Finance Committee

TOWN OF HALIFAX

499 Plymouth Street

Halifax, MA 02338

**Meeting Minutes**

**Monday , January 24, 2022**

**Committee Members Present**: Tom Connolly, Michael Bennett, Cheryll Zarella Burke, Jon Schmaling and Todd Dargie.

Also, in attendance in the audience were: Cesar Calouro, Sandy Nolan, Ed Thorne (interim TA), Chief Chaves, Jean Gallant, Darlene Regan, Alan Dias, Gordon Andrews and Ashely Disesa

**Tom called the meeting to order at 6:01pm**

**Tom entertained a motion to accept the minutes of 01/10/2022**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

Tom said that Mike O’Brien had sent an email stating that he had classes at Boston College on Monday nights from January through May. Tom said he really didn’t want to lose Mike as a member of the Committee but that is definitely the heart of budget season. He asked if others would be able to switch nights for meetings. He asked first if Sandy and Linda had availability other nights. Linda said Tuesday nights would be the next best for her. Sandy agreed that would also have the most availability on Tuesday nights. Cheryll said she probably couldn’t do Tuesday nights because of a part time job she is currently doing. She wasn’t sure though. Todd and Jon also said they could do Tuesdays. Tom said since we would be losing one member either way, maybe we should stick to Monday nights for now and he would try and keep Mike O’Brien in the loop. He said Mike said he might be able to make some Mondays when he didn’t have class. Tom said Mike could still reach out to departments at his convenience.

Sandy took a moment to introduce Ed Thorne, the new interim Town Administrator to the group.

Tom asked what topic they could move onto while waiting to meet with the Selectmen. Linda said they had correspondence from Todd that they could address regarding the wage study and also the creation of a revenue study committee.

Tom said as far as the wage study he wanted to express that we had collected some information from the 10 surrounding towns through the information that Linda collected on behalf of the committee. Tom said his company also had collected data on some benchmark positions in the State of Massachusetts as a whole, in the general region of Halifax and in town of similar size to Halifax. He said the data had showed about the same information, which was that Halifax tends to be the low payer. He said Halifax is consistently the low payers and we are not competitive with our surrounding towns or towns of our size. So Tom felt the question is “how do we move on from here, or do we?” Tom asked Todd his thoughts on the subject in regard to the email he had sent. Toss said when he met with departments heads, they had echoed the same concerns. That because Halifax is the low payer, it is hard to keep good qualified employees from leaving. They wanted to know what the Finance Committee is going to address that issue. Todd said that during his research he had come across a study done by the Mackenzie company that looked at different ways for municipalities to increase revenues and that could help be part of the solution. He said the article suggested things like, should we raise fees? She we adopt more local mandates? Todd said we talk a lot about the marijuana facilities, but we don’t know what that will bring and maybe there are other options as well. We need to ask what our viable options are for increasing revenues. He said we have a big problem in the coming 3-5 years and being on the Finance Committee has been eye opening to that fact. Maybe we need to reach out to residents to hear their ideas on how to increase revenues and what they think are acceptable ideas. Tom said we can keep confirming we are not competitive in pay and that it will lead to the Town losing talent. He said maybe the Fin Com should talk to the Board of Selectmen (BOS) to look overall at revenue generation. Has it been done in the last few years. Are we looking at ways to generate revenue or just focusing on trying to work with what we have. Todd agreed we need to focus on new ways to generate revenue and it is a Town problem as a whole. Todd said he would share the Mackenzie study with members so they could look at some of the ideas. Tom said he would also share the benchmark jobs data on eh Shared Drive as well.

6:16pm, Gordon and Ashely are present for the meeting as members of the Select Board. Cesar said that Troy was not able to attend due to phone difficulties.

Gordon said that he thought Todd’s idea was a great idea. Gordon questioned if this would be a sub committee that would be created and would study revenue generation sources. The Fin Com members agreed they can start to look at revenue generation and may not need a subcommittee. Todd said maybe there can be some zoning changes that can help to attract more business. Gordon said that yes, sometimes things like the number of parking spaces required make it difficult for businesses. We want to attract more places to Halifax if we can.

