Finance Committee

TOWN OF HALIFAX

499 Plymouth Street

Halifax, MA 02338

**Meeting Minutes**

**Monday, August 24, 2020**

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

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

The meeting was recorded by Zoom

**Melinda called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:02 pm**

Meilnda said that the Finance Committee has been able to reassess the budget due to changes in the State information regarding Chapter 70 funds and Unrestricted Aide. Melinda asked members to look at the new budget sheets that Sandy last sent out. Melinda said she also wanted to discuss the Articles for ATM. Melinda asked Charlie and Sandy if there had been any new budget news in the last week, and they said there had not. Melinda said she thought it would be best to start with the operating budget before the Articles.

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend increasing Line 6, the Law account, to $124,500**

Motion: Bill

Second: Fred

**AIF**

Sandy said this is the amount that Charlie asked for when first submitting budgets before the drastic cuts due to COVID. Charlie said there is another new lawsuit so the Town will probably need the higher amount for the Law line. Charlie said he had hoped not to dive too deeply into the higher State Aid money that was now available, but he thinks for this case the $124,500 is more prudent. Melinda and Fred said they would both rather fund it correctly now versus taking it out of the Reserve Fund later in the year, because the Law account has been devastating the Reserve Fund.

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend an increase in Line 8, The Town Reports to $6,700**

Motion: Bill

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

Sandy said this would allow the Town to still mail the warrants next year to people. Charlie said we believed this was a place we could cut costs, but if we have some money available this would be a good place to put the money back.

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend increasing Line 30, Elections and Registration to $31,840**

Motion: Bill

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

Sandy said she checked with Barbara Gaynor and Barbara thought it should be increased due to early voting costs. Charlie said it will also be 2 weeks for early voting in October. Melinda asked if this is needed for mail in ballots. Sandy said some if it is postage. Bill asked what the labor difference is in mail in versus an in person vote because either way you must have someone there to take the vote. Charlie sand Sandy said additional payroll hours are necessary because now someone (an E&R worker) must come in for extra hours to allow for in person voting, this time around it will be at least 12 additional hours to the regular polling hours. Bill mentioned that he got 5 mail in ballots at home and wondered where they came from. Barbara said he actually received 5 postcards from the State offering him the option of mail in ballots and unless you return those postcards and request a ballot, then you don’t get a mail in ballot.

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend increasing Line 48, Police Expense to $70,000**

Motion: Bill

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

Sandy said she based this increase request on the history of that account because they often come back asking for a Line Item Transfer in that account. Melinda said she believed keeping up the software for proper accreditation was also part of the reason for the higher expenses.

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend increasing Line 56, Fire Station Maintenance to $17,000**

Motion: Fred

Second: Bill

**AIF**

Sandy said they have been at least this amount based on the history of the account and often ask for Reserve Fund or Line Item Transfers.

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend increasing Line 57, Vehicle Equipment Maintenance to $33,500**

Motion: Bill

Second: Fred

**AIF**

Melinda said she was weary to vote the HES figures because we don’t yet have solid input from Silver Lake Administration on what they are doing. Charlie said Silver Lake figures should be voted because the other two Towns have already voted. Sandy said the HES figures in front of the Fin Com was the original budget submission (before going back to fy20 figures) minus the 2% amount that would be attributed to a wage increase and with the adjusted busing figure (because Admin notified the Town that the busing bid came in lower than they expected when the submitted the budget). Sandy said she had spoken with Christine Healey and Christine knew the budget figure that the Fin Com was voting on tonight and hadn’t given any further input. Charlie said the Fin Com should be careful to make sure that figures don’t include an across the board increase in wages unless they intend for all Town employees to get an across the board increase as well.

Melinda said now would be a good time to have a discussion or take a vote on what the Fin Com members felt, at least philosophically about wage increases. Melinda asked Sandy and Charlie what they thought the approximate cost for a 1% wage increase in the Town would cost. She said she thought it was about $90,000. Sandy said she thought that was high, Charlie said he looked at 2018 and a 2% increase was about $180,000. Bill said his opinion was that offering nothing to the employees was unfair. He said there is inflation happening and to not give employees anything is not right. Fred said they should be cautious though because Unemployment in Massachusetts is above 16% and he wants to make sure an across the board wage increase wouldn’t be the cause of someone having to lose their job. Melinda agreed saying that she thinks fundamentally and across the board wage increase is a good idea, but she doesn’t like the idea of a loss of jobs. Melinda asked Sandy and Charlie what might be plausible. Charlie thinks that right now it is plausible to give the across the board without any layoffs, but he is concerned if it is sustainable for FY22. Charlie said one idea that had been tossed about was the idea of a one-time stipend to every employee. The stipend would be prorated based on the number of hours worked. This would give some money towards this fiscal year without having any promises in place towards next fiscal year. Charlie said it has happened in other Towns and any of it is possible as long as both sides agree. Charlie said he really couldn’t be more specific unless there was an Executive Session because it involved negotiation. Melinda said she thought a one-time payout may be easier to sell to Town Meeting then to give a wage increase that is small (less then 1%) and then people would say, “why bother.” Fred said the people will say why should the Town workers get it, no matter what the Fin Com decides. Charlie said he just wants it to be the same for all employees. He said if Fin Com does not believe in an across the board increase then they should keep that in mind when voting to recommend the school budgets also. Charlie said we can’t vote on how the School budget is spent (for wage increases or not) but we can vote to fund less in the budget and force them to make the decision if it is more important to give the increases or cut positions. Melinda said that the Fin Com needs to vote a policy on wage increases for this year, so that they know where they stand in future budget discussions.

