



Town of
Longmeadow, Massachusetts

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Town Manager Lyn N. Simmons

Select Board

TO: Chairperson Marie Angelides and Members of the Select Board

FROM: Lyn N. Simmons, Town Manager
Paul J. Pasterczyk, Assistant Town Manager / Finance Director

DATE: March 2, 2020

RE: FY 2021 Town Manager Budget Message

I am pleased to present the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Budget for the Town of Longmeadow. In its final form, this budget will continue the budgeting best practices that has earned the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) for the last five fiscal years. The four principles of the GFOA budget process are:

Principle I – Establish Broad Goals to Guide Government Decision Making. A government should have broad goals that provide overall direction for the government and serve as a basis for decision making.

Principle II – Develop Approaches to Achieve Goals. A government should have specific policies, plans, programs, and management strategies to define how it will achieve its long-term goals.

Principle III – Develop a Budget with Approaches to Achieve Goals. A financial plan and budget that moves toward achievement of goals, within the constraints of available resources, should be prepared and adopted.

Principle IV – Evaluate Performance and Make Adjustments. Program and financial performance should be continually evaluated, and adjustments made, to encourage progress toward achieving goals.

Budget Process: Initial Forecast:

The preparation for the FY 2021 budget began in October 2019 with a joint meeting of the Select Board, School Committee and Finance Committee. Contents of the meeting included an update on the FY 2020 budget, including an update to the Town's current financial position. Updated FY 2020 budget numbers became the basis for the FY 2021 budget projection. Projections at that time indicated a budget shortfall of \$677,325. On the sources side, this projection included using only 1.75% of the Proposition 2 ½ allowable 2.50% tax levy increase, 4.00% increase in state aid and a 2.00% increase in local receipts. No use of reserve funds were in the budget projections.

On the expenditure side, wages were anticipated to increase 3.00% covering both cost-of-living allowances and step increases; expense line items were allotted 0.50% increase to cover inflation; employee benefits were expected to increase at various levels; debt service was to be funded at the actual amounts due, and capital at 3.25% of anticipated net general fund revenue in accordance with Select Board policy---an increase of 0.25% from the FY 20 Town Budget. Similarly, the annual

contribution to the OPEB trust fund was to be funded in accordance with Select Board policy at 1.50% of the Property Tax revenues---an increase of 0.25% from the FY 2020 Town Budget.

Budget Directive

The Town Manager's initial FY 2021 Town Budget directive to Town Departments stated that 1.75% of the allowable 2.50% tax levy increase would be used in the budget submitted to the Select Board. This drop of a quarter of a percent coupled with State Aid estimate falling short and the other demands on the FY 2021 revenues had to be amended to 1.875%. The level of increase in funding for the Select Board's Capital policy had to be trimmed to 3.125% of net general fund revenue. However, the Town Manager's FY 2021 recommended capital plan should still be fully funded with residual funds from the Capital Stabilization Fund. The capital plan was further enhanced by the receipt of an additional \$47,836 from the Commonwealth's Chapter 90 program.

Budget Process: Revenue Summary

The Town's General Fund, which excludes enterprise funds (Water, Sewer, Solid Waste/Recycling, and Stormwater), has four major sources of funds categories: Property Taxes, State Aid, Local Receipts, and Reserves. As the budget process evolved, the estimates made in October 2019, with the exception of State Aid and reserves, were able to be increased based on current information and played a role in being able to present a balanced budget for FY 2021.

Revenues: Property Taxes

Property taxes are the largest revenue source of the Town comprising 81.28% of the FY 2021 General Fund revenue budget. Property taxes are levied on real property (land and buildings) and personal property (equipment) used by business firms. The Board of Assessors main responsibility is to determine the value of all real and personal property. The Department of Revenue's (DOR) required five-year (formerly every three years) revaluation was last completed in FY 2019. In the last three fiscal years, property values increased 3.18% in FY 2020, 4.68% in FY 2019 but decreased 0.24% in FY 2018. On an annual basis between the five year revaluations, interim adjustments are performed and, finally, every 9 years the Town is required to complete "measure and list" valuation that requires a physical inspection of each taxable property in town. The next "measure and list" valuation needs to be completed by FY 2024 and is currently under way with an anticipated 20% of the properties being inspected annually. To date, the "measure and list" valuation is approximately 33% complete. The cost of this "measure and list" revaluation is now built into the operating budget.

