

PLANNING DEPT #175

Interview with George Meservey on 2/17/23

Fin Comm: Nick Athanassiou, Elaine Baird, Lynn Bruneau

Proposed FY24 Budget	Revenue	\$3,500
	Salaries	\$303,588
	Expenses	\$4,735

History:	Revenue-\$	Sals-\$	Expenses
2019	3,580	156,675	8,170
2020	4,070	164,317	14,290
2021	3,500	180,243	6,112
2022	3,500	200,692	1,918
2023	3,500	293,137	4,635

The jump in Salaries from 2020 to 2021 was due to the hiring of part-time housing coordinator, Marsha Allgeier. The Salary figures for 2023 and 2024 do not yet reflect the recent change in compensation for the Director of Planning & Community Development, George Meservey due to a position reclassification approved at a recent Select Board meeting. The change adds \$3277 to Mr. Meservey's compensation for the remainder of FY23 and adds \$11.6k to his comp for FY24. The change is warranted due to a number of new job requirements and responsibilities.

The ups and downs in Operating Expenses are largely due to changes in the "Sample/Testing" line item which pertain to water quality monitoring. After FY2021, the budget was moved to CWRMP (wastewater) annual funding. During FY21, not all of the budgeted funds were spent because of COVID restrictions on resources that continued into FY22.

The Planning Department is responsible for the smooth functioning of ten committees and two departments (Building and Conservation), is involved with planning and community development, short-term and long-term, and coordinates alternative technology efforts for wastewater management.

Last year the Planning Dept. managed three feasibility studies, those focused on 1) Economic Development, 2) a Community Center and 3) development of the Governor Prence properties. The first was the responsibility of the Planning Board

while the other two were the responsibility of committees appointed by the Select Board, with Planning Board oversight.

The Economic Development study was completed last May/June but further work has been deferred, pending the hiring of an Assistant Town Planner, a position approved at last May's Annual Town Meeting. Mr. Meservey is hopeful that a candidate will surface soon, and if the right candidate joins the Department, perhaps this individual could be part of succession planning, anticipating Mr. Meservey's retirement in 5+ years.

The Gov. Prence Committee presented their results to the Select Board last fall, supported by a different consultant. Their recommendation is focused on affordable housing, with a development defined within existing zoning bylaws (thus a density limit of 77 units) that would "fit" with the character of the town. The Select Board may move forward at Town Meeting this May with Warrant Articles that w/ support the development of the property.

The Community Center study, supported by a third consultant, was also presented to the Select Board last fall, with a focus on community/quality of life - perhaps with a "community center without walls" as an interim solution to address community needs/wants.

The Planning Dept. has been guided by the 2006 Comprehensive Plan, lightly updated in 2019, and considered to be 80% complete based on annual input from various Town departments and boards/committees. The Planning Board is currently working on a strategy for updating the Comprehensive Plan, planning to leverage the Cape Cod Commission's "Local Comprehensive Plan" approach which would result in a 60-100 page document instead of a 300-400 page document. Also, the Board is planning to solicit input from key boards/committees on various sections of the report and ultimately to engage a consultant to help with a community outreach process for further input, and to help synthesize all of the input/feedback into a final report. The Department anticipates requesting funds for consulting support at the Fall/Special Town Meeting.

The Department continues to be deeply involved as the only staff support in initiatives of the Affordable Housing Trust Board and Affordable Housing Committee, a responsibility very effectively supported by the part-time housing coordinator, Marsha Allgeier.

As noted previously, day-to-day regulatory decisions are perfunctory but frequent so the role of “big P” planning often gets left behind when there’s so much day-to-day activity to deal with. Mr. Meservey has said that “We are always in triage mode. We want to be collaborative, but we just don’t have the time.” He has also highlighted the enormous contribution of volunteers on town boards, noting the significant contribution made in water quality monitoring – “absent volunteers, the cost would exceed \$100,000.”

Mr. Meservey did not include a 5-year Look-Ahead form re “Future Growth Potential” with his FY24 budget for the Planning Department; however, we reviewed the form included with last year’s budget. The strategy for funding an update of the Comprehensive Plan is noted above (likely Fall/Special Town Meeting 2023). The CROS update (Conservation, Recreation and Open Space) - was originally scheduled to expire in February 2024. Mr. Meservey noted that the “due date” for an update is now February 2025 so funding will be included in next year’s budget. Mr. Meservey said that he and Building & Facilities Manager Ron Collins had worked together on the last update. Last year’s 5-Year Look-Ahead also included funding for GIS maintenance - \$20k-\$25k/year. An Assistant Town Planner could help keep the Town’s GIS system current and allow for consideration of additional municipal applications. The system is currently maintained by the Conservation Agent, John Jannell.

Mr. Meservey provided a copy of FY24 funding needs that he would like to include in Warrant Articles for May Town Meeting (also recently provided to Interim Town Manager Charlie Sumner). One Article w/be for \$96.7k to fund 3 water quality/water sampling projects - \$47k for Lonnie’s Pond Monitoring (related to the oyster deployment - as required for the Pleasant Bay Watershed Permit); \$30k for Cedar Pond monitoring (as required by MA DEP); and \$19.7k for Summer 2024 Marine Water Quality Sampling (Nauset Estuary and 3 Cape Cod Bay creeks). A second Article for \$126.5k would support water quality data analysis and reporting (\$26.5k) and interim remediation of Crystal Lake and Pilgrim Lake (\$100k for alum treatment pending Phase 3 sewerage). (Update: the first article \$96.7k is on the Warrant; the proposed “second article” components have been deferred.)

As noted previously, the Planning Department does a remarkable job with the profound increase in activities they have experienced over the past few years. It would be very helpful to find the right Assistant Town Planner to help get things done better and sooner and also to help assure continuity.