Finance Committee

TOWN OF HALIFAX

499 Plymouth Street

Halifax, MA 02338

**Meeting Minutes**

**Monday, June 8, 2020**

**Committee Members Present**: Melinda Tarsi, Cheryll Zarella Burke, Fred McGovern, Drew Mcglincy, Bill McAvoy

Also, in attendance in the audience were: Charlie Seelig, Sandy Nolan

The meeting was recorded by Zoom

The Finance Committee met as part of the audience of the Halifax Elementary School Committee Meeting. That meeting was recorded by the HES secretary, but here are some notes with regard to the Finance Committee at that meeting:

Jill Proulx, Superintendent, presented a new FY21 budget proposal based on the Town’s vote to fund the School at the FY20 budget, same as all other departments. The presentation is attached. It included a reduction of $47,900 in supplies in Tier 1, and a reduction of $63,000 in savings for next year primarily from closing in March of this year (savings on supplies for FY20 will allow them to use funds from FY20 to purchase supplies for FY21 before the severe budget cuts caused by COVID-19). The presentation also depicted Tier 2 cuts which included staff reductions with a cost savings of $103,140. Tier 2 would cut the Math Interventionist (they had hoped to add this year), 2 paraprofessionals and would reduce the Behaviorist to .8 FTE. It would also cut Bus #10 because this class has less students.

Summer Schmalling (HES committee chair) wanted the Town to know that “we hear you” and that the committee is working diligently as best they can with so much uncertainty in numbers. Jill asked the School Committee if they planned to vote a budget based on the figures before 6/15 because the School has a legal obligation to notify staff of cuts before that date. Summer said that may be hard to do given the uncertainties.

Fred McGovern asked about the cost of supplies to handle safety regulations for COVID-19 should the children go back to school. He wanted to know if those figures were in the budget. Summer said she believed the CARES act would cover the cost of supplies for COVID-19. Fred asked about if the school committee had started to think about social distancing and alternating schedules for students and the impact that would have on the budget. Fred said it is probably not a good idea to cut teachers when they may need them to keep class sizes small enough to meet COVID social distancing guidelines. Jill agreed with Fred. Gordon pointed out that the budget assumes that there will be a full return to school in the fall. He said that a partial return might mean a different budget altogether.

Melinda told Summer that departments Town and School were put back to FY20 levels as a starting place to handle the budget given the extreme cuts from COVID. That way if we had to do a 1/12th budget we would have something to base it on. Melinda said the Finance Committee was trying to work with all departments and trying to keep everyone informed as they go. There was some discussion about if they could/should vote the budget at FY20 or wait for more information. Summer said that given what the Finance Committee had said, and what Gordon had said, it sounded as if FY20 might be one of the best case scenarios and so they voted that budget. Christine Healey, business manager read the wording and voted to reduce the budget to FY20 at $5,659,147. They also voted the new Vocational Education line 72 to $165,500.

Melinda thanked the committee for their votes so that the Finance committee could move forward with more solid numbers at least for now.

**Melinda called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 7:22 pm**

Melinda asked Charlie about the CARES act money. He said there was $345,000 to be spent. Melinda asked if overages from the FY20 school budget had to go back to Free Cash (because the school had said they realized a savings for next year based on the close down of this year). Charlie and Sandy both said they believed that the School just meant that money that had been saved on supplies during the close down of this year, would allow them to buy supplies for next year to save in that budget. Charlie and Sandy said normally they both would try to dissuade departments from doing this but given the extreme circumstances we are under due to COVID, they understood the rationale behind doing this for this year. Charlie said especially if it meant that by spending the money for supplies prior to 6/30/2020, they could then reduce staff cuts for after 7/1/2020.

Melinda clarified that the Finance Committee had just met earlier with the HES School Committee and that the School committee had just voted the budget at the FY20 level which is the figure Fin Com had been using for the Schools. Melinda also pointed out that the School Committee had just voted to accept a new figure for Line 72 Vocational Costs and suggested that the Finance Committee also take a vote to agree with that new budget line.

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend Line 72 – Vocational Costs- at $156,500**

Motion: Bill

Second: Fred

**AIF**

Melinda asked if there was any new budget information from Charlie or Sandy. Charlie said that he had a 1/12th budget proposal ready to go to the State for approval.

Melinda said there were no new updates from Wage and Personnel but they might have some next week on the reclassifications.

There were not RFT or LIT to be handled

**Melinda entertained a motion to approve the Meeting Minutes from 6/01/20**

Motion: Bill

Second: Fred

**AIF**

There was no correspondence

There was no public participation

Melinda said once we know when ATM will be we can discuss the calendar for July but as of right now we are every Monday night through June 2020.

Under As May Arise, Drew asked if he could talk about a couple of items. He said that on Route 58 in Hanson there are some wires that are a problem. He said that they almost appeared to be glued together and he tried to take a picture of them with his phone but it broke his phone when he tried to take the picture. He thought the phone broke because he was too close and there may have been a magnetic field of some kind that broke it. He said he just wanted to make people aware of it.

Drew said he also wanted to talk about solar panels. Drew said he is employed by a solar company and he wanted to install panels on people’s houses to save money. Melinda said we need to “tap the brakes” to make sure personal professional issues are not being inserted into Finance committee meetings. She said it then becomes and ethical issue for Conflict of Interest. Fred also brought up Article 52 about the solar tax. Charlie said that addresses the River St property and solar panels and it is because the developer does not want to do a PILOT program. The Town has sent something to the State to try and make the company have to pay taxes on the property. Fred said maybe Drew had misunderstood what the article was about. Charlie said that sending something to the State probably won’t pass the legislature but as more Towns do it, it will hopefully put pressure on the State to address these issues. Charlie said he didn’t have the wording on the article in front of him, but he was fairly certain it addressed that the solar panels would have to be over a certain size, therefore eliminating worry about regular residential panels. Fred said his point was that when that article came up Drew may want to recuse himself from the vote in order to avoid any ethical issues.

Fred said he had done some research and he found that Plympton had voted a 1.46% increase in their school budget and they were also adding a staff member in Plympton.

Melinda said we are going to try to keep everyone informed of what is going on with the budget but for right now we are in a waiting pattern for more information.

**Melinda entertained a motion to adjourn at 7:36 pm**

Motion: Bill

Second: Fred

**AIF**

Respectfully submitted,

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

Fred McGovern, Clerk