Finance Committee

TOWN OF HALIFAX

499 Plymouth Street

Halifax, MA 02338

**Meeting Minutes**

**Monday, February 10, 2020**

**Committee Members Present**: Melinda Tarsi, Bill McAvoy, Fred McGovern and Drew McGlincy

Also, in attendance in the audience were: Sandy Nolan, Charlie Seelig, Scott Materna and Jean Gallant (late arrival by Gordon Andrews)

The meeting was recorded by Area 58

**Melinda called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm**

Melinda reminded other members about reaching out to departments to make appointments with their liaisons. Melinda questioned if there had been any issues making appointments. Bill stated he just had not been able to make time in his own schedule yet and Melinda offered to help out if he needed it, but Bill expected to get to it soon.

**Melinda entertained a motion to table the Selectmen’s budget until Charlie came back in the room**

Motion: Bill

Second: Fred

**AIF**

Melinda asked Sandy to speak about the Accountant’s budget changes. Sandy let the Committee know that her Assistant Accountant would be retiring at the end of May. Therefore, her clerical budget line would be going down as the current Assistant is at the top step, but the new person would likely be hired at somewhere between a step 1 and a step 3 depending on experience. Sandy also informed them that her Expense budget line would be slightly increasing to cover the costs of having a new person take some educational courses. Sandy forewarned the Committee that she may be submitting an article for the STM during the ATM to get funding to overlap training by hiring someone in April to work with Jean until May so that Jean could help train them. Sandy stated that May and June are difficult times of year to be trying to train someone herself because of Town Meeting and End of Year obligations. Sandy estimated she may need $5,000 from Town meeting to cover the overlap. Melinda asked if there were any further questions for Sandy and there were not. Sandy pointed out that the audit expense remained the same as the company had given a 3-year price quote. Melinda thanked Sandy for all the information.

Melinda asked Charlie to speak about the Selectmen’s budget. Charlie said he may have increased slightly in some areas but then decreased in other areas in order to remain around the same figure. He said he looked back 10 years ago in order to compare the increase/decrease and the new budget still remains at less than it was 10 years ago. Melinda asked Charlie if he could discuss the Law line item. Charlie said he hoped his request for more money in the Law line would get the account back under control. He said there is one case in litigation and the secondary effects of that case are taking up a large amount of the Law account. He said in general he feels we are living in a more litigious society in general. He said he felt it was better to spend a few hundred up front on asking a lawyer for a legal opinion then to get caught on the back end paying a lot more because the Town had done something it shouldn’t. Charlie said the FY21amount seems more realistic to what we spent on Law over the last two years. Melinda asked if Charlie feels comfortable with the number he was requesting. Charlies said he feels it is the minimum he would need. He mentioned that there has been a personnel matter that was being litigated but he was hopeful that it would end soon as there was movement to end it. He said the Zoning Board matter is not likely to end anytime soon and may in fact cause other litigation to spin off from this one case. He said he is adamant about the Town continuing to defend itself because it is more then just a zoning matter. Fred McGovern asked if we were still considering an investment in rewriting the Zoning bylaws to help avoid litigation. Charlie said that he would have to put a separate article in at Town Meeting for that kind of funding. Currently they are working on rewriting the Multi-Family portion and that is being done within the current budget and he hopes to bring the changes to the next ATM. Melinda asked about the Town Report line. Charlie said the Town reports cost about $24 to copy (the first being the most expensive to make) and we currently print 100 copies. Charlie said if we really needed to save a couple thousand, we certainly could consider no longer printing Town Reports. He said we could just format one and then make copies as people requested them. Melinda asked Charlie if he wanted to talk about Data Processing now or if he preferred to wait until Cesar was available. Charlie said he preferred to wait. Melinda questioned if any of the hard wiring for the COA building would be in the Data Processing budget (if they were to move offices around). Charlie said that something like that would require a separate article at Town meeting (such as with the current recabling). Melinda said that she did not believe it was a definitive plan, it was just a possibility that came up during her talks as liaison to the COA.

**Melinda entertained a motion to accept the Meeting Minutes from 2/3/10**

Motion: Bill

Second: Fred

**AIF**

**Melinda entertained a motion to move the Waterman agenda items to the end of the meeting so as to deal with the rest of the housekeeping items.**

Motion: Bill

Second: Fred

**AIF**

Melinda asked if there was any Public Participation.

