Finance Committee

TOWN OF HALIFAX

499 Plymouth Street

Halifax, MA 02338

**Meeting Minutes**

**Monday , April 4, 2022**

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

Also, in attendance in the audience were: Cesar Calouro, Sandy Nolan, Alan Dias, Jean Gallant

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

Sandy shared an Excel spreadsheet about the Custodial Wage line budget. She said Scott had presented two different budget scenarios. One where he had his usual part time custodian and two summer helps. The other where he eliminated those three positions and instead added one full time Custodial worker. Scott said currently by the time everyone finishes cleaning in the morning it is after 10am. Then he and the craftsman start getting out their tools so they can start projects. He said it means they aren’t getting seriously into the projects until the day is almost half over. Sandy showed that the difference between the two scenarios would equal a budget impact of an additional $7086.15. Sandy said the building maintenance has been asking for extra help for a long time and she asked Scott to present on this. Tom asked Scott if he would lose any scheduling flexibility by going to all full time. Scott said he wouldn’t because the part time person normally leaves by 9am and if anything, this would give him a person who might be available later in the day as well. Tom confirmed that this would mean no extra summer help and Scott said that was true. He said he thought it was important to have someone that had more of a stake in the game because they would work harder than the summer help if their full-time job depended on performance. Jon who was calling in, asked to clarify that what the committee was asked to be voting upon was the increase of $7086.15 and Tom said it was.

**Tom made a roll call vote and all were in favor.**

Alan Dias joined the discussion to speak about the RFT for $12,000 that had been on the previous week’s fin com meeting. Alan said it was an individual owner and that his understanding was that taxes were current. He said he believed the building inspector had requested the money to do the demolition but that he hadn’t spoken to the building inspector. Alan said as a resident, he didn’t like the idea of the town paying to demolish a private residence for someone. He said the Board of Selectmen had the option of spending ARPA funds if they wanted to on this project. He thinks the demolition will trigger a lawsuit. Tom said the scope of the Fin Com is only to discuss the money for the demolition and they do not weigh in on the process. They leave that up to the Fire Chief and the building inspector to determine if it is unsafe. He said the two positions were conferring with outside counsel on the matter. Tom corrected Alan and said the taxes are not up to date and that the building had been determined to be a safety hazard. He said in similar cases in the past, we used the RF to pay for this and we can lien the property to try and get the money back. If it went through ARPA he doesn’t believe the money is supposed to be used for such a thing. He said the Fin Com’s only function is to approve the money or not, and not anything else, so he didn’t see them revoting it, but he wanted to check with the rest of the committee. Todd said that Tom had really covered it all as far as the fact that Fin com only handled the money. Tom thanked Alan for coming to them and sharing his opinion, but the committee had decided not to reopen that vote. Alan thanked the Committee for their consideration and said they made a good point.

Sandy shared her screen to look at the School budget lines. Sandy said she had checked the figures in the One Drive against the figures submitted by the School to be put in the warrant and they were correct. Tom said using rough numbers with respect to HES if you take out the Special Ed transportation the budget goes up a bit on two things, textbooks and student health. He said there were off setting items in the budget for each of those. He said he was advised that they still are working on the Special Ed transportation that went up by over $300,000. He has asked them to look into the proposal to share transportation with the COA. He said other than that, they basically came in with the flat budget as requested. They did a flat budget, not flat service so that implies that there may be service cuts in some areas. He said the Silver Lake Assessment is going up by about $276,000 in the budget. He said it is not likely we will win this budget battle because Plympton and Halifax will vote through because it has less impact on them. Tom felt as far as the operating budget they did a decent job trying to keep things flat and cut where they can. He said the big impact is once again transportation and he hopes they continue to look for other options for the future because something else must be out there.

