

TOWN OF BROOKLINE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Capital Subcommittee Report
Building Department: FY23 Budget:
Public Hearing: March 7, 2022

Building Department Budget

Overview	FY21 Actuals	FY22 Budget	FY23 Budget	Variance
Total	\$ 8,204,130	\$ 9,587,404	\$ 9,847,173	\$ 259,769 (2.7% increase)

Major Changes	FY21 Actuals	FY22 Budget	FY23 Budget	Variance
Building Maintenance xx (exclusive of cleaning)		\$ 3,563,281	\$3,675,405	\$112,124
Utilities	\$ 2,708,321	\$ 2,825,759	\$ 2,863,659	\$ 37,900
TOTAL		\$ 6,389,040	\$ 6,539,064	\$ 150,024 (2.4%)

INTRODUCTION

The Advisory Committee’s Capital Subcommittee held a public hearing on March 7th, 2022, at 5:30 p.m., via Zoom, to review, discuss, and take public comment on the FY23 operating budget for the Building Department. A recording of the hearing may be found here:

https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/play/ed8DLMvQ8ysFTuPyVpDJPInm2EGbSskEUcwP1BxbngHH70xzKTNmY3bcaOSca-hGr3cbKTnJ6PQFjMe0.4relALaeWFp_u7H?continueMode=true
(Passcode: +Xfxs9c^)

In attendance were Charlie Simmons (Director of Public Buildings), Daniel Bennett (Building Commissioner), Melissa Goff (Deputy Town Administrator), and members of the Capital Subcommittee, John Doggett, Harry Friedman, Carol Levin, Pamela Lodish, Carla Benka, and Alok Somani.

RECOMMENDATION

The Subcommittee, by a vote of 0 – 2 – 4, REJECTED THE BUDGET.

Discussion:

The largest issue continuing to face the department is the insufficient funding for the Repair and Maintenance of public buildings, particularly the Public Schools of Brookline. The budget is not increasing in accordance with the significant increase in the square footage occupied. In

the past year both a 70,000 square foot STEM building and the new 120,000 square foot 22 Tappan Street building have opened. In previous years the budget has also not increased sufficiently to cover the expansion of the Florence Ridley School. These new and renovated facilities are both larger, and their electrical, plumbing and mechanical systems are more complex to operate and maintain.

A pro-forma 2.5% increase in the budget does not cover the increase in costs due to facility growth and complexity or due to the current 6% + inflation rate for goods and services. In all, there was a \$1,144,821 difference between what the Building Department requested and what was allocated in the proposed FY 23 Budget. Of that amount, approximately \$800,000 was the shortfall in School Building Maintenance. This budget shortfall is independent of the approximately \$16 million in deferred school maintenance which should be addressed by the CIP. It also does not include potential shortfalls in the utility or building cleaning line items.

The Building Department is finding it hard to fill vacancies, especially in the mechanical HVAC trades, where the salaries offered are not remaining competitive with those in the private sector. This forces the Department to increase its use of private contractors, which is a more costly alternative. When the new Driscoll School becomes operational, the department will not have in-house expertise to manage and maintain the geothermal heat pump system.

The Subcommittee also questioned the small increase in the Utilities line item (1.34%), Building Cleaning (2.34%) and a 13.5% decrease for Water. The utility budget is developed using a 3-year usage formula. It does capture improvements in the Town's energy efficiency but does not reflect increases in its occupied area.

Some of the cuts made to the Building Department's budget due to COVID have not been restored. Items not restored or fully restored include training and a program to scan and digitize all plans.

Ms. Goff explained the annual 2.5% budget increase was a policy directive from the 2008 Override Study Committee, and if the amount of the budget allocated to building repair and maintenance is to be changed, a new policy recommendation will need to be made by an appropriate body.

The Subcommittee discussed potential scenarios under which dedicated trusts or endowments for the maintenance of public-school buildings could be established.

Building Department responses to Capital SC questions.

One more question: what was the total amount of your original budget request, including the items or increases that weren't funded in the Town Administrator's recommendation?

