Finance Committee

TOWN OF HALIFAX

499 Plymouth Street

Halifax, MA 02338

**Meeting Minutes**

**Monday , February 7, 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, Toni Ross, and Sue Lawless

**Tom called the meeting to order at 6:00pm**

**Tom entertained a motion to accept the minutes of 01/31/2022**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: Cheryll

**AIF (Jon did not vote as he was having technical difficulties)**

Tom said that starting on 2/28 he would like each department to come give a brief explanation of their budget to the Finance Committee. He said many had level funded but some hadn’t. He thought it was good to have them all in and he suggested we start with the Police who were already scheduled for 2/14. Linda Cole said she had been notified by the Chief that he had a conflict that night and he had asked for his meeting to be moved to 2/28. Tom said that would work. He ran over the budget lines and said the accountant’s was spot on with level funding. He asked if the Assessors had sent in theirs as he did not see it. Sandy said they had definitely submitted, and she would double check if she had not yet put it in the shared folder. Sandy said she would double check the Board of Health as well and send it. Tom said they only went up about 1%. Tom said he didn’t see the Tax Collector budget, but Sandy said it would be under Treasurer/Collector. Tom said the Town Clerk went up significantly but that they had already been warned it would because of the extra elections in 2022 and there is nothing that can be done about that. Tom said he didn’t see anything from the Building Inspector. Tom asked Todd if he had any other information from his departments at the Town Hall. Todd said there was nothing too surprising. Tom said the Zoning Board budget was missing and Sandy said it was under Board of Appeals. Tom said there was nothing yet on the Planning Board. Sandy agreed that nothing had been submitted. Tom said there was nothing yet from Youth and Recreation and nothing from Weights and Measures. Sandy agreed neither had turned in a budget yet and she would get on asking them for it. Tom said the COA just went up a bit, maybe steps. He said the Fire department budget was flat. He mentioned the police budget was up but that they had already requested the Chief to come in and discuss it. Tom said he didn’t see anything yet from the Building Committee, but Sandy said it was there under Municipal School and Building Committee. Tom said he dint’ see the Veteran’s budget yet and Sandy said she still needed to upload it but he is level funding everything. Tom said, Cemetery, Highway, Recycling, and Water were all flat. Tom said the Historic District and Commission were flat. He said the library was up about 1%. Tom said there was nothing from Parks. Linda said that Parks hadn’t submitted because they were looking to speak to someone about the BOH request to possibly add a porta potty at the beach. Tom said he would reach out to the Parks rep.

Tom said the big-ticket items were the school budgets and we didn’t have them yet. He said he thought HES was up about $800,000 which is about 7.7%. Sandy said that figure is the initial budget and that they usually do a a second version and Fin Com might want to reach out to them for the second version. Sandy said that is part of the full figure though and the Elementary School costs went up $139,604 and the other part was Special Ed costs and Special Ed transportation costs. She said Christine (Healy) said they had gone way up because there is now only 1 vendor doing special needs transportation in the area and so the prices have gone way up. Tom asked if the census was affecting it also. Sandy said possibly, but it was mostly the fact that there is no longer competitive pricing because there is only one vendor. Sandy said there was no budget yet from Silver Lake but that the Town expected based on what Gordon Andrews had said, that it would increase the Town Share by about $350,000. Sandy said the Fin Com should make sure someone is working on a second version of both school budgets.

Linda said that she had noticed as Tom was running through the liaison list of departments that IT had not been put on the list and we were missing a budget from them. Todd said he had spoken to Cesar while he was in talking with his departments. He said Cesar was working on figuring out how to level fund the budget. He said Cesar had wanted to do some modernization but it couldn’t be done in FY23 if we were level funding so Cesar was reworking the budget to level fund. Linda said she would add the Data Processing department to the liaison list for next year. Tom said with all the regulatory restrictions and security issues facing IT, it is important to have Cesar talk through the budget to make sure the correct cuts are being made while still remaining safe because it is either pay now or pay later. Cesar said he expected to call Todd by the end of the week with the new budget information. Linda asked if she should schedule Cesar in with the Police Chief for 2/28 and the committee said that would be good.