**Tom entertained a motion to recommend the full school budget as proposed**

Motion: Michael

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

Sandy said all recommendations have been made for the Operating budget and the Fin Com could move on to the final article recommendations. She said so far there is only one contract article that has a figure attached to it, she didn’t know if the Fin Com wanted to wait on recommendations until the BOS fully explained the amounts and contracts. Everyone agreed they should make the recommendation at Town meeting. Sandy said the Water articles are for a service truck for $57,000 and the Water Phase 2 upgrades for $520,000 all from Water Retained Earnings. Tom said these two are self funded from the Water department. Todd asked about if Phase 2 was the final phase. Sandy said she did not believe so. She said an engineer is doing it and it is a four or five year upgrade of the Y camp and Richmond Park. Two to three years ago they did Phase 1 for the same amount. This phase focused on generators and electrical systems and they are hoping to get ARPA money so that any money left will work towards the next phase.

**Tom entertained a motion for the service truck**

Motion: Todd

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

**Tom entertained a motion to recommend Phase 2**

Motion: Michael

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

Sandy said she made a couple of phone calls about the intercom system for the HES building but she hadn’t gotten responses. She read the request for the new intercom system. Sandy said she had no idea of the condition of the current system. Michael said it didn’t sound as if the old system was bad, it sounded more like they were looking for the convenience of being able to flip a switch in an emergency situation and send out a school wide message. Sandy said she believed that was true. Each building is a different stage but all schools in the region are hoping to upgrade to the same system. Sandy said this was not recommended by Capital Planning. Tom asked what was the problem with Capital Planning. Sandy said at the time it was not a priority and they thought they didn’t have enough funds. However, at this time it would fit into the Capital budget and money still left over. Todd said it is more of a “nice to have” versus a need. Michael said the bells and whistles are safety features. Todd said it would be good to have the school present this again. Tom asked if we could have them come back to speak to it and just put it in the warrant that the recommendation would be made at town meeting. Tom questioned if they had vendors already. Sandy said yes, the quoted prices was $38,753. Tom said based on last year we were going to get questions about whether or not it was put out to bid. We want to have answers before ATM. Tom said make it a recommend at town meeting. Todd said it was the lowest of the three quotes received when he was at Capital Planning. Everyone agrees meet with Matt and make recommendation at town meeting.

Sandy said Article 37 was previously put into the Stabilization fund. This article would put the left over money towards the Plymouth County Retirement Assessment. Sandy said right now it is at $87,000 but we won’t know the actual amount for the article. It will say “a sum of money” so you may want to recommend at town meeting. Everyone agreed. Tom asked where does the money go if we don’t spend it all. Sandy said it gets closed out to Free Cash.

The Police Chief suggested article amendments to dog bylaws. Article 38 and 39 are about updating the rabies code in the current bylaw. Sandy said there is no money to the article or to the Stormwater bylaw articles. Tom asked if there was any financial impact. Sandy said there is not but bylaw says that Fin Com will make a recommendation on every article. The Fire Chief proposed that the Holidays in Halifax celebration bylaw does not automatically say that the Fire Chief is a member but he would like to change it so that it is 5 members at large. Sandy said it originally came under the fire Chief when people were donating fireworks, but now that doesn’t happen. The Fire Chief can still participate, just doesn’t want to have to. Fin Com will make the recommendation at town meeting.

The Halifax Housing Authority is requesting reimbursement for retirement assessments they paid to Plymouth County for an employee who was under the Housing authority and the Town. The Housing Authority was improperly assessed part of the Town’s portion. The Housing Authority would like the Town to pay them back for the money they paid. Charlie had started looking into it but requested figures from Plymouth County and the Housing Authority and never got figures. Sandy said she has no way of verifying the amount. Ed also has not been able to verify the amount. Tom said the number is probably right but it would be irresponsible to recommend if not verified. They will recommend at town meeting.

The board of Selectmen have put in an article to change the BOS from a three member board to a 5 member board. Sandy said it would be a $3,000 increase. Sandy said it may not happen right away. Tom asked if the vote was about the money or the wisdom of a 5 member board. Sandy said that was not correct it has no impact for this fiscal year. No recommendation at this time.

A petition article for marijuana establishment limits. There is one on the special town meeting and one on the annual town meeting. They want to limit establishments to two. Nothing from BOS yet. Recommendation at town meeting.

5G will not go to town meeting because it is a policy not a bylaw. It is a policy about noise and placement.