From the excel spreadsheet only (including schools) we requested \$1,144,821 and received \$178,772 – a reduction of \$966,049

Building	Type	Description	Requested	Recommended
	Services	repair and maintenance	\$175,000	\$50,000
		cleaning	\$15,000	\$3,548
		Tradesmen license reimbursement	\$1,400	
		school building maintenance	\$802,591	\$62,124
		school wireless request	\$9,000	
	Capital	Truck Body replacement saddle	\$10,000	\$10,000
	Capital	PC Leases/laptops	\$22,980	\$4,000
	Capital	Handheld devices/large screen monitors	\$6,200	\$6,200
	Capital	2 electrical vehicles & charging stations infrastructure	\$90,000	\$45,000
	Capital	Building Maintenance Equipment	\$6,400	\$6,400
	Capital	Drone	\$4,000	
	Supplies	uniforms	\$500	\$500
	Supplies	office supplies	\$1,750	

Questions

1. Are there any vacancies in the Building Department? *Yes*

- Which positions and for how long have they been vacant?

3 HVAC Tradesmen (5 years), 1 Building Inspector (1 year) and 1 Project Manager (4 months).

- Are they affecting operations? *The 3 HVAC Tradesmen position are having the most impact both financially and operations wise – We have hired outside contractors to do the work at a cost approx. 2.5 times of our in-house staff. This has delayed PM and miscellaneous repairs. The Project Manager Position has reduced the staffing of that division by 1/3 with another retirement on the way in April. Staff is out straight closing out the High School Project, overseeing both The Driscoll and Pierce projects while implementing the CIP.*
- Why do you think they have been difficult to fill? *With the exception of the Building Inspector position, salary appears to be the draw back with the positions. The pool of candidates has been weak. This is consistent with all recent recruiting candidates. We continue to re post and advertise.*

(Accomplishment 16: Recruited qualified applicants to fill vacant positions and hire additional staff persons for the Building Department.) *This refers to the recent hires of Building Inspectors and filling of two Tradesmen positions left vacant from retirement.*

2. What impact has COVID had on your department's staffing and services in the past year? *The impact has been severe with respect to services. Until recently, staffing had not been an issue as staff was masking up and maintaining proper distances. With the latest form of the virus and the ease in which it spread more staff contracted COVID at the highest rate throughout the pandemic. We were able to manage all divisions properly and keep up with our work.*

On the services side there were many impacts that presented concerns of how we can continue to provide the proper services to the resident and users of our buildings. As you may recall all divisions of the Building Dept. were deemed essential services by the Governor. In order to meet the constraints required by COVID regulations the department was able to revise and modify policies and procedures for the various divisions to continue to fulfill our responsibilities. This involved modify office spaces, installing plexi glass, hand wash devices, interior operations, shifting to virtual Town Hall, entering unoccupied buildings, photograph and video inspections, etc.

3. The proposed budget shows an increase of approximately \$731,000 (7.6%) over the previous year, with most of that increase \$583,500, (16.4% over previous year) in the Building Maintenance line item. *This is being looked at by Melissa Goff and her staff. It is an error in the accounting system.*

- How much of this increase is a result of increases in the Town's footprint?

The Town's footprint has increased by 8% (of Town Buildings). The Town's R&M services line in FY 19 was \$1,147,884. It was reduced in FY 21 to \$1,052,022. We have been attempting to restore funding back and add monies for the extra sq. footage.

- How much is slated to address deferred maintenance?

0% The Operating Budget is used to Repair and Maintain the buildings. This includes repairs, testing, preventative maintenance and inspections. It is not used for deferred maintenance, which should be handled under the CIP.

Why have there not been proportionally sized increases in the Utilities (1.34% increase) and Building Cleaning (2.34%)? Why is there a 13.5% decrease for water?

The Select Board office develops the utility budget utilizing a 3-year usage formula that tracks departmental usage town-wide. Utility usage has been trending down town-wide due to the Town's energy-efficient efforts for several years. Yet, the utility budget for FY23 does represent a budget where there are some unknowns, as the Town just agreed to procure gas based on a fixed contract. The Town has previously been procuring gas at the current market cost annually. Also, the Town has not gone out to bid to procure gasoline for the following fiscal year.

The decrease in water is based on the same three year-average for the department's usage.

We have been trying to get the Cleaning budget increased.

Do you feel this budget adequately covers cost increases due to inflation?

No, we do not. The annual operating budget increases 2.5% every year. This amount was recommended years ago by B-FAC. Presently, inflation for goods and services is above 6%.

4. What have been the significant changes in your department this past year?

There have been many retirements and resignations resulting in staff participating in the recruiting process. The new hires have brought many different skills, knowledge and work ethic to the Department. Lastly, additional work load without additional staff or outside funding to outsource work has been challenging.

- What, if any, operational concerns do you have?

Ability to maintain the all buildings properly.