The amount of property taxes the Town can raise is regulated under Proposition 2½. In the aggregate the Town may not raise more than 2.50% of the Town's taxable "full and fair cash" valuation. This is known as the levy ceiling. In the absence of market growth in the Town's valuation, the Town could hit the levy ceiling by FY 2025. This possibility is the driving force in the Select Board's initiatives not to raise / spend tax dollars at the highest level allowed. Additionally, the annual levy increase may not exceed 2.50% more than the previous year's levy limit plus the additional taxes from any new growth and, if voted by the electorate, amounts approved for operating overrides. Any Proposition 2 ½ operating override or exclusions for debt or capital would be added to the tax levy. Overrides require a majority vote at a Town election.

Property taxes in FY 2021 are expected to rise by \$1,815,282 / 3.33% to \$56,319,574. The increase includes 1.875% of the allowable 2.50%, an estimated \$150,000 in new growth and an increase in the Town's excludable debt of \$488,671. The FY 2021 taxes from previously voted debt exclusions will go from \$4,888,680 in FY 20 to \$5,377,351 in FY 21. The increase is attributable to the debt service on the new DPW facility and the new Adult Center.

	FY2020 Actual	FY2021 Estimated	\$ Change	% Change
Prior Year Levy Limit	\$48,289,342	\$49,857,396		
Add 2.50%	\$1,207,252	\$1,246,435		
Add New Growth	\$360,802	\$150,000		
Add Operating Overrides	0	0		
Levy Limit	\$49,857,396	\$51,253,831		
Add Net Debt Exclusion	\$4,888,680	\$5,377,351	+\$488,671	+10.00%
Add Capital Exclusion	0	0		
Maximum Allowable Limit	\$54,746,076	\$56,631,182	+\$1,815,106	+3.45%
Actual Levy	\$54,504,292	\$56,319,574 (est)	+\$1,815,282	+3.33%
Unused Levy*	\$241,784	\$311,608	+\$69,824	+28.88%
Levy Ceiling	\$56,282,829	\$56,373,617		
Remaining Taxing Capacity	\$6,425,433	\$5,119,786		

*FY 2021 unused levy of \$373,100 or 1.75% of the allowable Proposition 2½'s 2.50% increase was the original goal of the Select Board, Town Manager and Finance Committee. However, 1.875% of the allowable 2.50% was used in FY 2021 thus reducing the FY 2021 unused levy to \$311,608. Contributing factors of not meeting the goal included State Aid coming in lower than projected and some unforeseen costs. The FY 2020 goal to only utilize 2.00% of the allowable increase was met. Minimally a step in the right direction was achieved in FY 2021.

The Town's taxable valuation in FY 2020 was \$ **2,251,313,167** an increase of 3.18% over FY 2019. The FY 2020 tax rate was \$24.21. With the estimated \$150,000 in FY 2021 new growth and 0.0% change in market value, the Town's taxable valuation is estimated to be **\$2,254,944,667**. If the projected revenue amounts in this budget hold and the expense budget approved, the FY2021 tax rate will be \$24.98 utilizing the FY 2021 estimated valuation.

Revenues: State Aid

State Aid is the second largest revenue source of the Town comprising approximately 10.30% of the FY 2021 General Fund revenue budget. The Town is using the FY 2021 net State Aid amounts proposed in the Governor's FY 2021 state budget proposal. The amount is \$7,159,876, an increase of \$165,257 or 2.37%, far less than the \$278,710 / 4.00% increase projected. For comparison purposes the FY 20 increase was \$432,814 / 6.60% and the FY 2019 increase was \$588,081 or 9.85%. This was a big factor in not being able to meet all the budget initiatives originally proposed.

