Finance Committee

TOWN OF HALIFAX

499 Plymouth Street

Halifax, MA 02338

**Meeting Minutes**

**Monday May 3, 2021**

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

Also, in attendance in the audience were: Charlie Seelig, Chief Chaves, Sandra Nolan, Toni Ross, Gordon Andrews, Sue Lawless, Ashley Disesa, Barbara Gaynor

The meeting was recorded by Zoom

**Fred called the meeting to order at 6:11pm**

Fred asked if there was any new budget information. Charlie said Article 46=Fraud assessment he now had figures for. He said they were $33,200, $50,000 and $178,000. He said obviously he would not be looking further into the one that was for $178,000. He was going to review the proposals and then come back with recommendations hopefully before Town meeting.

As far as the handicap ramp project, he also had some figures. They came in much higher than the $35,000 that was originally estimated years ago. Charlie said he was meeting with Scott Materna and the architect to discuss ideas like extending the porch and what else might need to be done. He said that one alternate with the platform was and additional $90,0000 more. The second alternate would require $117,000 more in addition. Everything is very expensive right now in construction and he doesn’t see prices going down. Charlie suggested they wait on giving their recommendation until Monday night but the money is available in Free Cash to do it. Joe said he would try to take a peek at the proposal before Monday night just to make sure nothing looked too out of line, but he agreed everything in construction is expensive right now. He said the biggest factor is probably the rebar inside the construction because metal is so expensive right now. Gordon asked about a temporary ramp solution until prices go down. Joe said it more than likely would not be worth it. The temp ramp would likely be an aluminum one, which again would cost quite a bit because of the metal, plus you would probably have to have it for quite a long time if you are waiting for prices to go down so renting one would likely not be cost effective.

Fred said that last week he had asked Cesar to talk about the Asset Management system again. Tom said it simply comes down to revenue. We currently have some kind of Asset Management system that is being used on Excel so maybe other things in the budget should be a priority. Fred said he also wondered if they should wait until the Risk Assessment was done first and then see what type of Asset Management system they recommended because he wouldn’t want to spend the money without first making sure it would meet the proper standards. Sandy said she had spoken to Scott Materna that day and he said of all the articles that Building Maintenance had put in, this would be the first article he would pull because he is not totally sold on it even though Cesar is pushing it. Sandy said there are also other projects that Cesar has started but not finished that probably should be wrapped up first. Fred said especially if they are not increasing Cesar’s hours, maybe this project should wait. The members all agreed they wanted to stick with their original vote not to recommend the Asset Management system.

Fred asked Charlie if they could discuss an across the board increase without going into Executive Session or if they should wait and discuss it after the Executive Session. Charlie said they could probably discuss it now. Sandy said there are currently no recommendations from the Fin Com on any of the Wage and Personnel amendments. Charlie said he still had not completed his research on the Grade 6 and Grade 7 positions and based on what he was hearing from the Fin Com about across the board increases, it might not matter if he got it done because there may be no money available to make the changes. Fred asked about amendment 2 in the bylaw that was for changes to grades for some positions. Fred asked for thoughts on an across the board increase of 1%. He said he knew that if the school budget got voted through the Town would already be about $80,000 into the $300,000 buffer. Cheryll said that she was against the 1% increase because she doesn’t like taxes increased any more and doesn’t want to go further into the $300,000. Joe asked if there was an increase for employees last year. Sandy said there was a 1.6% increase last year and 2% the year before that. Joe said that meant if you did 0 this year and reasoned that next year may be even worse and gave 0 that year, it would mean only a 3.6% over four years. Fred said next year could be better or it could be worse, it is hard to say. Joe confirmed with Sandy that she said that the 1% for all Wage and Personnel and union (other than the schools) would cost about $53,000. Sandy confirmed that. Charlie said it would cost about $100,000 if you included 1% for the Halifax Elementary School as well. There was discussion about how many people get steps and how many are at their top steps. Sandy and Charlie said that about 50% of the employees are already at their top step (Sandy said we only have 6 steps) and so about half of the employees only get a raise if they get an across the board increase. Gordon made the point that the Silver Lake teachers were already being given 1.6% increases for the next two years guaranteed. It is already in the Silver Lake budget figures they provided. Joe said if no increase was given this year he would certainly be pushing for a more than 1% increase next year. He said some people might take 1% as insulting, though he wasn’t sure that was the correct word, so maybe it is better to do nothing this year but give an even better increase next year. He said it might be easier to say that we don’t have the money this year but with the understanding to do better next year. Tom said he can see both sides of it but maybe this year is the better year to rationalize not being able to do it. Deb agrees with Cheryll that she doesn’t want to see taxes raised. Drew said he doesn’t really have many thoughts on it. He said he felt like $53,000 was not much money so he doesn’t care either way. Fred is concerned if next year is worse eit would be even harder to come up with the money for an across the board increase. Fred said he wants to give it but he has concerns.