Tom said there was not much to discuss on the standing agenda item for Wage and Personnel, so he would pass over it for the evening. Cesar said he had a few points he would like to bring up that were Wage and Personnel items. Cesar said that he had read through the Wage and Personnel bylaw and noted that his position was not included anywhere in the bylaw. He said he had already presented that to the Board of Selectmen but also wanted to present it to the fin com so it could be addressed.

Cesar then said he wanted to bring up the matter of the two positions recently requested to be brought in at higher steps. He said two weeks ago the COA had requested for one of their new employees to be brought in at a Step 3 and then last week the Board of Selectmen secretary was also requested to be brought in at a Step 3. He said that when he COA requested it, the director was put through hoops. Tom said it was a different question altogether. He said he wasn’t sure why Cesar was bringing it up now. He said it was an approved position for which there is a job redefinition and the Fin Com had found a way to get done what they needed to get done but there was a different nuance to the COA position, and it had to do with the redefinition of that role. So Tom felt we got her where they needed to but it took some hoops to get there but the question of a standing job description just being brought in at a higher step due to experience was a pretty straight forward matter. The redefinition of the role for COA was a more complicated exercise and he thought the Fin Com navigated it pretty well. Cesar said he would agree but his concern was the position was going to town meeting and that the job description never changed (for the vote at the meeting) and it was decided that the receptionist would keep the same job description with the understanding it would need to be reclassified down the road, but the Finance committee still requested documentation from the COA. Cesar said he is not saying the Fin Com did anything wrong, but he thinks the process needs to be a little clearer because he would hate to see other town department heads lose faith in the process and in the Wage and Personnel committee. Tom said respectfully to Cesar, he felt the process went very well and there were two things that needed to be resolved and they got them resolved satisfactorily but sometimes it takes debate and process and he believes the Fin Com was guided through that process well. He doesn’t believe there was any breach of confidence in the process whatsoever in the distinction between what they did between the two positions. Tom asked Linda if she had a point as she had begun to speak earlier. Linda said that she believed Cesar’s question, which had not been asked to her directly, but she certainly could have answered, was actually about the fact of the documentation. Linda pointed out that several times before the meeting with the COA, documentation had been requested through email but that the COA had never submitted documentation prior to the meeting. Linda said the committee was aware of this because she had notified them through emails that she had requested and was waiting for the documentation. The fin Com had asked for the documentation in the meeting because it was never provided ahead of time. Linda said that she had also requested (as she always does) that the BOS provide the documentation ahead of time for their meeting with the Fin Com. The BOS had provided the information ahead of time (which the Fin Com knew because they had been given it via email) so they did not ask for it in the meeting because they already had it. Linda said it the same things were requested from both parties, but it was simply that one had responded and provided it ahead of the meeting and one had not. Cesar said he appreciated the clarification, but it did not seem like that in the meeting. Linda said that Cesar could just ask her and she could have let him know. He said he tried to ask, and Linda said that he had never asked her. Tom said this was a good discussion and whenever those concerns came up they should be raised.

Tom asked if there was any correspondence this week and Linda said there was not.

Public Participation: Sue Lawless said that the federal 2020 had been completed. She said that it was determined that we did not need a third precinct because the population hadn’t grown enough. She said there had been a redistricting though for some legislative spots. She said this forced them to create what she is referring to as Precinct 2a. She said she was still checking with the State, but this may force her to buy a new voting machine and staff a different line at the polls in order to avoid confusion. She said she had called around and the estimate for another machine was around $6,000. She said she is trying to gather more information from the State to confirm if she needs a third box but if she does she will need it by September. Sandy said the machine could probably be purchased as a capital item and not in the Clerk’s budget but staffing for the elections would mean a necessary increase in the E&R wages. Sue said there was a 3.1% increase in the population from the 2010 to the 2020 census and if that same rate keeps up, then by 2030 there would be a third precinct anyways. Tom thanked Sue for the information.

**Tom entertained a motion to adjourn at 6:27pm**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: Cheryll

**Respectfully submitted,**

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

Michael Bennett, Clerk