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend a freeze on an across the board wage increase for Town employees**

Motion: Bill

Second: Fred

**2-2-0 Cheryll for freeze, Fred for freeze, Melinda against, Bill against**

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend a percentage wage increase (percent yet to be determined) across the board for town employees**

Motion: Bill

Second: Cheryll

**1-3-0 Bill for, Melinda, Fred and Cheryll against**

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend a stipend payment (amount yet to be determined) for FY21 for all town employees.**

Motion: Bill

Second: Fred

**2-0-0 Bill and Melinda for**

Charlie said he would pass this voting information along to the Board of Selectmen to consider while negotiating with unions.

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend increasing Line 71, HES costs to $5,759,574**

Motion Fred

Second: Bill

**AIF**

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend increasing Line 75, Silver Lake Assessment to $4,632,541**

Motion: Fred

Second: Cheryll

**AIF**

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend Line 83A, Stormwater Management at $142,000**

Motion: Bill

Second: Fred

**HOLD**

Sandy said this figure is what we spent last year, so she put it at $142,000. Charlie said he thinks it should be $144,400 at the least. Fin Com wanted to hold for clarification on the figure

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend increasing Line 85, Street Lights to $32,500**

Motion: Bill

Second: Cheryll

**3-0-1 Fred, Cheryll, Melinda for, Bill abstained**

Sandy said the $32,500 figure was based on what was spent last year in that account. Bill asked why is it increasing so much each year over the last 6 years? Charlie said the supplier rate is fixed but transmission rates might be getting higher. He would have to look for more information on it.

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend Line 154, Group Insurance, at $1,100,908**

Motion: Bill

Second: Cheryll

**3-0-1 bill, Melinda, Cheryll for and Fred abstained due to his work ethics protocol**

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend Line 154 insurance at $281,000**

Motion: Bill

Second: Cheryll

**3-0-1 Bill, Melinda and Cheryll for, Fred abstained due to his work ethics protocol**

Sandy said this is the amount Charlie originally asked for. This helps because the School building has been underinsured and so has the 111F wages.

Melinda asked the Fin Com members to turn their attention to the voting for recommendations on articles. Melinda asked Sandy if the article funding shortage that Sandy was showing took into consideration the money from the budget that was now left on the table. Sandy said article money is a different source then the budget money because the article money comes from Free Cash. Sandy said there is not enough Free Cash to fund all the articles as they stand now.

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend $30,000 for crosswalk devices.**

Motion: Bill

Second: Cheryll

**HOLD**

Sandy said this article did not come from or go through Capital Planning. Charlie said he believed the Traffic Study Safety Committee had placed the article on the warrant. Bill asked for details of what these devices were and where they are supposed to be placed. Charlie said he believed the devices were similar to the ones by the police station and post office crossing but were for places where no devices existed already (such as up by the Elementary School and Hemlock Lane crossing). Bill said he would like some more information on this before he would want to vote. Charlie said he will ask for more information.

**Melinda entertained a motion to recommend Line 35 for the articles, Vapor Barrier for $13,000**

Motion: Bill

Second: Fred

**AIF**

Sandy said that Scott had previously reported that the Vapor Barrier was a must before the garage doors

Sandy as the Fin Com if they were still planning on recommending the Zoning Bylaw revision funding. The Fin Com said they were

Melinda asked Charlie about the Unemployment Fund. She said she knew Charlie was concerned with funding that. Charlie agreed that the Board of Selectmen would like to see more money in that fund. Charlie said they might do an article in the second Special Town Meeting on 9/12. Sandy said that we would need a funding source for that money. Melinda asked if the source would be Free Cash or Stabilization. Sandy said she hoped it would come from Free Cash. Sandy added that the Landfill Capping repairs may be lower than the estimated $71,800. She said that she believed the Highway Department said they were capable of doing some of the work and so we were reaching out to the company who gave the estimate to see what the lower cost would be if Highway did some of the work. Charlie said he would have to get more information from Steve because he hadn’t been updated yet.

Sandy said there needs to be talk with the Department Heads about pulling articles so that they can’t be voted on during the meeting because we won’t have enough money to fund them all. Charlie said we should pull the article for COVID-19 expenses.

Melinda said she wanted to hold off on passing along any Wage and Personnel Recommendations until she confirmed with Gordon Andrews that Fin Com would be discussing them just in case Gordon wanted to be at the meeting as he is the other Wage and Personnel rep.

There were no RFT or LIT requests.

**Melinda entertained a motion to approve the Meeting Minutes from 08/17/20 both regular and Executive Session**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Bill

**AIF**

Public Participation: None

Melinda asked members about meeting before Town Meeting and suggested maybe Thursday or Friday for an hour. The members said they preferred a Zoom meeting platform. Melinda asked Linda Cole to set something up for that. Bill said he is on vacation that week but should be back in time for Town Meeting and possibly the Zoom meeting beforehand.

**Melinda entertained a motion to adjourn the regular meeting at 7:30pm**

Motion: Bill

Second: Fred

**AIF**

Respectfully submitted,

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

Fred McGovern, Clerk