Revenues: Local Receipts

Local Receipts comprise approximately 8.42% of the General Fund revenue budget with Motor Vehicle Excise Taxes (MVET) being the largest category of Local Receipts. Other significant General Fund Local Receipts include Ambulance Fees, Interest Revenue, Penalties and Interest on late payments, Rentals (mainly attributable from our cell tower leases), Other Departmental Revenue, Licenses and Permits and Reimbursements from the Parks and Recreation Department for funding of Day Care Salaries for benefitted employees. In general, the overall increase expected in most categories is approximately 2.0 %, with the major exception being a projected increase in Ambulance revenues of 24.26%. This increase is driven by the added staff (2.00 FTEs) in FY 21. The added staff will be able to better meet the increased demand for services while steadying overtime costs within the department. Increased rates, justified through regional rate studies, also played a role.

The estimated amount of the FY 20 Local Receipts was \$5,304,134. This is expected to increase in FY 2021 by \$545,960 or 10.29% to \$5,850,094. FY 2019 was the first year of receiving annual mitigation funds from MGM Springfield. The FY 2019 amount was \$275,000 and this amount increases 2.50% annually. The FY 21 amount anticipated is \$288,922.

Revenues: Reserves

The last category of General Fund funding sources is Reserves. Reserves are mainly comprised of Free Cash and the Operational Stabilization Fund. Free Cash develops when actual receipts exceed estimates and expenditures are less than estimates (appropriations). These amounts are added to any unexpended prior year's Free Cash. Free Cash is certified annually as of July 1st of the fiscal year by the State Department of Revenue and the amount is based on the previous fiscal year's ending operations and resulting financial statements.

The Town's Operational Stabilization Fund was established through Article #15 of the Town Meeting held on November 18, 2003 in accordance with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40 Section 5B. The balance in the Town's Operational Stabilization Fund as of January 31, 2020 is \$4,163,392. The balance as of January 31, 2019 was \$3,813,099, an increase of \$350,293 or 9.19%. The Operational Stabilization Fund is considered the true "rainy day" fund of the Town.

The combination of Free Cash and the Operational Stabilization Fund is known as our General Reserves. The policy of the Select Board calls for the total of both to be in the 5 - 10% range of General Fund operating revenues. General Reserves within this level are an indicator that our financial health is favorable. As of July 1, 2019 (FY 2020) the General Reserves were \$5.31 million or 7.89% of the General Fund operating revenues. It is anticipated that as of July 1, 2020 the General Reserves as a percentage of operating revenues would decrease slightly as a result of the rising operating revenues and a stagnant General Reserve balance, however a proposed warrant article on the Annual Town Meeting warrant adds \$250,000 to the Operational Stabilization Fund and will help maintain the General Reserve level. The Town's Operational Stabilization Fund is slowly increasing but tight budgeting margins have squeezed Free Cash expectations thereby equalizing the General Reserve balance.

The Town transferred \$102,800 of its FY 20 Free Cash to the Operational Stabilization Fund in the fall of 2019. Approximately \$100,000 worth of interest revenues is anticipated to accrue in the account in FY 20 bringing the projected July 1, 2020 balance to \$4.21 million. FY 21 Free Cash is currently estimated at \$750K. FY 21 operating revenues will be approximately \$69.38 million.

General reserves are not a reliable recurring source of revenue and, therefore, it is the policy of the Select Board, School Committee and Finance Committee not to utilize anticipated reserves to fund

predictably recurring expenses in the operational budget. No reserves are used to balance the FY 2021 recommended Town budget.

Budget Recommendations by the Town Manager:

The following is summary of the FY 2021 Town Manager’s recommended budget. It follows the guidelines of the Town Charter by being balanced without the use of reserves and achieves the amended goal of increasing taxes only 1.875% of the full 2.50% permitted under Proposition 2½. This is the fourth year of the implementation of a Revenue Sharing concept that provides guidance and compromise on what an appropriate allocation of resources is for each budget category. Both the school and non-school departments fell within the range of the projected allocations so additional cuts were not needed to balance the budget.