Article 45 is the Silver Lake Stabilization account. SL would like to establish their own stabilization account. Sandy suggests getting Jill and Christine into meeting to discuss. Sandy said last year it was not funded. If it is established the School committee can spend without going back to Towns. Tom said Fin Com voted against it last year. There was concern that the Town already has only a little control over the regional school budget.

**Tom entertained a motion to not recommend Line 45**

Motion: Michael

Second: Cheryll

**AIF to NOT Recommend**

Sandy said moving on to the Special Town Meeting.

Article 4 puts money back into the Retiree Medical bills. It is a housekeeping of an accounting error.

**Tom entertained a motion to recommend**

Motion: Michael

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

Special Needs Transportation- about a $234,000 deficit in FY22. Halifax wants to use $200,000 Free Cash to cover it instead of using Circuit Breaker money. Years ago Halifax promised if something unusual like this happened then they would do their best to help. This will help our spending for Special Ed in FY23. Cheryll said the pricing is crazy. Sandy said it is mandated and something we have to do. Todd asked if the FY23 price is locked in or is there a chance of shortfall there also. Sandy said the business manager is working very hard to try and find alternatives. Todd said is the $367,000 the high water mark and Sandy said she believed so although she continues to work on alternatives.

**Tom entertained a motion to recommend**

Motion: Michael

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

Article 6 is for the voting tabulator that Sue Lawless had spoken about for the Precinct 2a.

**Tom entertained a motion to recommend**

Motion: Michael

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

Article 7 is for $20,000 for unemployment. Hoping to come from left over Veteran’s benefits line. We add to it when needed. Tom asked if there was a balance and Sandy did not have it available but said this was in addition. Sandy said the money just stays there if we don’t use it. Jon asked if we don’t fund it and then need it, would it have to go to Special Town Meeting. Sandy said she believed so.

**Tom entertained a motion to recommend**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Michael

**AIF**

Sandy said this year we had a deficit in our Snow and Ice account that hasn’t happened in many years. The deficit is about $9400. The article requests $15,000 but Sandy hopes it will be lower. This is in so that it won’t be added to the Tax Recap so that it doesn’t get added to the tax for residents. Cheryll asked if we didn’t put enough in. Sandy said it is the same amount every year. If it goes over that is fine but the budget can’t go down if you want the State to reimburse for it. That allows for the deficit spend. If you bring it up, you won’t be able to bring it back down next year.

**Tom entertained a motion to recommend**

Motion: Michael

Second: Todd

**AIF**

FY22 Fireworks. They didn’t fund because they thought the fireworks would be in July and come out of FY23 budget but they are being done in June so now we need the money. They are requesting $3300 to pay for fire and police detail. The money is available in the roof fund line. Sandy spoke to Scott and money is available

**Motion to recommend money for fireworks in FY22**

Motion: Michael

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

Next four articles are the articles that were presented by Scott for FY23 budget but all the quotes he has are dependent on ordering as soon as possible because the cost of materials keeps rising. The decision was made to move the articles to the FY22 budget so that Scott will be able to do the projects right away in FY22 and keep the costs down. The roof and wall repair on town barn, recycling center wall repair, maintenance shop work, and the sound panel materials for multiple buildings. Everyone agreed about all of them being recommended.

**Tom entertained a motion to recommend all the articles**

Motion: Michael

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

The committee reviewed that Town Meeting would be on Monday May 9th.

Jean Gallant asked about the $300,000 cushion under the legend. Tom and Sandy said we were still a bit under the $300,000 but we are probably have about $225,000 for a cushion. Tom thinks gas prices, inflation and supply change issues will be an issue in FY23. Sandy said this didn’t include the union contracts so that would effect the cushion also.

Tom asked for anymore public participation. There was none.

Tom said the committee would enter Executive Session and then close out the meeting from Executive Session.

Tom took a roll call vote to enter Executive Session to discuss union negotiations that if discussed in public session might adversely effect the Town negotiation strategy.

**Vote to enter into Executive Session and then adjourn from there at 8:05pm**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Michael

**AIF**

**Respectfully submitted,**

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

Michael Bennett, Clerk