**Fred entertained a motion to recommend a 1% increase across the Board for Wage and Personnel employees and unions (with the exception of HES)**

Motion: Tom

Second: Cheryll

**0-6 Finance Committee does not recommend.**

The Committee discussed the amendment to move the Chief of Police to Unclassified instead of Grade 12 in the Wage and Personnel bylaw. Charlie said the amendment is to fix the possible problem of if you find yourself with no contract and need someone to fill the position. He said for the top position at the Police station to fill the Police Chief position as an interim, while they find a new Chief, the position would have to take a pay cut. Tom asked if only the positions of Police Chief, Fire Chief and Town Administrator are the ones that have this interim department head situation. Charlie said that all department head positions can be filled with this interim method of taking Step 1 of the empty position minus 10%. However, these three positions are the only ones where you would find the problem of wage compression. Charlie said he believes our Chiefs positions are highly underpaid compared to comparable towns. The Committee said it is important to keep experienced people in these positions if we can.

**Fred entertained a motion to recommend changing the positions of Fire Chief, Police Chief and Town Administrator to Unclassified positions.**

Motion: Tom

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

**Fred entertained a motion to recommend Passing Over changes to Grade 6 and Grade 7**

Motion: Tom

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

**Fred entertained a motion to recommend a $300 clothing allowance for the Health Inspector**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Joe

**AIF**

**Fred entertained a motion to recommend the changes to the Call Fire fighter positions including clothing, puymp operator and detail pay**

Motion: Tom

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

**Fred entertained a motion to recommend the salaries for the newly Unclassified positions**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Tom

**AIF**

**Fred entertained a motion to add Craftsman as a position in Grade 8 and add stipends.**

The Committee decided to table this discussion until 5/10 as Charlie stated that he believed a settlement would be reached with the Mixed Unit prior to 5/10 that might effect this.

Fred wanted to discuss the RFPs for the Zoning bylaw changes. Charlie said that Miyares had reached out to him and wanted to make sure the Fin Com knew that the list they provided was based on the list that Charlie had put in the RFP. They listed the areas where they could get the most work done for the price that was given. They wanted to make sure the Committee understood that they are a Law firm and not a civic engagement group. Charlie said that is the main difference. The Bobrowski proposal focused heavily on residential input. Charlie said the Fin Com had to decide if the wanted a group that focused on civic engagement and used some of the money as the means to that end or a group that used less money on civic engagement. Charlie said he was sure both firms were capable of the job. Fred asked Charlie what ever became of the Zoning bylaw Committee that he had seen something about online. Charlie said it was defunct. Fred said he had concerns with this all falling back on Finance. He said he doesn’t want Finance to have to get into the specifics of zoning. Charlie agreed, he said that everyone should be involved. All the Boards doing their part and input from the residents. Joe said he liked that Bobrowski stated their hourly rate so you could work your way backwards and figure out how much they could accomplish because they outlined in each section the expected number of hours. Joe said it was hard to tell with Miyares because they never stated their hourly rate. Deb asked for clarification on what the project was about. Fred said the current zoning bylaw is very confusing in some areas and needs to be cleaned up. He likes the idea of moving all the definitions to one area and making sure they are therefore the same throughout the bylaw. Charlie reassured that the intent of the attorneys is not to come in and do planning for the Town. They are simply cleaning up what already exists. They are focused on the legal part of making the existing bylaws clearer. Tom said he feels indifferent about most of it but he likes the idea of already knowing the hourly rate and Bobrowski took the lead on straightening up the whole situation and he likes the community engagement.

**Fred entertained a motion to recommend the contract to Bobrowski’s firm**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Tom

**AIF**

Cheryll asked about the reappointment of members since her term would be up in June 2021. Charlie said there were two terms that would be up in June 2021 and a member who did not need to be reappointed would have to meet with the Selectmen on 6/8 to speak to the reappointment of Cheryll and Fred. Tom said he could be there.

**Tom Connolly made entertained a motion to recommend reappointing Fred McGovern and Cheryll Zarella Burke to the Finance Committee when their terms end on 6/15/21.**

Motion: Tom

Second: Deb

**AIF**

Under correspondence Linda mentioned that there was a Talent Bank form from Michael Bennett who would like to join the Finance Committee. Fred asked Linda to schedule Michael to come in and meet the Committee on 5/24/21

There was no public participation.

**Fred entertained a motion to adjourn the public meeting at 7:19pm and move to Executive Session.**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Tom

**AIF on a roll call vote to move to Executive Session**

Respectfully submitted,

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

Tom Connolly, Clerk