- Are there some parts of the operating budget that you believe are underfunded?

Everything that was not funded that was requested. The training line item has been reduced mostly due to the fact that COVID did not allow us to use this funding over the past two years.

5. Were you able to accomplish your FY22 objectives? If not, what were some of the identifiable barriers?

The objectives we have had difficulty accomplishing relate to implementing the Matrix Report recommendations and completing the review of the HVAC salaries to enable us to fill the positions. Lastly, the plans scanning project that was implemented years ago has not been funded for several years.

What were three key successes for the department in the past year?

- *Continuing our efforts to adapt with the impacts of the ever-changing COVID pandemic. The pandemic affected all Town construction projects, inspector's ability to perform on-site inspections, meetings and tradesmen and outside vendors ability to carry out work orders.*
- *The completion of the High School Expansion Project including the MBTA station, Stem wing addition and new 22 Tappan Building.*
- *Work on the Town sustainability policy including Solar Panel installation, Fossil Fuel K-8 schools and Town Meeting Warrant Articles.*

6. What are the best ways to measure your department's success in terms of effectiveness and efficiency?

The Public Buildings Division

- *Meeting all safety guidelines for buildings; security; emergency systems – testing and repairing as needed*
- *Consistent preventative maintenance on all building systems to preserve and extend life*
- *Speed at which work orders can be completed*
- *Percentage of work orders and requests that can be completed by in house staff*
- *Percentage of requests and regular maintenance that continues to get deferred/pushed off to future years*
- *Number of declined requests due to funding issues*
- *Increase in number of PM work orders vs. a decrease in the number of corrective work orders.*
- *Shorter timespan to complete work orders.*

Code Enforcement and Permits Division

- *permits/certificates issued*
- *complaints received*
- *inspections performed*

CIP and Construction Division

- *Projects measured by schedule*
- *cost*
- *completion*

What do you see as the three most important measurable objectives for the department in the coming year?

Objectives 2 and 4, 8 and 36 would be important to make progress on and move forward. The first two go hand in hand, as they are school projects, Driscoll and Pierce, and require advancement over the next year. The next objective pertains to the Public Buildings Division; implementation of the Matrix Study that detailed how to move forward by recommending proposed staffing, preventative maintenance (PM) and repair and maintenance (R&M). Lastly, the Short Term By Law will be enforced and the registration will begin shortly. The online registration has been setup, inspections will occur and STR registrations will be issued.

A more general list over objectives for Public Buildings is:

- Increase completion of work orders in house, reduce outside contractor use*
- Reduce work order time to complete*
- Reduce building maintenance that continues to be deferred*
- Be able to keep up with increased square footage in new buildings and new systems without bringing in outside contractors*

7. Has your department received any grants (or rebates)? *Yes, \$69,362 from the High School Project.*

8. Are there needs that you would like addressed in the department's operating budget in the coming 3-5 years?

Staffing in all divisions; filling vacant positions, increase as needed and performing a salary review with Human Resources for some. Continue efforts to work with the School Dept. on funding the Repair and Maintenance budget to address past, current and future building expansions. Restore the mini CIP. Increase hours for both part time Electrical and Plumbing & Gas inspector positions.

9. What are the operating costs of using the Academic Building on the former Newbury Campus for the Department's Maintenance Shops?

Last fiscal year, \$96,520 was spent on R&M. \$28,532 was spent on utilities. Note: Town occupied the building in January, 2021.

Where would the shops be relocated if the Academic Building or the site were used for another purpose?

Considering we are in the basement and sub-basement we do not feel any other users would want to be located in these areas of the building. At this time there have been no alternative locations discussed.

- Is the entire Academic Building being used by the Building Department at this time?

No. The IT Dept. is using a few areas in the building to store various types of equipment.

10. Could you provide more information on Objective #28: “To add staff and reorganize Public Buildings Division, based on additional School space being built or purchased in the near future”?

Per the Matrix report in FY 15, we should have added 12 more Tradespersons, plus an EMS assistant. We have added the EMS assistant. And we have added 5 more Tradesmen – 3 positions of which we cannot fill after 5 years. We are still in a deficit of 7 persons plus an additional 3 persons based on additional square footage amounts.

The Matrix report recommend dividing the managerial oversight of the Tradesmen to the two Operations managers, and then under them would be a foreman each. The foreman would be filled using existing staff and promoting them. We are unable to do this as per the pay plan, a foreman would get more money than their supervisor. The HR Department is aware of this.