Finance Committee

TOWN OF HALIFAX

499 Plymouth Street

Halifax, MA 02338

**Meeting Minutes**

**Monday, January 27, 2020**

**Committee Members Present**: Cheryll Zarella Burke, Drew McGlincy, Melinda Tarsi (Bill McAvoy and Fred McGovern were not able to attend). No quorum was reached

Also, in attendance in the audience were: Town Accountant Sandra Nolan, Town Admin Charlie Seelig, Jason Vivieros, Joao Chaves, Kendra Kelly, Toni Ross

The meeting was recorded by Area 58

**Melinda called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm**

Melinda advised the rest of the Committee that she had already visited with the Police Chief and the Fire Chief about their budgets. She then asked Chief Chaves to speak about the Police Budget. Melinda stated before the Police Chief spoke that we would skip the part of the budget that had to do with Police Clerical because that is a matter still before the Wage and Personnel Board and since the W&P Board hasn’t given any recommendations to the Finance Committee yet, there is no need to review those budgets at this time. The Police Chief stated that he agreed and that negotiations for the Patrolmen’s Union and the Sergeants Union are also under review and will not be settled until June 30, 2020 and so he doesn’t know those wage figures currently. Melinda asked the Chief if he was comfortable with the level funding of the Police Training line item and he said he was. The Police Chief explained that the increase in the expense budget was covering items such as new accreditation software, a lease for the police motorcycle (if buying one isn’t approved at Town meeting) and upgrades on the surveillance system at the Police Station which included updates to the software. Melinda also pointed out that there was a slight increase in the clothing allowance. The Chief said that is if we hire more Permanent Intermittent Officers then we must provide them with their first issue gear but we no longer pay for them to go to the academy. Melinda asked if anyone had anymore more questions regarding the expenses and no one did. The Police Chief pointed out that if the two new cruisers are not approved at Town Meeting (as they are requested every year) then the maintenance costs may likely go up because we would have to pay to maintain older vehicles but he thought that he had it in the account to cover that. Melinda asked the Chief to speak on the Animal Control budget. They skipped discussing the Wage account for now because it was another issue before Wage and Personnel and the Finance Committee would wait to hear the recommendation of the W&P Board before voting that part of the budget. Sandy Nolan noted that the expense and salary lines for the Animal Control Officer are funded by the revenue brought in through Animal Control (fines, fees, etc) but that the revenues vs the expenses are currently very tight. So, if the Town wishes to keep funding Animal Control only through the revenues brought in from that department there might be very little “play” in the budget for further hours. Melinda asked Charlie if W&P would in fact recommend only on the job description changes for Animal Control and not only the actual increase in hours request. Charlie agreed, W&P only should make recommendations on the job description changes and Finance should recommend only on the hours changes. The two boards do not necessarily have to agree since Finance is only making financial recommendations. Sandy Nolan asked the Chief to clarify if he was only looking for more hours for Animal Control or if he was also looking for a grade change based on the new job description. The Chief said he is only looking for more hours not a grade change. Melinda said that it is possible that if the job description is being changed, then W&P may also find it should be regraded. The Chief said he feels the job description would justify the additional hours. Melinda asked the Chief if he had other information to share and he said he did not. Melinda said Finance would be back in touch if they had other information or more questions.

