Finance Committee

TOWN OF HALIFAX

499 Plymouth Street

Halifax, MA 02338

**Meeting Minutes**

**Monday February 8, 2021**

**Committee Members Present**: Cheryll Zarella Burke, Fred McGovern, Melinda Tarsi, Tom Connolly, Lauren Carmichael (6:35)

Also, in attendance in the audience were: Charlie Seelig, Sandy Nolan, Jean Gallant, Chief Chaves, Alex (?), Smitty (?), Joe Vetrano, Gordon Andrews, Toni Ross, Kathy O’Neil and Keith Swanson

The meeting was recorded by Zoom

**Melinda called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:01 pm**

**Melinda entertained a motion to accept the meeting minutes from 2/1/2021**

Motion: Fred

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

Melinda asked for nominations for Chair, Vice Chair and Clerk for the Finance Committee. She said members could nominate themselves or others.

Fred McGovern nominated himself as Chair (since he is the senior member now)

**Melinda entertained a motion to appoint Fred McGovern as Chair of the Finance Committee**

Motion: Fred

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

Cheryll asked what the Vice Chair does. Melinda said mostly they just stand in for the Chair when the Chair has to recuse themselves from a vote or miss a meeting, then the Vice Chair would run that meeting.

Tom Connolly nominated Cheryll as vice chair (since she is the second senior most member)

**Melinda entertained a motion to appoint Cheryll Zarella Burke as Vice Chair of the Finance Committee**

Motion: Tom

Second: Melinda

**AIF**

Melinda explained that the Clerk is mostly in charge of signing the minutes of the meeting once they are approved. In the rare event that the recording secretary was not present at the meeting, the Clerk would take the minutes of the meeting.

Cheryll nominated Tom as Clerk

**Melinda entertained a motion to appoint Tom Connolly as Clerk of the Finance Committee**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Fred

AIF

Melinda congratulated them all on their appointments and said she knew they would do great in the coming year.

Charlie said the only new information he had on the budget was that he now believed the regional assessment for communications was not going up (as he stated in an earlier meeting). He also said that the insurance is currently estimated with a 7% increase, but it is more likely to be 2.5%. This is good news as it means money saved in both cases.

There were no Reserve Fund Transfers

The only correspondence was a Talent Bank Form from Deb Pasquale. Melinda asked Linda to reach out to Deb and see if she could come in for an interview on 2/22. Charlie said that would be good because the Selectmen were appointing Joe Vetrano (if recommended by the fin Com) on 2/23 and they could do Deb at the same time if she and the Fin Com agreed to recommend her.

Melinda said as far as scheduling she would leave that up to the Committee since she was resigned from the Committee as of 2/15/21. Fred said they will continue to meet every Monday through March (except 2/15/21)

There was nothing under As may Arise

Melinda ran through how the interview process goes for a new applicant for the Finance Committee.

Linda pointed out to Charlie that there was a statement in the Chat box from someone named Alex saying that the meeting could be found by anyone on the internet. Charlie addressed that due to open meeting law it had to be this way. He said it is a downfall of the law now that we have Zoom.

Melinda asked the Water department if they had anything specific, they wanted to address in their budget. Keith said he would just run through the lines that had increases. He said he wanted to raise equipment maintenance from $9,000 to $15,000 to help the Highway department with repairs. He also wants to increase the overtime budget for the Administrative Assistant from 30 hours to 40 hours. He said she is spending extra time trying to collect bills especially now. He is increasing the water testing from $15,000 to $25,000 but the State helps pay for that mostly. He is also asking for an increase in Water Tower maintenance. He said he is behind in cleaning at two of the wells for reasons he did not care to get into now. Finally he is asking for an increase in the Water meters. He said he has replaced some randomly but will be replacing many more as he thinks the State is beginning to crack down. He said the new meters are electronic and much better because he can pull a lot more information from them in a resident has a question. Melinda asked Charlie if the increase in overtime budget hours also had to be discussed as a Wage and Personnel issue. Charlie said hours aren’t addressed by Wage and Personnel (new board) and it only goes through Fin Com. Hours are simply a budget concern not a regrading or position concern. Charlie said also all Water department employees (with the exception of Keith Swanson) are now union so Wage and Personnel wouldn’t apply to them anyway. Melinda asked if any other member had questions. Tom asked about if there was any “back up” for funds in case something major happens and the Water department gets caught short. Charlie said the Water has it’s own Reserve Fund that is voted each year at Town Meeting. Keith said he has been to a Special Town Meeting for an article for Water and he doesn’t want to do that.