GENERAL FUND

General Government – The Town Manager’s recommended FY 2021 budget for General Government is \$1,668,510 an increase of \$23,407 or 1.42% when the FY 20 \$125,000 supplemental appropriation for legal expenses is excluded. This is a level service budget and nearly one half of the increase is attributable to the Elections & Registration budget (\$11,800) to cover additional costs associated with a State Primary election and Presidential / State election. The adjusted legal budget was increased \$7,500 to cover potential legal costs associated with renegotiating the Town’s cable TV contract. No wage adjustments are budgeted for in the General Government function for non-union employees; a special article will be offered at the Annual Town Meeting to fund the wage adjustments for all non-school / non-union employees. The reorganization of the Assessor’s Office will be in its final year. A Principal Assessor has been appointed and will work alongside the contractor for one year before the contractual services are reduced. This reorganization has reduced the office personnel by 1.00 FTEs and will have completed the “measure and list” valuation, due in FY 24, by FY 23. The Department of Revenues required 9-year “measure and list” revaluation (last completed in FY 2015 at a cost of \$140,000) is incorporated in the operating budget on a 5 year prorated amount in order that it is fully completed by FY 24. This “measure and list” revaluation requires a physical inspection of each taxable property in Town and will continue to be done in annual cycles as opposed to the previous 9 year intervals. The FY 21 budget request accomplishes all this. It is anticipated that additional small amounts of new growth will be discovered annually as opposed to at the end of the 9-year project cycle.

Public Safety – The Town Manager’s recommended FY 2021 budget for Public Safety is \$5,774,907 an increase of \$227,936 or 4.11%. Two additional Firefighters / EMTs are budgeted for in the Fire Department and account for approximately \$150,000 of the increase when employee benefits are taken into consideration. Additional projected ambulance revenues in the amount of \$205,000 will cover the majority of the overall increase and the costs of the two Firefighters / EMTs. It is anticipated that the additional Fire staff will be able to better meet the increased demand for services and steady the use of Fire overtime. The WESTCOMM Regional Dispatch Center which the Town of Longmeadow and the City of Chicopee jointly participate in became operational in FY 20. Dispatchers (4.50 FTEs) salaries and other related costs will no longer be budgeted for in the Police budget. The Town’s estimated assessment to WESTCOMM is budgeted at \$155,000, less than half the fully loaded costs of maintaining our own dispatchers. No wage adjustments are budgeted for in the Public Safety function for non-union employees; a special article will be offered at the Annual Town Meeting to fund the wage adjustments.

Planning and Community Development - The Town Manager's recommended FY 2021 budget for Planning and Community Development is \$190,870 a decrease of \$5,733 or -2.92%. The decrease is mainly attributable to the allocation of clerical help in the Inspection and Zoning Enforcement Department to assist in the Health Department. No wage adjustments are budgeted for in the Planning and Community Development function for non-union employees; a special article will be offered at the Annual Town Meeting to fund the wage adjustments.

Schools – The Town Manager's recommended FY 2021 General Fund budget for the Schools is \$36,027,268, an increase of \$874,139 or 2.49%. The Town Manager's recommended budget fully funds the requested amount of the School Committee and that the amount is slightly higher than the revised amount under the "Revenue Sharing" concept that was projected while addressing the initial budget projected shortfall of \$677K. \$138,916 of the FY 2021 General Fund increase is directly attributable to reductions of school revenues sources outside of the General Fund, mainly School Choice and Title I. The additional costs are driven by contractual increases in personnel services (\$902,979) with some offsets. There is an increase 5.00 FTEs within the recommended School Department General Fund Budget as compared to the current year's original budget but only a .90 FTE increase when compared to current staffing levels.

Public Works - The Town Manager's recommended FY 2021 General Fund budget for the Department of Public Works (DPW) is \$3,270,534, an increase of \$68,990 or 2.15% when the FY 20 \$165,000 supplemental appropriations for Forestry and Planting expenses are excluded. The budget numbers would appear more attractive if the anticipated savings of \$100,000 in Street Light expenses were left in the budget. The increase would then be 5.28%. The \$100,000 in savings is an estimated amount from the Town's purchase of the light poles and the changeover of the fixtures to LED lighting. The estimated savings resurface in the Town's Debt section to pay the debt service on the bond that provided the upfront funds for the project. Two new position have been added to the DPW budget. The first is a Grounds Dept. laborer needed keep up with the current demand on the maintenance of our fields and to address the additional needs anticipated once the Wolf Swamp Field project is completed. The second position is a Town Building custodial position required for the upkeep of the new Adult Center expected to open in the Fall. The new Adult Center will not only add additional square footage to maintain but will be open additional hours serving the public. Additional funds, \$24,200, are being allocated to maintain the schools within a redistribution of the accounts. No wage adjustments are budgeted for in the Public Works function for non-union employees; a special article will be offered at the Annual Town Meeting to fund the wage adjustments.