Linda read into the record the proposed changes to the Wage and Personnel bylaws that had been submitted before 12/31/21. They were all submitted by former Town Administrator Charles Seelig. The first was in regard to giving W&P employees a 1% increase in wages retroactive to 7/1/21 in order to bring them current with the unions. The second was in regard to Police matron pay and the third was in regard to the Juneteenth Holiday. All article proposals are attached.

Gordon said the 1% for all W&P employees for FY22 would be funded with money left in articles from previous town meetings. He said he had spoken to Sandy Nolan prior to the Special Town Meeting in the fall to have her change funding sources from the left over article money to Raise and Appropriate so that there would be money left to settle on giving the W&P employees and any unsettled union contracts the 1% that brought them in line with the other unions that had already received 1% for FY22. Sandy confirmed the money is still available to fund the 1%

**Gordon entertained a motion to fund a 1% pay increase retroactive to 7/1/2021 for all Wage and personnel** **employees.**

Motion: Tom

Second: Ashley

**AIF**

Sandy said that this vote would be done in the Special Town meeting within the Town meeting in May 2022.

Gordon asked Chief Chaves if he had opinions on the article regarding the Police Matrons. The Chief pointed out that he had not submitted this article. He sid that he believed in the last year we had only had one or two shifts that actually needed matron coverage. He said if the current matrons were going to be grandfathered in anyways, such as the article stated, then he thinks discussing a uniform rate of pay for the matrons is a non-issue. He said his research had shown that we pay at the low end on matrons and the sheriffs department is on the high end around $25. He said that currently we have 3 matrons that already work for the town in another capacity. We also have 2 matrons who do not work for the town in another capacity. Sandy said if it is not currently a problem because there are such limited shifts, then why worry about making changes now, just let it be. Gordon agreed with Sandy. Everyone was in agreement that until the Chief determines that it is becoming an issue, just leave it alone. Cheryll asked how many women prisoners do we get that need a matron. The Chief said maybe 6 female prisoners a year on average and not all need a matron.

Gordon brought up the article for Juneteenth. He said that he believed that if the State is going to recognize it as a paid holiday then the Town should also. He said the unions would push for it if the State is doing it. Sandy asked if the State had actually made it a paid holiday or just a holiday (with no regard to pay). Michael Bennett said he had just looked it up and it was listed on the State as a paid holiday. Tom said maybe you don’t have to vote it right now. Linda suggested they could take a vote that would just agree to follow the State in reference to paying or not paying Juneteenth.

**Tom entertained a motion to follow State regulation on the holiday of Juneteenth**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Mike Bennett

**AIF (BOS and Fin Com)**

Gordon announced that he would have to temporarily leave the meeting for a doctor’s appointment.

Tom asked Darlene if she would like to speak to her agenda item while they waited for Gordon to rejoin the meeting.

Darlene said they are in the process of hiring the Receptionist/Transportation person at the COA. Darlene said there were many applicants who brought a diverse background, but most were not geared towards working with elders. She said she found two candidates that she felt had good potential. She said that she had her board member Jo Schofield help her pick the two candidates, but she found that the low wage issue makes it difficult to attract the right people. She said the candidate she wants to offer the position to already works as a transportation coordinator for a private company. She also felt the candidate could help take on some of Darlene’s responsibilities. She said the candidate had also previously volunteered at the COA and knew about Halifax and what to expect. Darlene said that starting her at Step 1, $15.12 is not attractive. She would like to bring the woman in at a Step 3, Grade 2. Tom asked if she was experienced in this field. Darlene said both candidates had some different types of experience, and that this candidate did not need benefits. Linda cautioned that whether or not someone needed benefits should not be discussed when deciding upon hiring someone. Sandy said that maybe the job description should be changed if Darlene felt it was not correct and then maybe the position would be regraded. Darlene said they want to hire someone now. Sandy said it was important to note the experience if you want to move someone up a step. Tom said that according to Darlene the predecessor was not doing this job to the description. Linda asked if Darlene could send along whatever she was looking at as documentation for experience because as of yet, she had not sent anything to the Committee to review. Tom said to Darlene that he did not believe Linda was questioning the experience or not, but rather that it was a point of order that the committee should have the information for the minutes to show why they decided to vote a higher step if that was the case. Tom said if she sent it, they could vote it at their next meeting. Cesar said that he was not trying to speak for Darlene but if the Fin com waited until next Monday to vote then the BOS would also need to vote but they were not meeting the next week, so it would be three weeks until Darlene could get someone in. Darlene said she could email the information now. Darlene said she just wants to find a good person. She will send the resume over. Ashley said while Darlene did that she just wanted to take a moment to commend Darlene on taking the time to find a qualified candidate who could grown with the Town. Cheryll asked why Darlene had sent a job description in a prior email when asked for documentation because it didn’t make sense to her because the job description was for the Town of Duxbury. Darlene said she just wanted the committee to see what that person might do in another town. Tom clarified with Darlene that she just intended it as an example of what she would like to see in Halifax and Darlene agreed. Tom said Darlene should, 1) send the resume, 2) tighten up the job description, 3) possibly ask for regrading at Town Meeting.