6:28pm Zoom bombing. Everyone was locked out for 5 minutes and then meeting restarted

6:35 quorum regained (Lauren joined the meeting at this time) and the meeting restarted

Jean Gallant took a moment to thank Melinda for her service to the Town and wished her the best on her new journey in Mansfield.

Melinda reminded all present that Reserve Fund transfers are supposed to be for things that are unexpected. If things are being talked about a year in advance, then they aren’t unexpected and should instead be budgeted for. Reserve Fund Transfers (RFT) are more for emergencies. Tom said he appreciated the clarification about the Water department already having its own Reserve Fund to cover unexpected shortfalls. Charlie said the Water department would just go before the Finance Committee to have the RFT approved, they do not have to go before Town Meeting.

Melinda told Keith we would not be voting budget lines now but will eventually vote first the lines without increases and then if there were questions when it came time to vote for ones with increases, Tom could help answer any questions. They would reach back out to Keith if they needed him.

Toni Ross joined the meeting.

Melinda asked Chief Chaves to speak about his budget. He expects the biggest increase to be in wages. Some of it is contractual. He wants to put in for the lieutenant position that was established last year, and this would be an added position. He hopes Town meeting will approve the position. He said this would be about an additional $89,000 of the amount in the increased wages line. He could not however, guarantee that amount as it would be a contract for that person.

Gordon Andrews joined the meeting.

Chief Chaves said the administrative assistant’s overtime line is also going up. He said it was due to the accreditation process. He said that he and one of the sergeants are doing most of the work but once the policies are established it would involve a lot of pulling of files by the administrative assistant and gathering paperwork. He did not feel she would be capable of doing this during her regular working hours. He mentioned that a Selectmen had approached him about the idea of hiring someone part time for the project or using an intern rather than paying someone overtime. He said he had considered this. He said the training budget is also up due to police reform. He thinks given the way the State works, the reforms will be done through unfunded mandates to send officers for training. Plus there is another recruit in the academy and it costs money to backfill his shifts while he is in for probably a couple months. Melinda asked if the accreditation is a multiyear process will the increases all be in the FY22 or would increases be expected in FY23 also. The Chief said he expected almost all if not all the work would be done in FY22 and the State process of approval might be in FY23. Tom asked the Chief about the article he mentioned a few meetings ago about bodycams for the officers and if that was included. The Chief said that was under Capital articles so it wouldn’t be included in the budget.

Jean Gallant asked about the Water department and Police department administrative assistants getting overtime. She wanted to know if she could ask for approval for her employees to get overtime as well. Charlie said that once budgets are set and the money is there, you have the right to spend it. You could pay overtime if you had the money available. Charlie said if it is an emergency you can do it (like the Highway needing their admin to come in unexpectedly during a snowstorm) but if you are putting it through the budget process for approval then maybe you should be asking if there are other options such as using someone with less hours to work more hours so overtime doesn’t have to be paid. Use the part time person in the department instead of the full-time person so you pay a regular rate vs an overtime rate. He said presentations should be made to Fin Com on why it is necessary to pay overtime through a budget line. He used the Selectmen’s office as an example and said overtime should really only be an emergency situation for administrative assistants.

Melinda said hello to Joe Vetrano who was there as a possible new member of the Finance Committee. Melinda explained briefly what the Fin Com does and how they are an advisory board. They do not advocate for departments but rather advise Town meeting based on the Fin Com information. She explained generally the calendar throughout the year for Fin Com. Joe said he understood what Fin Com does and he thought being in procurement could help him if he was to join. He just wondered what his role would be throughout the year. Melinda asked if Joe was still interested in joining and he said he was. He said Mondays should work for him with his work and coaching schedules.

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend Joe Vetrano to the Selectmen as an appointee for the Fin Com**

Motion: Fred

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

**Melinda entertained a motion to adjourn at 6:59pm**

Motion: Fred

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Cole, Secretary \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Tom Connolly, Clerk