Finance Committee

TOWN OF HALIFAX

499 Plymouth Street

Halifax, MA 02338

**Meeting Minutes**

**Wednesday March 24, 2021**

**Committee Members Present**: Cheryll Zarella Burke, Fred McGovern, Drew McGlincy, Tom Connolly, Joe Vetrano

Also, in attendance in the audience were: Charlie Seelig, Chief Chaves, Bert Gaynor, Cesar Calouro, Sandra Nolan, Scott Materna and Steve Hayward

The meeting was recorded by Zoom

**Fred called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:02 pm**

**Fred entertained a motion to accept the meeting minutes from 03/22/2021**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Tom

**AIF**

Scott discussed that he would like to make some changes to his staffing structure. He said he would like to decrease his part time Step 6 position to a Step 1. He would also like to make his Grade 4 step 6 position a grade 8 step 1 position. He would like to eliminate his two-part time summer help positions and make a Grade 4 Step 3 position. He said overall this would be an increase in his budget of about $11,000. He thinks it would allow him more year-round help and give him more a tradesman position within the staff. Scott said he is stretched a little more thin now that he also helps out at the schools. Tom asked about how many people would be dismissed or lose a job. Scott said if the full plan went through then the person presently working as the part time custodian would lose their job. Tom asked Charlie if there would be “collateral” for someone losing their job (ie: unemployment, benefits, etc). Sandy Nolan said that the part time person really just helps out as needed now but spends much of his time in Florida. Charlie said he does not work enough hours to qualify for benefits. Linda Cole added that the amount of time he spends in Florida would likely exclude him from claiming unemployment. Sandy said overall the increase to the budget would be about $11,000 and she thought that if there was money available, this should be apriority item because the department had been asking for it for several years. Fred clarified that Scott’s budget already had a 1.8% increase and that this would be another $11,000 on top of that. Sandy confirmed that would be correct. Linda mentioned that the only correspondence was an email from Charlie regarding an article request from Scott for a safety gate in the Highway barn. The email had come from Charlie after the Committee had already voted the article at $6,000 but the email said $6500. Scott said they use the mezzanine for storage and currently there are just removable boards up there. We must now meet OSHA regulations and replace those boards. The Town would like to keep it something that can be moved so they can continue to store Highway and Fire equipment up there. Scott said the request for $6,000 should cover the cost of the product and any labor or product adjustments could be handled under his current budget.

Steve Hayward wanted to discuss the requests of the Traffic Safety study committee. He said they wanted to add their own separate budget line. He said the new solar powered signs are costly to maintain. The batteries need to be replaced every several years and are very costly. Sandy said the new crosswalks that have been approved have maintenance costs associated with them. Steve said the Traffic Lights budget was level funded but he would need to increase that amount. He said that he just replaced 2 lights by the crosswalk near the police and it cost about $900. He said he doesn’t have a problem with that yet, but he wanted to start a separate budget line to start to add to a little each year because soon the Town will have 5 crosswalks and the cost to replace all those batteries will be much higher in a few years. He said he would be replacing Stop signs; Yield signs and others and they are costly. He said Speed Limit solar signs can cost up to $3,000. Sandy sad the regular signs have always been covered under the regular Highway budget. Steve said the Street Safety Committee wanted a separate budget line. Sandy said something like new $3,000 signs would probably have to be an article. Charlie said you could divide it into two different pieces. You could have an increase in budget for maintenance for things like batteries and then you could do articles to replace one or two signs to solar signs each year. Charlie said he would have to show he is spending an abnormal amount on requests for signs if he didn’t want it to come out of his regular budget. He said line items would need to be funded and then tracked. Steve wanted to clarify that he doesn’t just put up a sign every time someone requests one. He has standards that he has to meet in order for a sign to be placed. Tom said currently these things are paid for out of lines 83, 85 and 86. He said he should think some of those lines would decrease if there was a separate line created. He said some of each of those lines could maybe help fund the new line and then some added funds designated so that there would only be a slight increase because you were offsetting other lines. Steve said he could get some numbers together on what they have spent over the last few years.

Tom said if you funded both Scott’s request and Steve’s request that would increase the budget significantly. Fred said that if there is money available maybe paying for maintenance on articles that were voted previously (like crosswalk signs) should be prioritized because it is almost like an unfunded mandate if you vote the article and don’t allow for maintenance.

Cesar said that his budget that was previously submitted was incorrect because he had based his budget on the wrong step for his wages. He said he gave the new adjusted budget to Sandy. Cesar said that he needs more hours because he can’t do it all in 25 hours. He said his job has grown immensely and he now helps support the Police and Fire and all kinds of new users on Boards and Committees. He said he spends 5 of his 25 hours solely dedicated to updates because he has to. He said he would like to be moved to a 40 hour a week position. Tom said that many of the upcoming articles that are to be voted on are related to data processing and he could see how that would not be able to be handled in 25 hours. Drew said that we are just shy of 1.5 million dollars in articles and that at least he needs time to digest Cesar’s request. He said he doesn’t want to burden the taxpayer more than necessary. Fred asked how much it would cost to increase Cesar to 40 hours. Cesare said ti would be an increase of $19,125 over the current requested budget. Charlie said Cesar deals with many more employees now then he originally did. Charlie said if money becomes available this should be a priority for increasing hours. Fred said maybe even increasing by only 5 hours this year and then maybe increasing more in FY23 after the new systems in the articles have been passed. Cesar said he responsibility is really 24/7 and 25 hours just doesn’t work.

