Finance Committee

TOWN OF HALIFAX

499 Plymouth Street

Halifax, MA 02338

**Meeting Minutes**

**Monday , May 2, 2022**

**Committee Members Present**: Michael Bennett, Cheryll Zarella Burke, Jon Schmaling, Tom Connolly

Also, in attendance in the audience were: Cesar Calouro, Sandy Nolan, Gordon Andrews, Holly Merry, Ashley Dieses and Sue Lawless

**Tom called the meeting to order at 6:04pm**

**Tom entertained a motion to accept the minutes of 4/25/22**

Motion: Michael

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

Tom asked the Board of Selectmen to elaborate on the agenda item request of the Board of Selectmen to meet with the Finance Committee regarding IT. Gordon said there was a question on the IT budget and on raises. Gordon said Ashley had the question about the IT budget. Ashley said she had a question because the Finance Committee had asked for level funding but then they recommended giving the Assistant Tax Collector 40 hours but did not recommend doing the IT at 40 hours and instead suggested it come from ARPA funds. Ashley wanted to know the reasoning. Tom said that was not at all the position of the Finance Committee. He said that the Fin Com believes we are understaffed in IT and the committee believes that having just one person in that position is a Single Point of Failure. He said the Finance Committee had said several times that someone needed to advocate for that position. He said all hours that had been approved had been approved after the department head came in to speak with the Finance Committee about the reason they were requesting more hours and funding. Tom said he had mentioned several times and tried to make it very clear to Cesar that he would need a supervisor to come in and advocate for the change for him. Tom said up through today, the Finance Committee had not been able to have that conversation because no supervisor had come in. He said it didn’t mean the Fin Com was not supportive of more hours, it just meant that no one had some to speak for the increase in hours. Ashley said there was an acting Town Administrator right now, and to be clarify, that meant that the Fin Com was not getting from him what they needed to support Cesar. Tom said all the Fin Com probably needed was an endorsement from a supervisor and in his 30-40 years of doing this, no one gets to argue for their own increase, they need to go to a supervisor and have the supervisor agree it is needed. Tom said the committee seemed in agreement that the department is under resourced, that there is definitely a single point of failure in the department right now and that there should be a longer-term conversation about resting all of these hours with one person. He said there is no redundancy in the IT department. Tom said if the Board of Selectmen felt they could advocate for Cesar than the Fin Com could probably take a vote tonight. Ashley said she would need Gordon’s input on this. Gordon said that his recommendation would be to put the hours in the budget and not use ARPA funds because he wants those hours in the budget moving forward. Gordon said that he knows that the Police department has needs too and that going forward he thinks it is important to have department heads work on talking to the Finance Committee about these things. He said it needs to be discussed what the Fin Com sees as needs and what whomever else comes in as the new Town Administrator sees as needs. Tom said the Police Chief had been in and had a very fulsome debate and there was a general consensus between them that there are needs in the Police department long term. Tom asked Sandy, given this late request by the Selectmen, is there money in the budget to support the hours? Sandy said that there was money available in the budget and that there had also been discussion about a 1% increase to all employees. She said if both of the former things happen then there would still be $70,900 left within the levy limit so there is some room. Sandy said she was trying to locate the budget request for 40 hours from Cesar to get the exact number. Gordon said if she had what the ARPA request was, then it should be the same number. Sandy said that was last year’s ARPA sheet and there was also a step increase. Sandy said she was looking through all the sheets Cesar sent. Tom said he wanted to be clear that this was about the hours for resources for this individual and not the increase in pay, just about giving the 40 hours. Gordon said he agreed this is just a request for an increase in hours. Sandy said it would cost an additional $19,225 in the budget.

**Tom entertained a motion to recommend the IT technician at 40 hours**

Motion: Michel

Second: Jon

**AIF**

Tom asked Gordon about the 1% across the board wage increase. Tom said it had been discussed but not voted. Sandy said that if the Wage and Personnel got the wage increase it would be an additional $21,403. Tom asked if that was worked into the number of $70K (roughly) that Sandy had already quoted in the levy limit. Michael said it was generally fair to give the wage and personnel the same as everyone else. Tom said that 1% was relatively uncompetitive anyways and if you didn’t do it, you are lucky to see more turnover or unionization. He said he just wanted to ask for a motion to approve.

