



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

## Meeting Minutes

**Monday April 8, 2024**

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

**Audience:** Chief Chaves, 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 18, 2024 & April 1, 2024:** Minutes from the Finance Committee meeting from March 18, 2024 & April 1, 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 18, 2024 & April 1, 2024.**

**Motion:** Michael Bennett

**Second:** Cheryll Zarrella Burke

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

*Motion Passes 7/0*

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REVIEW AND VOTE ON FY25 BUDGET:** Todd reviewed the expectations of the school department and the gap needing to be filled by the town and school. They were originally asked to reduce their budget by \$700K. Although they were unable to get to this number, they were able to provide the town with an updated budget showing \$500K in reductions. After speaking with the Town Administrator and reviewing upcoming enrollments in the vo-tech program they were about to cut an additional \$90K in tuition costs. This left \$110k in unallocated funds which the town agreed to assist the schools with. The town will allocate \$60K toward the school department's budget, in return the school department will need to reduce their budget by an additional \$50K before the budget can be approved. Cody reviews where he was able to find the funds in the FY25 budget. The first change to the budget was the Conservation was reduced by \$5K. Next was the part time Middle School SRO (\$39,140) will be funded out of free cash for FY25. Although the position was not recommended by the finance committee, the town administrator still must prepare in case the town votes to approve the expense at the town meeting. Last is the fixed cost for insurance for the water department. Rather

than budget full town insurance costs Cody will have the water department offset their amount of \$18K. This will free up \$62,140 which will be used to assist with the school department budget.

Jim believes the school should still pay the full amount. He states they were able to find \$93K within minutes at a public meeting. He also mentioned he spent months with the school department as their liaison reviewing the budget and they couldn't find the money then. Frank agrees with Jim and believes there must be tighter controls on the school to avoid being blindsided in the future. The committee agrees they would like to review with the schools this summer to prepare for next year and to go through the fine details. The goal of the committee has been to reduce the cost of transportation which consumes a large portion of the school operating budget.

EJ asks about the part time middle school SRO and if they were ever informed how this officer is being paid. Todd replies that the officer is being paid \$72/ per hour which is the detail rate. It is felt the town is being overcharged for this service. Cody says it should be an operating expense and, in the budget, where each town must pay for the services. Kingston pays for the high school officer, but the middle school is split between Halifax and Plympton. Cody informs the committee that Plympton agreed they were being overcharged as well. Bill spoke on the issue stating it should not be a detail rate and a specially trained officer should be assigned to this school.

After the open discussion concluded Todd moved on to FY25 budget votes. The first one was for the General Town Government, Public Safety & Dispatch Services

**Todd entertained a motion to accept the budget for General Town Government \$1,949,127, Public Safety - \$3,916,591, Public Safety – Police: \$1,928,685, Public Safety – Fire - \$1,649,679, Public Safety – Other Public Safety - \$138,227 & Dispatch Services- \$200,000**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: Cheryll Zarrella Burke

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

*Motion Passes 7/0*

The next was the school department budget. The committee was informed the Town can now only vote on Elementary School Costs, Debit Exclusion and Silver Lake Budget. The voted-on amount equals \$15,437,356. Jim asked to see the general law when this changed, Cody will request this from the school superintendent. Sandy also mentioned at town meetings in the past the school department provided a breakdown of the budget.

**Todd entertained a motion to accept the budget for the School Department for \$15,437,356**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: William Smith

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

*Motion Passes 7/0*

**Todd entertained a motion to accept the budget for Public Works – Highway Budget for \$989,981**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: Cheryll Zarrella Burke

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

*Motion Passes 7/0*

**Todd entertained a motion to accept the budget for Public Works – Cemetery \$88,543**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: Cheryll Zarrella Burke

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

*Motion Passes 7/0*

**Todd entertained a motion to accept the budget for Public Works – Water \$889,043**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: William Smith

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

*Motion Passes 7/0*

**Todd entertained a motion to accept the budget for Public Works – Solid Waste Management \$550,662**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: William Smith

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

*Motion Passes 7/0*

**Todd entertained a motion to accept the Budget for Health and Human Services Budget- \$610,273**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: Edward Bryan

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



*Motion Passes 7/0*

**Todd entertained a motion to accept the Budget for Culture and Recreation - \$637,188**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: William Smith

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

*Motion Passes 7/0*

**Todd entertained a motion to accept the budget for Debt Services - \$473,700**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: William Smith

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

*Motion Passes 7/0*

**Todd entertained a motion to accept budget for Fixed Costs – \$3,909,278**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: Cheryll Zarrella Burke

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

*Motion Passes 7/0*

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REVIEW AND VOTE ON FY25 CAPITAL PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Todd explains this year every department prepared a 5-year plan for any capital items they expect to need. The town currently has \$600K in free cash to assist with some needs for FY25. The capital planning committee reviewed all the requests and already made their recommendations.