Scott Materna asked Finance their thoughts on his adding another full-time person. Scott said that if they are likely going to approve a full-time person then there is no point in hiring the part time person he was going to hire now. Melinda said that as a member of the Finance Committee and a representative to the Wage and Personnel Board, she had met with Scott to begin to discuss this matter and how it affected his budget. Melinda stated that Wage and Personnel has not yet met to discuss this matter and so there is no W&P recommendation to the Finance Committee at this time. She said that the Committee members could look at it now only as a Financial recommendation. Scott said that one of the two summer help positions would be eliminated, and the part-time year-round custodian would be eliminated as well, if he was approved to hire a full-time year round additional employee. Sandy said that Scott’s request was in line 40 of the budget and he had proposed two different budgets that the Fin Com could look at. Melinda asked Scott if he could discuss the need for this particular person at the particular grade he was requesting. Scott said it brings more skill to the department and allows them to run more efficiently as well as eliminating the need to pay prevailing wage. Scott said projects like the upcoming siding project could use this new position. This person could be in charge of some of the projects while Scott could handle other projects. Melinda asked Scott if he had any figures on how much the Town had spent paying prevailing wage for projects in the last two years. Scott did not have that figure. Melinda said it would be helpful if Scott could get that information and compare it to the salary of the new position. Bill asked if adding this position with such responsibility would add to liability and insurance. Charlie said it would probably not have an effect on insurance as we already have Worker’s Comp insurance and they wouldn’t break this position out separately. Bill asked if Scott had a figure on what was spent on the Part time help last year. Melinda said that Scott may have broken that information out in the alternate budget. Bill and Fred both stated that they felt they needed to see all the budget information (for all departments) before making any decisions. Scott clarified that the Committee wanted him to get numbers on what we would save on projects based on paying this position vs what we paid in prevailing wage and also how much was spent on part time help last year. The members said they couldn’t commit until they see the full budget including the school budget numbers. Melinda told Scott that W&P has posted their meetings and they should be meeting with him soon.

There was no other public participation.

Melinda reviewed the calendar with the group, and it is scheduled for every Monday (with the exception of 2/17) for February and March. Melinda will not be available on 3/9

**Melinda entertained a motion to move to Executive Session at 7:33pm**

**Roll call to move to Executive Session: Drew = yes, Bill=yes, Fred=yes, Melinda=yes.**

Melinda said the Committee would reconvene after Executive Session (Sandy Nolan and Jean Gallant left the room and Scott had previously left)

**7:44 Melinda took a roll call to return to public session**

**Roll Call to move out of Executive session: Drew=yes, Bill=yes, Fred=yes, Melinda=yes open session reconvenes**

**Melinda entertained a motion to vote $12,000 be used from the Reserve Fund to pay to settle the Waterman Grievance.**

Motion: Bill

Second: Drew

**AIF**

Sandy requested that Charlie do a Reserve Fund Transfer form. Charlie filled out the form and the Committee signed the Reserve Fund Transfer request.

Gordon Andrews reminded the Committee that Silver Lake would have a school committee meeting on 2/13. Fred asked Gordon if he had any information on if Silver Lake expected the closing of Sacred Heart High School in June 2020 to have any impact on the school budget. Gordon said from what the School Committee had seen, it should not have a big impact. Gordon asked the members if they had discussed at all the Chapter 70 funding. Melinda said they will discuss it during the Tri-Town Finance Committee meeting on 2/24. Melinda asked Gordon if the School would still be planning to do an article to fund a School Resource Officer. Gordon said he believed they did, or they could put it as a sub line in Article 5. Melinda said that the Finance Committee still believes (as they informed everyone last year) that a SRO needs to be part of the school’s operating budget and not an article. Bill said he remembered that last year Halifax had agreed to work with Kingston about a SRO because it was late in the budget season but they were supposed to make sure it got put in as part of the operating budget this year. Gordon said to his knowledge the Kingston Police have absorbed it into their budget and it is not in the School budget. Plympton does their funding through a separate article. Melinda pointed out that an article funding the position leaves it up to Town meeting year to year to approve or not approve the funding, so there is no planning. Melinda said that many departments on the Town side come to the Finance Committee with repeat requests for help and she could not justify supporting funding through and article. Melinda and Fred both stated that once again the school is not level service budgeting. The request for a SRO and for the new Chapter 74 teacher would be an increase to a service budget. Gordon said it could cost the Town more if we put it in the school budget because we may pick up a piece of Kingston’s share (they now fully fund the high school SRO). Bill said if we put it in the budget and divide by all 3 Towns it should probably cost less or close to the same. Gordon said Silver Lake is already trying to trim their budget (with the possibility of cutting 5 positions) and the need for a SRO is there. Melinda said that Finance agrees that the need for a SRO may be there, but if the school feels strongly that it is needed then they should put it in their budget to assure the SRO position will be there. Sandy questioned why the SRO is paid overtime and if a Special Police Officer could do the job at a regular rate. Gordon said it is the decision solely of the Kingston Police Chief what officer is appointed as the SRO because it is in his department budget. Charlie said ultimately, weak or strong chief, they still answer to a Board of Selectmen as an appointing authority. Gordon said he is trying to find a solution for it to be under the education umbrella, but he cannot see the School Committee voting to put it in their budget. Melinda said they already had all this discussion last year about having it put in the School budget and this just seems like “old wine new bottle” approach to it. Gordon said he could try to add the SRO into the budget if that is what it was going to take to get the Finance Committee to approve the School budget. However, the school would have to be “held harmless” for costs. Gordon said that the Town of Kingston is the Town that by law has to pay for the SRO if there is one in the school because the school itself is located in Kingston. Gordon said on a side note that the shared costs for Halifax Elementary will be increasing also due to the shifting of some positions to shared costs.

**Melinda entertained a motion to adjourn at 8:04pm**

Motion: Bill

Second: Fred

**AIF**

Respectfully submitted,

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

Fred McGovern, Clerk