Finance Committee

TOWN OF HALIFAX

499 Plymouth Street

Halifax, MA 02338

**Meeting Minutes**

**Monday , March 14, 2022**

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

Also, in attendance in the audience were: Cesar Calouro, Sandy Nolan, Chief Chaves, Chief Viveiros, Jean Gallant, Sue Lawless, Darlene Regan, and Holly Merry

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

**Tom entertained a motion to accept the minutes from 2/28/22**

Motion: Michael

Second: Todd

**AIF**

**Tom entertained a motion to accept the minutes from 3/7/22**

Motion: Michael

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

Chief Viveiros walked through his budget. He noted that some of the clerical is paid for by ARPA funds. Sandy said the Selectmen had voted that for FY22 and FY23 when they took the vote last year. The Chief said the wage line increase was just due to contractual changes for the Fire fighters (such as steps or stipends). Tom clarified it was just contractual and nothing else. Chief said more of the guys are now getting their certificates and degrees because there are incentives to do so. It is around $30,000. Tom said it is good to have public safety that is well trained. The Chief said Line 54 went up because it is the Training line and is related to wages. If someone takes a step and makes more then the training rate is up as well. Chief said everything else is level funded with the exception of the ambulance supplies line. Jason commented again that supplies are just very costly since Covid. He said the budgets are getting tighter and tighter and he is doing his best to squeeze them every way he can. He said that if we continue to level fund year after year, it is eventually going to mean service cuts because the budgets are so tight. Tom agreed that the continuous level funding is not sustainable and the Town nees to make tough decisions. He said we lose to many valuable employees to surrounding towns that offer better pay to their employees. The Chief said the Emergency Management budget is also level funded. The Chief said that for capital items he is requesting $340,000 for a new ambulance. He said the current 2017 ambulance has about 80,000 miles on it and the dealer told him it could take a year and a half to two years to get the new ambulance because of supply chains. Tom said by that point the current ambulance would probably have about 110,000 miles on it. Sandy said we have the Free Cash this year and given the waiting time and the fact that we may not have as much Free Cash in other years, it is best to order it now.

Darlene said she might her licensed social worker designation in the next year or so because she thinks it is an important part of the COA and outreach. She said more and more Outreach is becoming a major part of the job. She said the COA needs as much outside help from other agencies as it can get. She said the most expensive part of running the COA is the vans themselves. She said they may begin to look into GATRA services. She said Norwell and Plympton have done this already. Tom asked if we would lease vans from GATRA but still pay the drivers ourselves. Tom asked if a lot of communities have cut the services of van trips and is Halifax one of the few still doing it. Darlene said that some communities have cut but it is a big part of Outreach, and we would still pay the van drivers. She said she is still trying to get Title 5 services for the Town of Halifax to cover 19.5 hours to help out in the COA. Tom asked if we did get GATRA are we switching a capital item (like the van) to an operating expense. Sandy said there are still a lot of questions about GATRA and she would need more information before she could really make any statements about it. Darlene said they do offer meetings about GATRA and Sandy could attend to, she would let Sandy know next time there was one. Sandy mentioned the COA expense line was up $650. Tom asked if it was for postage. Darlene said that was part of it. She said she would like to get the newsletter sponsored by a local company as some other towns do that already. She said the MCOA is giving a $500 grant and she might try and apply for that too.

Tom mentioned that he noticed the IT expense was increased by $8978 and he wanted to know if that was all increases in licenses. He asked Linda to put it on next week’s agenda to ask Cesar to come prepared with that answer.

Holly spoke to the fact that the Assessors expense line had increased. She said she level funded everything that wasn’t contractual, but the increase reflected the increase in the mapping software charges because they had to go to a new vendor. She said the Association dues had also gone up slightly and the camera/web hosting contract was also up.

Linda said the Banking and Payroll line expense had gone up. She said for the first time in about 7 years the vendor had to raise prices to cover the exorbitant cost of paper and envelopes right now. She said it increased by $100 because they were trying to fit the rest of it in the budget as is.

Tom asked Sue Lawless about the $19,216 increase in Elections and Registration. He said she had spoken to it before that there are just more elections this upcoming fiscal year. Sue said it is in fact due to more elections and it might have to even go a bit higher to pay for the new voting machine that is necessary.

Cheryll inquired about the new amount under Planning Board wages. Sandy explained that the PB secretary is now separated out from the regulatory department because the Planning Board had requested it that way. Sandy said this did make the regulatory figure go down about 6.5% but it would have reflected more, however, most of the people in that department are still on steps.

Tom asked about the Building Inspector wages going down. Sandy said the Building Inspector did not want to appoint an assistant building inspector but instead wanted to put the amount of that salary into his expenses. Sandy said she wasn’t sure if the Board of Selectmen might need to approve that before he does that because they appoint him.