Todd asked Cody to review the ARPA funding decisions. Todd also clarifies that the finance committee does not have a vote on how ARPA funds are spent. This will be up to the discretion of the BOS. Jim had a question regarding the purchase of a new woodchipper with these funds. Jim states the current machine is only being utilized for an average of 1 hour per day and he doesn't understand the need to purchase this item for \$84K. Cody states the town needs to make a commitment for funding by September 2024 and this item will be on the BOS agenda in the future. Cody recommended the Finance Committee take an informal vote and Cody will bring the recommendation to the BOS prior to their vote. Todd believed the woodchipper is a needed asset to the town, however the fire department is in need and he would also like to see the money go to purchasing additional turnout gear. The other committee members agreed so they do not take the vote but ask Cody to relay the information to the BOS.

EJ asked Cody about the finance management software being used with the ARPA funding. He would like to know if this is a lease or if we own the software. It was confirmed it was a lease. EJ also asked where the support services will come from, and it was stated it would be covered by the annual contract cost.

The capital planning committee recommended the following requests for the free cash. \$74,400 for structural gear, \$100k for fire department mold remediations, \$120K for 2 police cruisers & \$300K In road maintenance. The capital planning committee recommended the following from the Water department retained earnings \$25K for the purchase of the mini excavator & \$500K for water treatment plant upgrades.

**Todd entertained a motion to recommend the Free Cash Capital Requests for \$594,400 and the Water retained earnings capital requests for \$525K.**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: William Smith

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

*Motion Passes 7/0*

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REVIEW AND VOTE ON TOWN ARTICLES:** The committee has already previously voted on Articles 1,3,4,5,6,10,11 &14. Jim has a question regarding the wording for the Tax rate verbiage on the warrant. This was something that has always been in there and it was not recommended to change. EJ suggested moving it from the top to between wage and personnel and capital planning.

Article 2 To see if the Town will vote to amend the Wage and Personnel By-Law as presented in attachment A and as recommended by the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee or take any other action relative thereto.

**Todd entertained a motion to recommend the Article 2**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: William Smith

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

*Motion Passes 7/0*

Article 7 is for the Solar PILOT agreement. At the time of the meeting, they did not have a PILOT agreement and it was requested by the town administrator to wait until Town meeting to vote on this item.

Article 8 Funding of FY 2025 Capital Plan - To see if the Town will vote to fund the recommendation of the Finance Committee and Capital Planning Committee for the Fiscal Year 2025 Capital Plan and fund from the following: 594,400 from Free Cash & \$ 525,000 from Water Enterprise Retained Earnings

*This was already voted on tonight under the Capital Agenda item.*

Article 9 Is regarding Massachusetts Community Preservation Act and it is requested for the finance committee to wait on making their vote until Town Meeting. The BOS will be making their vote tomorrow night on the percentage rate.

Article 15 - Transfer \$25,000 from the Stabilization Fund for the replacement of a roof top HVAC unit at the Silver Lake Regional School District. The finance committee would like a confirmed cost before a vote can be made. They will make their recommendations at the Town Meeting. Cody is still waiting for the information from the school on this project. Cody suggested having the school in at the end of April and review their line-item approved budget. Todd proposed April 29<sup>th</sup>, Cody will check the school availability and get back to the committee.

Article 16 - To see if the Town will vote to transfer \$75,000 from free cash to the Unemployment Special Revenue Fund to cover unemployment costs associated with the Town or take any other action relative thereto. Cody is confident that this number will be enough to cover unexpected costs.

**Todd entertained a motion to recommend the Article 16**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: William Smith

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

*Motion Passes 7/0*

Cody informs the committee of an additional article being added to the warrant being proposed by the Halifax School Committee to transfer available funds a sum of money to the fiscal year 2024 operating budget to cover the deficit in the special needs tuition and transportation. The finance committee will wait to make their recommendations at the Town meeting.

**FIN COM 2024 TERM EXPIRATIONS:** Todd informs the committee that Cheryll and Michael are both up for re-election. He asks them if they would like to continue to serve on the committee which they both confirmed. The other committee members thanked them for their years of service. The committee will take a vote for reappointment during the next meeting.

**RESERVE FUND TRANSFER REQUESTS:** None

**COMMITTEE LIAISON UPDATES:** None

**CORRESPONDENCE & AS MAY ARISE:** None

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:** None

**NEXT MEETING PLANNING:**

- Tuesday April 16<sup>th</sup> – cancelled.
- Monday April 22<sup>nd</sup>
- Monday May 6<sup>th</sup>
- Monday May 13<sup>th</sup>

Cody stated he will also plan a joint meeting with BOS and Finance Committee before the town meeting.

**Todd Dargie entertained a motion to adjourn at 7:52 PM**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: Cheryll Zarrella Burke

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, Capital Planning FY25, Draft Warrant

**Respectfully submitted,**

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Bennett". The signature is written over a horizontal line. There is a large, stylized flourish or "X" mark at the end of the signature.

Michael Bennett, Clerk