Melinda asked the Fire Chief if he could address the Fire budget. The Fire Chief said that the Fire Wages full time are still under the contract so any wage changes would only be the ones due per the current contract. Melinda addressed again that Finance would temporarily not look at the Fire Clerical budget as it involved changes that were before the Wage and Personnel Board and since W&P had not yet made any recommendations to Finance, they would wait to see what W&P recommended. The Chief said that the Fire Wages for call fire fighters did not include any “across the board” increases that W&P may or may not recommend. The Chief said that the Fire Expense was increasing in the line regarding internet, because we now have Fire vehicles that are equipped with WIFI. There was also an increase in the line dealing with Equipment Testing because we now have to comply yearly with the OSHA standards. It used to be about every 2 years, but now it is yearly. The Chief also said there is an increase in the electricity portion because the station has experienced very high bills the last two months. Charlie and Sandy both questioned why that was and the Chief said he believed it was a combination of both kilowatts used and the cost per kilowatt. Sandy said that we are under contract on the cost per kilowatt and the Chief said he wasn’t sure if it was just the usage. Sandy said she thought that they should check to make sure that all equipment was functioning properly if the usage was up. The Historical Commission had a similar problem and found a faulty dehumidifier. The Chief said they would try to look into it. The Chief advised that the Vehicle Maintenance line of the budget was also increasing because the Town Mechanic no longer does any work on the Fire vehicles other than oil changes. They have to go out to get all other services and companies are charging more. Melinda asked the Chief if the increase he was looking for in the Ambulance supplies budget would be enough to cover the department and he said he believed it would be. The Fire Chief took a moment (per Melinda’s request) and explained to the new members of the Finance Committee how ambulance billing now works (it has changed in the past year). He explained that after the former Admin Assistant left, we switched billing for the ambulance to an outside source. The outside company keeps a 3% profit on what they collect for us. The Chief says the $2500 increase in the ambulance billing line was for software. Sandy asked if that billing was done through ComStar (the billing company for ambulance) and the Chief said it was not. The Chief said he had level funded the Emergency Management budget. He said they include money in that budget to make sure they can pay if they have to bring in non fire department employees to help with warming or cooling stations. The Chief also said he had level funded the Holidays in Halifax budget. Melinda thanked the Chief for meeting with the Committee.

Melinda advised that the group could not officially vote to Accept the Minutes of 1/13/20 because they did not have quorum tonight.

There was no public participation

Melinda asked if Charlie or Sandy had anything to say about the Cherry Sheet information they had received via email. Charlie said that the local aid figure will not change. It is what it said on the Cherry Sheet (see attachment). Chapter 70 may change with a slight increase to us but Charlie said that Finance should not rely on that for now. He said we won’t know for sure until April what the solid numbers look like. He said the Charter School Assessment may vary based on past experience. He said it shouldn’t be more but there is a possibility of it being less. Charlie advised the Finance Committee that they should just use the Governor’s numbers for now while doing their calculations.

Melinda asked Sandy if we are still waiting on budgets from some departments. Sandy said that we are but we are in better shape then usual as far as getting them in from the departments. Sandy said that Youth and Rec has not turned theirs in, but they have a lot to think about because if Y&R has to raise the people making minimum wage due to the increase in minimum wage, then they are starting to catch up to the worker’s above them who have more responsibility.

Melinda opened a letter from Chief Chaves and explained that it was about the SRO at the Middle School. She summarized (and read the second to last paragraph) that the Chief was in favor of having a SRO at the Middle School but not in favor of the funding mechanism (a Town meeting artlicle) that Silver Lake was proposing. He urged them to add the money for this position into their budget. Melinda then reviewed correspondence from Charlie about the newest version of the Silver Lake budget. Melinda said that we are now facing the predicament that Charlie and others had warned about and that is the fact that the Silver Lake expenditures are higher than the revenues that Silver Lake is bringing in. Melinda said that this is the reason we are holding another Tri-town meeting with Finances Committees. Charlie wanted to point out that the overall net for the Silver Lake budget has increased slightly from what he had previously stated. He said the number of students opting for School Choice also went down slightly so Silver Lake is relying on Towns for any increases they need in their budget.

Melinda discussed the upcoming calendar for the Finance Committee. We are meeting every Monday night. She asked members if they had met with their liaison departments yet. She said if they have we can start to schedule departments to come in and talk with the Committee if they would like to. Cheryll said that she had already met with 4 departments and would be visiting 3 more this week. Cheryll also stated that she had not received anything from the Appeals Board or the Sealer of Weights and Measures. Sandy said she definitely had the Appeals Board budget and was working on getting the Weights and Measures one. Cheryll said she would give the list to Linda Cole so that she could set up appointments. Melinda said she would ask Bill McAvoy for updates on his departments at the next meeting.   
Melinda stated that the Committee could not go into executive session (as per the agenda) because of lack of quorum.

**Melinda entertained a motion to adjourn at 7:43pm**

**Motion:** Cheryll

**Second:** Drew

**AIF**

Respectfully submitted,

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

Fred McGovern, Clerk