Fred asked Charlie about Wage and Personnel discussion. Charlie said he had nothing yet because he had been too busy.

There were no Reserve Fund Transfers

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Article | Motion | Second | Vote |
| A14-reseal HES $25,000 | Tom | Cheryll | 4-1 (Drew no) |
| A15 exterior lights $100,000 | Hold for information |  |  |
| A26 HES kitchen flooring $30,000 | Joe | Cheryll | AIF |
| A17 kindergarten hallway flooring $12,000 | Hold for information |  |  |
| A18 HES access path | Tom | Joe | AIF |
| A19 install AC in server and art room $15,000 | Tom | Joe | AIF |
| Tennis court repair | Hold |  |  |
| A26 document epermit $32,000 | Tom | Cheryll | 3-1 (Drew no) |
| A27 asset mangmnt software $24,000 | Tom | Cheryll | 0-4 do not recommend |
| COA van $73,000 | Tom | Cheryll | 3-1 (Drew no) |
| Unemployment $20,000 | Cheryll | Tom | 3-1 (Drew no) |
| SRO $35,000 | Tom | Cheryll | 0-4 do not recommend |

Discussions on articles:

Fred said Matt Durkee had sent specifics and photos after their meeting the other night. Fred suggested maybe now the Fin Com could vote on some of the articles. Joe said Matt’s notes had answered many of the square footage questions. Joe said actually for the square footage on resealing the parking lot it was an amazing deal. He said the price per square foot on the access road and the kitchen also look good. Joe said the hallway flooring quote still didn’t’ make sense based on the square footage. He said for 800 sf of VCT it should be no more than $5-$6,000 and not $12,000 as in the article. Sandy said she was under the impression it was carpet tile not vinyl. Joe said that would maybe make more sense but again it would still only be around the $5-$6,000 price range. Sandy said she could ask Matt for more specifics. Joe said it would be good to have the quote all broken down (ie: materials, removal, etc). Drew mentioned he found the pictures of the tennis courts helpful. Joe said based on the new information Matt had sent (Linda emailed the information during the meeting) the quote for the hallway floor was only $1482 and not $12,000 such as the article request. Joe said maybe it was just “fat fingers” and they had accidentally hit an extra zero but something was definitely not right between the quote and the article.

Fred said he had substantial concerns that the new email from Matt listed the HES lighting project at $100,000. He wondered if anyone had even spoken to the neighbors about putting up that much lighting and how it would affect them. He said in general he didn’t understand why it would be so much money. Scott said originally the school had put together kind of “a wish list” This quote was from that and that once they had brought in the electrician (because it was a much bigger job than Scott could handle by himself) and an excavator, they found the cost to be over $100,000. Scott said he had spoken with Matt and he was under the impression that they had decided to simply replace the light head fixtures if possible. The new fixtures would allow the light to shine down on the parking lot and not towards Rt 106 and therefore be dual purpose. Joe asked if the $100,000 would be needed just to replace the light heads as that seemed too high. Scott said if they were planning on just replacing light heads that should be nowhere near the cost. Joe said he thought it would be more like a few thousand dollars. Tom added that it would be foolish to reseal the parking lot and then cut it if we had to add a light pole. He hoped someone was considering the priority in which the items were done.

Cheryll asked Charlie if the money for the new AC’s could be reimbursed from the money the federal government would send to the schools and Towns. Charlie said there is no way to determine that yet as the specifications on how to spend the money had not yet been released. Fred says he prioritizes the safety of equipment and personnel. Fred thought it would be foolish not to have AC in the server room as electronics getting overheated is a real issue. Charlie said the Town Hall has a dedicated cooling system in their server room. Tom and Joe said it is important to get AC into that room whether or not we get reimbursed for it. Fred asked if there would be any kind of cost savings if the Town could now host summer school back in Halifax for students (Gordon had said in the prior meeting that currently Halifax summer school students have to go to Plympton). Sandy said she believed not because we don’t pay for transportation of students for summer school.

Fred said he was really struggling with the vote for the tennis court refurbishing. Cheryll agreed. Drew said he likes that the cost is split between the three Towns and in general is supportive of articles where the cost is split. Charlie reminded the committee that someone had suggested they could use the money from the Silver Lake stabilization account (from when Pembroke split out of the district) to pay for the tennis court refurbishing. The money was originally put into the account with the intent of paying for capital projects so this would qualify. Sandy said taking it from there would be a good idea. Joe said he had concerns that f you didn’t fix it and you don’t shut it down, there could be liability issues. Cheryll asked if there was a current tennis team. Several replied that there is a tennis team at SL. Concerns were raised that the capital money might be needed for the roof repairs at Silver Lake. Sandy said that Gordon had told her that the warranty on the roof had been located and the rood was now being fixed under the warranty. Joe said he understands everyone’s struggle, but we need to either fix the court or close it altogether. Joe wondered if because we have our own tennis courts in Halifax, we could negotiate to a slightly better price and Fred said not likely. Tom said maybe approving this under the Stabilization account but pressing the schools on their regular budgets would be the way to go. Fred said he would feel better seeing the final numbers on the school budget before he approves this. The committee agreed they would like to see the new budget numbers on 3/29 before they vote on this article.