Sandy said that the Dispatch services had increased but it was all contractual and there is nothing that can be done about it.

Sandy said there were some new numbers in the for the HES budget but still not the full budget. She said the business manager had called her and given her some numbers to put in for the lines, but they have not submitted to her a full budget. Tom said half of the HES increase is going to Special Ed transportation costs because we are stuck with one vendor, and they seem to be gouging us because they know that. Cheryll asked if it went out to a bidding process. Tom said he was told there are no other vendors in the area, but he asked the school committee to press on that issue.

Highway went up on the traffic lights line and the tree maintenance lines. Sandy said that Steve was on the agenda for next week, so we could ask him about the increases then.

The Water supply line was up by about $3600 and Sandy was not sure if Bill had mentioned why. Linda said she would send an email to Bill to try and get an answer.

The Recycling Hazardous Waster and Trash collection lines are up, and Sandy said it was contractual but Steve would be able to speak to that next week when he was in.

Sandy explained that on the library lines there is a Sate formula that is based on a 3-year average so the library can stay certified. Certification allows them to share books with other libraries and allows patrons to do the same. She said that having to get recertified is a challenge, so it is best to stay certified if you an. Jean said we lost Step 6 employees over the last few years and they are replacing them with lower paid employees. So the Town gave her extra money in the budget for expenses to keep the formula working. Jean said if she doesn’t use all the money, she always makes sure to turn it back in because she appreciates the Town keep the library certified. She said sometimes she has used it on capital items to save the Town from that expense if something is needed for the library. Sandy said when the wages go down, the expense line goes up and vice versa.

Sandy said the fireworks line just looks like an increase because for the last two years the town has not contributed to it at all but the Town is trying to put a little towards it this year to help pay for the police and fire details. She said most of the money for the fireworks is all done through fundraising.

Sandy said the debt is decreasing. She said the Plymouth County Retirement went up $117,076 but that is because the assessments are increasing as we near full funding in 2030. Sandy mentioned the Group Insurance line had now been lowered yet, but it will be, we are just waiting on open enrollment changes to get a better idea of the number. Sandy said that Linda had mentioned that it would be a good idea to put money towards paying down the PCR debt and investing it with PCR versus putting it all towards Stabilization. Sandy said the Medicare line was up because as wages increase so does the medicare expense. Sandy said we went up on OPEB by $1,000 because it is part of the OPEB investment policy to increase it by $5,000 every year and although we can’t afford to do that, it helps to at least do $1,000.

Sandy said the Gas and Oil and heating oil lines are level funded but there is going to have to a serious consideration in raising that given current prices. Sandy thinks it should go to $110,000 for gas and oil and maybe to $70,000 for heating oil but they should also discuss that with Scott if he comes in.

Tom said the 4% increase in the school budget reflected the wage contractual agreements for the schools.

Sandy said the Police Lieutenant position was still in the Police budget an if you take it out it will be just under a million because the position was in for almost $100,000.

Sandy said Christine Healey, the school business manager said there may be some more savings coming on the Silver Lake assessment.

Tom suggested that the committee try and get some voting for recommendations done on 3/21/22 and then put the budget to bed on 3/28/22. Sandy suggested reaching out to departments from liaisons if there are still any questions.

Tom asked about the capital plan recommendations. Sandy said they can look through it again, but they had a couple weeks ago and voting could be done on 3/21/22. Sandy said she could share the rough draft copy of the warrant if they wanted.

Linda confirmed with Sandy that the budget figures the committee was looking at contained the 1% retroactive increase on Wage and Personnel employees and the Highway employees. Sandy said it did not yet, but she will update it before the next meeting.

Cheryll said sometimes you can’t give a wage increase. Tom said the Town has to start giving some kind of wage increase and 1% almost seems to little even with respect to the employees. Cheryll said there are a lot of elderly people living on fixed incomes. Tom agreed with Cheryll and said that is why it is so important to find new revenue sources, so the burden is not put on older people if taxes have to be raised.

Tom asked about negotiations for FY23 for wages for the unions and the Wage and Personnel people. Sandy said she is not privy at this point to what is being negotiated. Tom asked Sandy what 1% for the wage and personnel employees looks like. Sandy said she would get that.

Tom said the committee should be ready to vote as much as possible next week.

Chief Chaves aske about if there was any movement on the Grade 6 and Grade 7 positions. Are the Fin Com and Board of Selectmen still working on that. Tom said it would probably not be done for this ATM. Tom said he would try and speak with Gordon about where to go on that issue. He said the fiscal position we are in as put it all on hold for now.

**Tom entertained a motion to adjourn at 7:17pm**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

**Respectfully submitted,**

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

Michael Bennett, Clerk