

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: 2/6/21

Finance Committee Attending:

Bob Daley
Sister Judith Dalesandro
Jason Forgue
Jonathan Glionna
Andy Myers, Chair
Jessica Sakaske

Others Attending:

Paula Beck
Barbara Huntoon
Laura Lafreniere
Liz Massa, Nick Chiusano, Greg Harrison
Mary Ann Pease
Kathe Warden
Chief Tammy Weidhass

FC Chair called the meeting to order at 2 pm. It was decided to record the meeting via Zoom and forward the recording to a transcription service to test this method for providing minutes for our meetings. The FC Chair also volunteered to take cursory minutes as a backup.

FC Chair gave an update on the school budget. The projected increase for Chester is high at 3.2% or \$51,557. To keep the overall budget increase at 2.5%, or less, town department budgets will need to be conservative.

First discussed was the Finance Committee Budget. The line item for the Reserve Fund is currently \$10,000. It was agreed to leave it the same for now and review the amount later in the budget process for possible reduction.

Chief Tammy Weidhass presented her proposed budget for the Police Department. The proposed budget differed significantly from the initial budget prepared by former Chief Dan Ilnicky. Chief Weidhass was asked to reconcile the budget differences and get back to us next week.

The Town Administrator presented the Selectmen budget. The two line items having increases were for Town Council Expense and increased hours for the Assistant Administrator. The town council expenses could go up for legal expenses to acquire the Old Elementary School building, and to address Bylaw updates. Jason Forgue indicated he thought the legal expenses for the building acquisition could be this fiscal year, and he reminded the committee that PVPC provides Bylaw reviews at no cost. The Town Administrator suggested we could level fund Town Counsel Service and address more funding, if needed, through the Reserve Fund and/or Special Town Meeting. She also agreed to ask PVPC about their Bylaw Update services. The Town Administrator expressed concerns about needing more Assistant Administrator hours per week to accomplish the increased workload falling on Town Administration.

The Town Administrator commented on the need for hours for Human Resource services, however, she will review the possibility of collaborating with other towns before asking for funds in the budget. The Town Administrator gave updates on Insurance and Retirement accounts. Bob Daley asked about Debt and Interest and suggested we look into refinancing the Water Treatment Debt at a lower interest rate. The Town Administrator asked the Finance Committee to consider putting funds into Capital Accounts for the painting of the exterior wood and columns of the Town Hall. Jason Forgue suggested setting aside funds for future needs for highway equipment.

The Town Clerk presented her budget. She indicated Expenses and Registrations could be level funded, and Elections could be reduced from \$5,400 to \$3,500 since this is not a major election year. She asked that we consider raising her salary from \$12,000 per year to \$14,000 due to increased hours spent on the job. Bob Daley asked the Town Clerk to come up with a plan for the \$4,000 set aside for record retention.

Bob Daley asked about progress with RRG, the assessing service company. The President of RRG was in Chester on Thursday reviewing properties. The next update by RRG is due March 1st. Bob also asked about the snow expense account this year as it looks like expenses will exceed budget. He suggested watching the expenses closely. Jason asked for the Highway Department to present its budget next Saturday.

The Building Inspector presented a level budget. He also presented a level budget for the Recreation Account. He indicated the new permitting software was working well; the town acquired this software through a grant with Blandford.

The Town Accountant presented a level budget, however asked for an audit next year for an expense of \$18,000. Finance Committee members expressed agreement for the audit.

The Town Collector presented a level budget with a slight increase for software support.

The Board of Health asked for a \$5,000 increase in Expenses. Although expenses are higher, receipts are projected to cover expenses. The BOH is looking to save additional funds by switching to single rather than dual stream recyclables. This means combining boxes for plastics and cardboard. The change will cut down on hauling fees and be environmentally friendly. The BOH has a \$2,500 grant to purchase a new electronics box, however they need an additional \$300 to make the purchase. The new electronics box will save money for the town. The BOH suggested we set aside \$20,000 in a Capital Account to pay for a replacement compactor, which will be needed in a year or two. Jason Forgue suggested a revolving account be set up for the Transfer Station so that funds over expenses could be banked for capital projects. Liz Massa expressed concern over break ins at the transfer station. She has installed a WiFi camera and signage to curtail the break ins. She is planning to install more cameras. Jason Forgue asked if more cameras could also be hooked-up to cover the Chester Ball Field, as they have unwanted behavior there too. The BOH also requests an increase to the salary account due to increased workload, such as more perc tests needed for residents.

Meeting adjourned at 5:06 pm