FY2022 program flyer and application form. JH and BP described the outreach efforts to publicize the Town's program, contact applicants, and assist with the application process. DA acknowledged the extensive work done by BP to reach and assist Brunswick's seniors.

SW asked about how much was budgeted for the program. JH said that in 2019-20 the Town budgeted \$70,000, and approx. \$31,500 was used. In 2020-21 the Town did not budget anything, and approx. \$31,000 was used. The Town budgeted \$70,000 in the 2021-22 budget.

Committee discussed the options to broaden the program for more people. Focused on the age limit, and adjusting the age to 65 and older. Interested in finding out how many additional people this could benefit. Staff will ask for this data from the State.

DA asked staff about administrative burden if the age was changed. BP brought up the last question on the application, about whether the property taxes are paid, re-wording it so that applicants can complete the application earlier in the year. This would help to spread staff's administrative work over more time. JE pointed out that this would be a change to the language in the ordinance.

Motion: Finance Committee recommends that the Town Council consider broadening the age eligibility for the Town's Property Tax Assistance Program to 65 years of age, and adjust the wording in the Town ordinance regarding on-time property tax payment.

Ordinance change: Sec. 8-124. Criteria for participation

(3) That the applicant is sixty-five (65) years or older as of the application deadline of November 1.

(5) That the applicant has paid property taxes due as of the application deadline of November 1.

DA moved SW seconded, two votes in favor (DJ had left the meeting).

5. 2020-21 Audit

- a. Report on week 1 of auditors' field work

JH reported that the audit has gone well so far, and the auditors will be returning on 10/18 for the second week of field work. Staff is currently working to complete the financial statements.

- b. Unaudited financials – General Fund

JH provided Statement 6 of the financial statements, which is the general fund budget-to-actual results, and show strong surpluses in several revenue lines, as well as savings in expenditure lines, and an increase in total general fund balance. While not yet the final audited results, JH expects the final unassigned fund balance will be over the policy target, allowing for the use of fund balance for capital projects.

6. 2023-2027 Capital Improvement Program

- a. Preliminary report

JH provided a work-in-progress list of projects, with several new projects noted.

- b. Flyer with updated schedule of workshops

JH pointed out that the planned October 25th workshop will be supplanted by the Cook's Corner Revitalization Public Forum, and encouraged Councilors to attend that. JH asked for Committee agreement with the list of workshops on the flyer before distributing it. Committee approved the schedule.

7. DA moved to adjourn, SW seconded, all in favor.