Community Services – The Town Manager's recommended FY 2021 budget for Community Services is \$1,778,385 a decrease of \$51,239 or -2.80%. The Day Care Salary line item alone was cut by \$68,056 to address the current enrollment with some growth allotted as opposed to funding for a full enrollment of children. Funding for full enrollment would have required additional cuts in other areas of the budget. Budget levels for all departments in the Community Service function are basically at level service. Of special note is the fact that the Library budget meets budgetary funding levels of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners for the first time since FY 2009 and therefore will not require the Town to seek a waiver of the FY 21 Library Municipal Appropriation Requirement. This will basically guarantee a \$21,000+ State Library grant. Changes in budgetary needs relative to the opening of the new Adult Center will be addressed as they become evident. As previously mentioned, an additional custodian has been budgeted for in the Town Building department of the DPW. No wage adjustments are budgeted for in the Community Services function for non-union employees; a special article will be offered at the Annual Town Meeting to fund the wage adjustments.

Debt Service – The Town Manager’s recommended FY 2021 budget for Debt Service is \$5,619,501 an increase of \$456,175 or 8.83%. The increase is attributable to the new debt service on the LED project and the Landfill closing. Planned increases are also within the debt service for the DPW and Adult Center. Tax rate impact from all Proposition 2 ½ excluded debt (FY 2021 estimated impact is \$2.39) is currently projected to incremental increase until FY 2022 (est. \$2.63) at which time it will level off. A substantial drop in the tax rate impact on excludable debt will happen in FY 2027 (est. \$1.94). The Town will be borrowing funds in the near future to cover the additional needs for the DPW project, Wolf Swamp Fields, Phase II of the landfill closing. The first two projects have been voted as debt exclusions and there is \$45,000 in the FY 2021 budget to cover the first year’s debt service on Phase II of the landfill capping project.. The Town will be looking to refinance the second LHS loan taken out back in 2011 in an effort to reduce the aggregate tax impact of all the Town’s debt exclusions.

Employee / Retiree Benefits / Liability and Property Insurance – the Town Manager’s recommended FY 2021 budget for Employee / Retiree Benefits / Liability and Property Insurance is \$10,890,125, an increase of \$452,897 or 4.34%. Numerous accounts are driving this increase including, but not limited to Employee / Retiree Health insurance, up an estimated \$258,347 or 5.02% in aggregate; the retirement assessment is up \$305,000 or 9.05%; liability insurance is near level funded as a result of recent favorable experience; per a recent change in the Select Board’s policy, the OPEB funding has been reduced to \$500,000, a reduction of \$121,850 from FY 20. This savings will be used in a special article to add \$250,000 to the Operational Stabilization Fund in order to enhance the Town’s General Reserves. Note that the OPEB Trust Fund now being professionally invested / managed by the State Retiree Benefits Trust Fund. The calendar 2019 rate of return on the Town’s funds was 16.57%.

Capital - the FY 2021 allocation for the Town’s capital program is \$1,954,770, or 3.125% of the net General Fund operating revenues less the Town taxes excluded specifically on certain debt. This is an increase above FY 20 allocation of \$126,246 or 6.91%. The Town Manager’s FY 2021 capital plan is fully funded through the use of this allocation and funds left over from prior years’ capital projects. In addition to the Town Manager’s capital plan, the allotment for pavement preservation will be enhanced by \$47,836 in FY 2021 as a result of an additional FY 20 Ch 90 distribution. As it has in the past, the Town can make up the any shortfall in the fall with funding coming from FY 21’s Free Cash or other sources.