Fred asked if anyone had any feelings on the Docuwear management system. Drew said if it wasn’t recommended and didn’t pass it would take some burden off of Cesar and his job. Tom said he thought if we didn’t do it, we may be the last Town not online. He thinks in some ways it could make the Town more efficient. He thinks every town should be digitized in the their records for ease of access. Fred asked if the e-permitting portion could go on the current website. Charlie said a third party could add onto the website and handle the e-permitting just like Unibank does with payments. Tom asked if there could be revenue offsets to going online. Charlie said he wouldn’t want to discriminate on price between a person buying a permit online and paying it in person. Tom said you could however increase all permit fees slightly due to convenience and that would help offset the costs.

Fred asked about opinions on the Asset Management software. Cheryll and Fred both questioned if we really needed it at this point. Tom said he felt it was slightly overpriced for what was being offered and the thinks we don’t have a big enough inventory in our fixed asset pool to warrant this.

Fred asked about the COA van. Drew asked about the charging stations in Town and about an electrical van. Charlie said there are no hybrid vans on the State bid list for the size the COA needs. Drew said they make a Bluebird van that is hybrid. Fred said that it has to be on the State bid list and Sandy said it must also be handicapped accessible. Fred said he wasn’t comfortable asking the COA to wait to replace it until a hybrid became available because it is already a safety concern.

Fred discussed with the new members of the Committee the background on the SRO article and how it has played out the last few town meetings. He said the Fin Com has always opposed it because they do not think the funding mechanism should be an article they feel it should be in the operating budget of the school. He said last year at Town Meeting it got voted through as an article. He believes that the position is needed but opposes the article on principle of funding. Chief Chaves said he reached out to some local districts in the Mattapoisett, Old Rochester, Lakeville area. He said one town funds through the school operating budget, and one funds through the Police operating budget. The Chief believes strongly in having an SRO in every school, but he made it very clear to the superintendent last year that he believes it should be in the operating budget of the school. Tom said he agreed with the rest of the Fin Com and the Chief that you need to use the proper funding mechanism. The Chief said that as police reform takes place you may even see the SRO get pulled out of schools. Some schools have already started to remove SRO because the public is opposed to having a SRO in the school building.

Sandy spoke to the fact that an additional $20,000 was needed in the Unemployment line just in case we end of having to pay the bills that DUA is sending. Currently there are quite a few fraudulent charges on the bills and so we have chosen not to pay them because we have until June 30th and we are hoping DUA will catch up and correct the fraud before then. Some towns have been paying right along but it is very difficult to get money back from DUA so Halifax has not. Sandy said if we paid all the charges, we would deplete the existing funds and have nothing to cover going forward. This is a safety net.

Fred said he was curious of what the cost would be to increase Cesar’s hours. He would like to see the cost at different levels of hours. Sandy said she could get that for the Fin Com. Tom said Cesar makes about $24.50 an hour according to the total increase he gave. Drew said he thinks there is too much income inequity in the world. He wonders if maybe you shouldn’t just give more money to everyone.

Fred suggested that the members begin to independently work on what items they would prioritize if somehow money freed up and became available. He said then the members could come back together and discuss their different rankings. Tom said he would like to see a restacked budget and what it would look like if you include the changes for Scott and Steve. He said the restacked budget would help him with prioritizing. Fred agreed and said that sometimes articles (such as crosswalks and solar signs) can cause maintenance issues and it is only fair to fund those if you are going to pass the article. Fred said therefore, those maintenance costs should be a priority.

Fred asked Linda to add the RFPs for the Zoning bylaws to next Wednesdays agenda so they could discuss them.

Tom said he had another question about why again the Police had about a 12% wage increase in their budget line. He wasn’t sure if it was additional staffing. Fred and Linda clarified that the wage line was voted at the figure without the lieutenant position in it and that had been the biggest portion of that line’s increase.

Fred said that he was looking forward to seeing new school budget figures on Monday night. He stressed that Fin Com had voted to keep the $300,000 buffer under the levy limit. He said Town Meeting could still vote the school budget the way it is but if they did the Town would have to hit into that $300,000 and then it would be on the residents because they are the ones who decided to do that which would increase their taxes. He stressed again that the schools chew up 54% of the entire operating budget and therefore departments on the Town side are automatically at a handicap.

There was no public participation.

**Fred entertained a motion to adjourn at 7:48pm.**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Tom

**AIF**

Respectfully submitted,

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

Tom Connolly, Clerk