While they waited for Darlene to send along the resume, Gordon said he would update on what he knew about the FY23 budget so far. He said that the first draft of the Silver Lake budget was a one million dollar increase from last FY. He said that the Halifax Elementary School budget was up $650,000. Gordon said that you can be sure with inflation, that will affect all departments. Gordon said that the Town has to consider all options for this FY including the use of Free Cash, Stabilization and even overrides. Gordon said he had set a meeting with County Treasurer Tom O’Brien to discuss different ideas. He said we need to think out of the box. Gordon said he also set a meeting with Senator Brady, Representative Lanatra, and Jill Proulx and Summer Schmaling. He said maybe he would have Sandy attend to. He wants to discuss Circuit Breaker funds and what they can do to squeeze money from there. He said if the Town doesn’t do something Out of the Box, there will be massive cuts all the way across the Town. Tom asked what would be done in overrides and Gordon said he didn’t know yet, he just wanted to talk about all options. Gordon said as of yet we have no idea what kind of revenue the marijuana facilities will generate for the Town so we shouldn’t count on that even though there are 2 possibly in play. He said that he had no idea where else revenue could come from. He said that the State will be giving a 2.7% increase in aid which works out to be about $30,000 in unrestricted aid. Gordon said he believes it is a service level question now. What are we willing to fund at what service level, do we cut positions?

Darlene sent the emails. Linda said that since Darlene had sent information on several candidates instead of just the one, she should clarify for members which one was the one she wanted to hire. She said candidate number 1. Cheryll and Todd both questioned why she was interested in candidate 1 when based on the documentation candidate 2, seemed more experienced. Darlene said she thought they were both good candidates but preferred candidate 1. Gordon asked what step Darlene wanted the new hire approved for. Darlene said Step 3.

Gordon made a motion to offer the new person a Grade 2 step 3 rate of pay

Second: Ashley

AIF (BOS AND FIN COM)

Darlene thanked the Committee and Board

Gordon asked if anyone had any ideas for what they could do about the FY23 budget. Jon said that he thought Todd had a good idea with the revenue research committee, but he wondered if that was a more long term goal over the next year and we needed a more immediate answer for FY23.

Jean Gallant asked for clarification on the 1% increase that was voted. Linda clarified that it would be put to Town meeting at the STM in May and then if it were voted, it would be retroactive back to 7/1/21 to put Wage and Personnel employees in line with unions.

Sandy let the members know that she had updated numbers in the shared One Drive for the comparison between FY21 and FY22 local receipts. Sandy said the first commitment has come out and she will look at it to help estimate excise for tax receipts because that is the biggest local receipt.

Gordon asked Sandy when the next Capital Planning meeting was. Sandy said it was 2/2. Gordon asked her to talk to committee members about considering the use of Free Cash to be used to help fund the operating budget. Sandy asked if that was advisable and that if we use it for the next fiscal year, are we expecting the operating budget to be better in the FY after that. Gordon said everything has to be on the table for FY23.

Linda reminded members they needed to vote their own budgets.

**Tom entertained a motion to level fund the Fin Com Clerical budget**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Michael Bennett

**AIF**

**Tom entertained a motion to level fund the Fin Com expense budget**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Michael Bennett

**AIF**

Jon asked about when they would vote a new job description for COA. Tom said Darlene needed to provide something for the ATM. Darlene thinks title should be changed. Jon said it was important to keep moving forward in the steps so this doesn’t need to keep coming back to Fin Com

**Tom entertained a motion to adjourn at 7:15pm**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: Cheryll

**AIF (the BOS also adjourned)**

**Respectfully submitted,**

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

Michael Bennett, Clerk