**Tom entertained a motion to recommend a 1% wage increase for all Wage and Personnel employees**

Motion: Michael

Second: Jon

**AIF**

Gordon said there are draft agreements with the two police unions. He wanted to invite the members to the Board of Selectmen at 1.30 on Tuesday to go over articles and motions. Tom said he was not available because of a death. Cheryll asked if it was in person or Zoom. Gordon said Zoom. Sandy said that in July the Selectmen are proposing a Special election. That would mean they would need extra money in the Election and Registration account. Tom said previously it was raised if it was better to wait until the general election and avoiding spending an extra $10,000-$11,000 for another election and just name an interim in the meantime. Gordon said this is an elected position and the town is seeing a great increase in employees going to other towns where the pay rate is much higher. He thinks it is important to get a person in as soon as possible because of that. He said the process to make it appointed is a long process and so we need someone in right away that can get up to speed. He said if someone else was to leave the Town’s employment, then at least the person would be up to speed on the job. Tom said he wanted to make sure he understood that this was about trying to fill this position expeditiously and not about this position being able to resolve Halifax’s lack of competitiveness. Gordon said that was accurate. Tom said they don’t want to snowball this. Gordon said yes, those offices are very tightly staffed and if even one other person leaves that office, it would be an issue. Tom said that again leaves us uncompetitive. Jon wanted to clarify if the other option would be waiting until September. Gordon said he had talked to the Town Clerk in the morning and she had been advised by other Town Clerks that it was not a good idea to run it during the Primary. Tom clarified where the money would need to be added. Sandy said the E&R wage line. Tom questioned a wage line and Sandy said because you have to pay the election workers. Sandy said she did not know how much more it would cost, maybe Sandy knew. Sue said she did not have the information at this time. She thought it was about $6,00-$7,000 to run the extra election. Sandy said currently it was at $31,100 and it would need to be increased to $37,000. Tom said he agreed it was important to fill the position quickly and so they might be stuck. He said it lead to the question of if there was an update on the Town Administrator.

**Tom entertained a motion to recommend funding the Elections and Registration line to accommodate a special election for the Tax Collector.**

Motion: Michael

Second: Cheryll

**On a roll call vote, Michael, Cheryll, Tom are in favor and Jon abstained**

Gordon said that once Troy announced he was resigning the Board decided it was better to wait for a full board before they went through with the interview process for a Town Administrator. Tom questioned why if they were exercising that decision about the Town Administrator, they wouldn’t hold the same belief for the Tax Collector position. Gordon said because the Tax Collector is elected. Tom said they are both essential critical positions. Tom said we are feeling the effects of a lack of a Town Administrator, and we need to get someone in. Gordon said there are 32 administrator openings Statewide. Sandy asked if we had talked to the company to get them to start the search so that we can start the recruitment process so when the new board is in, they will have candidates to interview. Gordon said he had spoken with them and they are working on it and have scheduled an appointment for the new candidates coming in. Tom asked if there was a slate of candidates developing. Gordon said there was.

Sandy said if anyone had any questions on the warrant articles she would be happy to help them. Sandy said the committee needs to look at the ones they haven’t recommended yet so they can vote before ATM. Tom reminded everyone that they need to be at the ATM because Cheryll and Mike O’Brien can’t, and they need quorum.

Tom said there was a records request to Sandy and the Finance Committee for the budget spreadsheet. Sandy said the spreadsheet is a working document. Sandy said she was told to send the all records requests through Ed so that he could determine what needed to go to the attorney and what didn’t. Sandy questioned if the request was from Bob Ross. Tom said it was. Sandy said she had given it to Ed and provided the spreadsheet and marked it as a working document so they would understand that it was a working document and constantly changing. Tom said his reservation was that it is a document that can be edited and he wanted to make sure that the file did not go to the person that way. He wanted to make sure it was locked before it went. Cesar said it would have to go through his office anyway and he would handle it. Gordon said if it is a spreadsheet and is requested that way, that is how the person gets it whether it is editable or not. Tom said there was also correspondence from the Board of Assessors about the ATB cases. Tom asked Sandy how that effects the budget. Sandy said the line for abatements and exemptions would be affected because it would need to be funded for more. Last year it was about $160,000 and she thinks it should go to $200,000 because of the amount of cases being settled. Sandy said the new number is reflected on the synopsis page. She said the overlay is highlighted for $200,000. Tom asked if there was a vote required and Sandy said no. She said the amount for that line is figured between her and the Assessors based on history. Tom said the memo was just a point of information.

Cesar said he wanted to know who was taking laptops or whatever to Town meeting. Sandy said she was, no one else was. Cesar asked if anyone needed a device. Cesar said he would send an email to regular employees to see if anyone needs one. He will also talk to Todd.

Tom reminded everyone that ATM starts early.

**Tom entertained a motion to adjourn at 6:33pm**

Motion: Michael Bennett

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

**Respectfully submitted,**

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

Michael Bennett, Clerk