



Finance Committee
TOWN OF HALIFAX
499 Plymouth Street
Halifax, MA 02338

Meeting Minutes

Monday March 18, 2024

Committee Members Present (Remotely): Todd Dargie, Frank Johnston, Cheryll Zarrella Burke, William Smith, Edward Bryan, Michael Bennett & Jim Walters

Audience: Chief Chaves, Gordon Andrews, Katie Berry, Lauren Laws, Sarah Hickey, Cody Haddad, Sandy Nolan, Cesar Calouro & Katie Esposito

Todd Dargie called the meeting to order at 6:01PM

This meeting is being conducted remotely and being recorded by Area 58.

ACCEPTANCE OF FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES FROM MARCH 4, 2024: Minutes from the Finance Committee meeting from March 4, 2024, have been circulated to the committee members prior to the meeting for review.

Todd entertained a motion to accept the Finance Committee meeting minutes from March 4, 2024

Motion: Cheryll Zarrella Burke

Second: Michael Bennett

Roll Call: Todd Dargie, Frank Johnston, Cheryll Zarrella Burke, William Smith, Edward Bryan, Michael Bennett & Jim Walters

Motion Passes 7/0

DEPARTMENT BUDGET REVIEW – SCHOOL DEPARTMENT: Todd informs the committee that tonight's agenda items were scheduled to be a review of the finalized School Department budget. Unfortunately, that will be postponed until April 1, 2024. The budget has not been voted on by the school committee as of this meeting. Lauren Laws will be representing the school department as the chair of the school committee.

Lauren explains to the committee the reorganization of the regional school district. The Pre-K program was being charged out of district tuition cost. This has now been restructured to show it as part of the regional program. This program consists of 7th – 12th grade students as well. The elementary school will remain separate at HES for grades Kindergarten to 6th grade. The school committee was hopeful that this would help to lower the budget, but it did not. Lauren explained that last Thursday's meeting would typically be when they would approve the FY budget. However, the school committee wanted to know why there was such a large increase and were not ready to approve the budget until this was clarified. They did learn a lot about the increases and are aware of inflation costs and contractual costs. The special education cost is also a rising expense in the school's overall budget.

Silverlake has cut a lot from their budget and has decided on a budget dollar amount and then will go back and figure out the line items after. As for HES they have not come to any discussion yet and are still trying to make needed cuts to and adjustments before coming to a vote. Lauren explains the school budget needs to be decreased by \$780K and they are not there yet. Lauren is hoping to cut the budget by \$500K and she feels they will be able to make the needed adjustments to this figure. They do have a decrease in students at elementary school, they currently have 541 verse 600 where they used to be. Lauren suggested having 22 students per classroom (3 teachers per grade at HES) and possibly laying off teachers. The school currently has 56 teachers in the union and 28 non-union members.

Cody explains that the town originally planned for the total cost of education to be a 3% increase from the schools. This was calculated based upon previous year's trends. The 11.6% increase for FY25 was not something the town could have prepared for. Cody is aware the school department budget does not run on the same fiscal schedule as the town. However, the town cannot vote on their budget until they receive a finalized school budget. The school department makes up 50-60% of the town's overall budget. Cody explained that April 1st would be the deadline for an approved budget for the town to be able to submit their budget for the town meeting.

DEPARTMENT BUDGET REVIEW – MISC. DEPARTMENT: Todd turns the meeting over to Cody to review various department budgets. He has made some cuts and adjustments to assist with the concerns revolving around the school department budget. Below are some of the changes made by the town administrator.

- The selectmen's budget was cut by a few hundred dollars.
- The new Account salary posting has been adjusted. They originally planned on hiring at a step 3 but have decided to move that to a step 1 or 2 which will allow for a decrease of around \$2,300.
- Town building department overtime wages decreased a few thousand. This was based upon a reduction in overtime needed since covid.
- The Board of Health expense had a reduction of \$500 for food services that are now being administrated through BOH and not a consulting firm.
- Heating and Oil expenses will be reduced because they are switching to heating pumps.

Cody explains that any other decreases to the budget would involve a reduction in staffing. The town is already operating at a lean level. The town also needs to consider the price of unemployment if a layoff happens. The town doesn't budget for unemployment costs. Cody explains the FY 25 budget was the perfect storm. The schools' cost of education increased by 11.6%, which is something the town never expected. The growth in town is also down and the state aid received was only a .55% increase from last year. Todd asked about the possibility of using free cash to assist with the costs. Cody informs the committee that free cash is looking to be around \$600k this year which is lower than normal. It is also not recommended to use free cash for annual operational costs.

Cody is reviewing the 10% budget cut sheets submitted by departments heads. The department expenses are lean, most are salary expenses. The committee requested a proposed budget from the Town Administrator showing what the budget would look like if they used the 10% budget cut submitted by the departments without a reduction in staff. The committee also asked to see the wage and personnel without including the step increases.

Cody mentions the new finance software Springbrook will cut down a lot on workload, which will assist with efficiency. The online and permitting system will also go live on July 1st, which will cut down staff time and workload.

FINANCE COMMITTEE SPRING CONFERENCE: Todd discusses the Finance Committee Spring Conference in Oxford MA. He asks the members if anyone is interested in attending. Ed Bryan is interested in going but needs to work on a scheduling conflict. Cheryll has work obligations and is not available to attend.

RESERVE FUND TRANSFER REQUESTS: None

COMMITTEE LIAISON UPDATES: Cheryll is on the Town Accountant Committee she has her first meeting on March 29th at 9AM.

CORRESPONDENCE & AS MAY ARISE: Cody asks Todd to begin his Finance Committee letter to prepare for the upcoming town meeting.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: Gordon asked if someone could upload the draft spreadsheet to the town website. Todd states that it is a working progress and not finalized so he does not believe posting it would be a benefit to the town. Cody stated that if he emails him, he can forward over the draft spreadsheet. Gordon also asks about an override which was not discussed.

The pipes at the HES were brought up but the school does not have a proposed cost yet. It is on Cody's radar as a future capital expense. Katie Berry asks where the funds are coming from, the town budget or the HES budget? Cody states the HES needs to submit a request for capital funding through the town.

NEXT MEETING PLANNING:

- Monday March 25th and Tuesday March 26th both have been cancelled due to budget issues.
- The next scheduled meeting will be on April 1st at 6PM
- Followed by April 3rd in a joint session with the BOS. They plan to have the school committee in to review the budget as well as review capital items.

Todd Dargie entertained a motion to adjourn at 7:59 PM

Motion: Michael Bennett

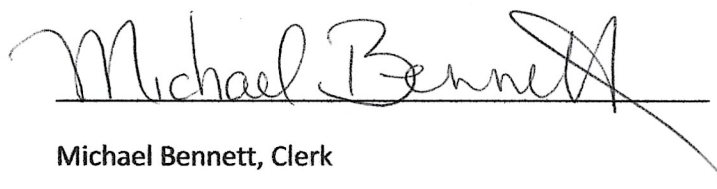
Second: William Smith

Roll Call: Todd Dargie, Frank Johnston, Michael Bennett, Cheryll Zarrella Burke, William Smith, Edward Bryan & Jim Walters

All in Favor 7/0

EXHIBITS: FY25 Budget Sheet – Town Administrator

Respectfully submitted,


Michael Bennett, Clerk