Enterprise Funds - Water, Sewer, Solid Waste / Recycling and Stormwater- The Town Manager’s recommended FY 2021 enterprise fund budgets are: Water \$2,952,778, an increase of \$251,171 or 9.30%; Sewer \$2,166,663, an increase of \$173,891 or 1.348.73%, Solid Waste / Recycling \$1,344,779, an increase of \$156,348 or 13.16% and the third year of the Stormwater budget, \$889,690, an increase of \$46,704 or 5.54%. The Water budget increase is mainly driven by a \$248,962 increase in the anticipated costs of purchasing water from the Springfield Water and Sewer Commission. Increases in other Water operational costs were absorbed by a substantial drop in the Water debt service, even with the increase in the Water share of the DPW debt. The Sewer budget’s anticipated costs from the Springfield Water and Sewer Commission increased by \$45,000.00. The biggest increase in the FY 21 Sewer budget is a result of the DPW debt.

The increase in the Solid Waste Recycling Enterprise fund is being driven by costs associated with handling of recyclables. FY 20 is the last year of a multi-year agreement where the disposal of our recyclable was a \$0 cost. The FY 21 budget includes a \$158,100 new line item for the disposal of the Town’s recyclables. This new cost is the sole reason for the increase in the budget. The Stormwater enterprise fund was established by Town Meeting vote at May 2017 Annual Town Meeting. In the absence of this new fund, the recommended line items would have been appropriated in Town’s General Fund – DPW Highway and Debt Service sections. The purpose of the fund is to promote the health and

safety of the public, to protect property from flooding and damage caused by stormwater runoff, and to protect and manage water quality by controlling the level of pollutants in stormwater runoff and the flow of water as conveyed by man-made and by natural stormwater management systems and facilities.

In FY 2019, the Stormwater utility fee was also established and was expected to cover \$200,000 or 31.0% of the total direct costs associated with the Stormwater Enterprise Fund. In FY 20, the fees were projected to cover \$292,000 or 35.0% of the total direct costs. In FY 21 the fees are projected to cover \$378,120 or 42.50% of the Stormwater Fund budget. A new Select Board policy was recently created that set the goal of having the Stormwater fees cover 100% of the costs by FY 2036. The indirect costs (employee benefits and liability) associated with the Solid Waste / Recycling and Stormwater funds are budgeted in the General Fund in FY 2021 and remain as such until the revenues generated by the funds are ample to fully cover costs.

Available Balances as of January 31, 2020:

Free Cash	\$395,038
Operational Stabilization Fund	\$4,163,392
Capital Stabilization Fund	\$59,612
Water Retained Earnings	\$282,567
Sewer Retained Earnings	\$738,816
Solid Waste Recycling Retained Earnings	\$68,452
Stormwater Retained Earnings	-\$3,034
Ambulance Reserve	\$425,736
OPEB Trust Fund	\$2,741,990

Conclusion

The FY 2021 General Fund operating budget of \$65,220,100 is an increase of \$1,757,169 or a 2.77% increase over the FY 2020 General Fund operating budget. A 3.24% increase when adjusted for the one-time supplemental FY 20 appropriations for Legal Expenses and Forestry / Planting. Over half of the increase is directly related to the increase in Employee / Retiree Benefits / Liability Insurance and Debt Service. The all funds operating budget represents a 3.40% increase over the FY 20's operating budget. The budget is balanced without the use of reserves and balanced with the use of only 1.875% of the 2.50% allotted by Proposition 2 ½. The FY 21 estimated unused taxing capacity is approximately \$311,600 and equates to nearly 13.82 cents on the tax rate for a property tax savings of \$51.67 on a home valued at \$373,900. The Select Board's funding towards the Town's commitment to the OPEB liability was recently modified by a revision to their policy. The Town's commitment to the capital budget was increased at a 3.125% level allotment. The Town Manager's recommended capital budget was fully funded with usage of unspent capital funds. Overall it's a tight budget that dealt with a few assumptions that materialized negatively against the bottom line but non-the-less it meets the spirit of the Select Board's goals while funding the School Committee at their requested level.

Sincerely,

Lyn N. Simmons,
Town Manager