

# Town of Ayer

## Finance Committee

### Ayer Massachusetts, 01432



Location: Ayer Town Hall, Meeting Room  
Finance Committee Minutes

Wednesday January 26, 2011

Present: Brian Muldoon; Chairman, Jesse Reich, Vice-Chairman; Scott Houde; Clerk, and Andrew Crowley, member

Absent:

One committee position open

Called to order at 7:01 pm by Brian Muldoon

- Mail
  - None
- Minutes
  - Outstanding minutes are 12/8/10, 12/16/10, 1/4/11, 1/5/11, 1/6/11, 1/11/11, 1/13/11, 1/19/11, 1/20/11
  - Minutes will be approved at next meeting with full quorum
- Budget Review
  - John Canney Town tax collector and clerk presented Town Clerk budget of \$67,468 which represents a 3% decrease and \$66,076 which represents a 5% decrease from FY2011.
    - The clerk's budget for supplies and services has been cut to minimum levels in the past few years. The only remaining area to cut money is the salaries line. This is due to the office's reliance on services and supplies to perform its duties. Services include binding marriage, birth, and death certificates. The documents have not been bound since 2005. State law requires books be bound and all documents in original working order. Estimated cost for binding the 2006 – 2009 documents is \$2,100.
    - The clerk's office has been working with Shriver Job Corp engaging students to input the data from these documents into a database to make this information available electronically.
    - The salary for the clerk's office includes the clerk and an assistant clerk whom works 37.5 hours per week.
    - The clerk's office collect fees for dog licenses, fishing license, death certificates, marriage certificates, permits, etc which go back into the general fund.
    - Some fees are dependent on services. Dog licenses must be stamped each year and other certificates must be printed.
    - BM – Are there fees we are not charging for? Such as a business license?
      - JC – The clerk keeps track of the licenses to make sure all business licenses are up to date. Being new to the office John is not sure when the fees were last changed. The consensus from the committee and audience is the fees have not been updated in almost 10 years. John stated his opinion that the fees are too high. "The clerk charges \$50 for something that takes me 6 minutes to copy."
      - Jesse Reich commented that the fees are for more than just the 6 minutes but are to offset the entire business hours of the office. SH added that the fees are based upon 2000 costs in benefits, energy, and labor. The costs have risen exponentially since then.
      - JR also commented that having low or no fees forces all taxpayers to subsidize the services needed by a few.
  - John Canney Town tax collector and clerk presented Tax Collector budget of \$81,867 which represents a 3% decrease and \$80,179 which represents a 5% decrease from FY2011.
    - Similar to the town clerk department the required cuts cannot be isolated to non-wages line items. The cut to supplies and other charges bring the department to the minimum amount for services and supplies.
    - Services for the tax collector are higher for printing of Real Estate taxes and Excise taxes. Other expenses include Demands and Supplements which are direct expenses with vendors.

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- The department has decreased expenses in the last few years by changing removing the Post Office box and having all mail go to 1 Main Street. The tax bills are now sent without return envelopes saving of approximately \$300.
- Mr. Canney has to review the legal obligations in place if salaries must be cut. Any legal obligations may require a reduction in operating hours. There may be disruptions of the office's abilities as new state requirements of reports come down the line.
- BM – What about non payment of taxes?
  - The deputy collector is currently pursuing unpaid taxes. Mr. Canney did not know what the outstanding balance was on unpaid taxes but an audience member estimates it to be \$280,000. In addition to unpaid taxes, there are outstanding water and sewer bills in the tens of thousands. The outstanding parties do include residents and businesses.
- SH – Can the list be published for the public?
  - Mr. Canney does not know if these can be published. The information is public data and can be requested from any resident. There may be legal restrictions on publishing a list.
- BM – Is there a list circulated to allow other departments to cross check if an applicant has outstanding balances with the town?
  - There is some information sharing but not completely organized.
- John Canney Town tax collector and clerk presented Elections budget of \$10,021 which represents a 3% decrease and \$9,815 which represents a 5% decrease from FY2011.
  - Cut to budget is in the supplies line item. This is the only item cut for both the 3% and 5% reduction.
  - Expenses include stipend for registrars for being available to register voters ahead of elections and finalizing the street lists within the precincts. The annual census costs \$1,500 per year and provides income for dog licenses. The census also provides information to the town for services and economic developer.
- John Canney Town tax collector and clerk presented Postage budget of \$15,520 which represents a 3% decrease and \$15,200 which represents a 5% decrease from FY2011.
  - The postage machine sits in the clerk's office. It is utilized by 20 departments in town hall. Mr. Canney does not know the history of postage usage.
- Stephanie Gintner, town treasurer, presented a budget of \$114,851 representing a 3% decrease and \$112,844 representing a 5% decrease from FY2011.
  - The department is made up of the treasurer, assistant treasurer, and an office assistant. The treasurer and assistant treasurer are full time employees and the office assistant has been cut to 5 hours per week.
  - The treasurer's office has expenses for services for MUNIS training, financial advisor, W2s, 1099s, and audits. There are also administration fees for the bank accounts and open enrollment costs for benefits.
  - The cuts in the budget are spread across wages, services, supplies and other charges. The cuts will affect the department's service to the public.
  - JR – Any grants or fees?
    - There are none available at this time
  - AC – Are there any services that we offer which can be cut?
    - Not in the treasurer's department
  - BM – Does tax title foreclosure generate a public hearing?
    - Not all tax title foreclosures generate a public hearing if the fees are paid to clear the lien. Some fees are recouped through the tax title but not all. The lawyer fees are not always recouped. The department collects land court fees and certificate of redemption.
    - Pauline Conley – Courts set the fees that the towns are responsible for. The responsible parties are required to cover the rest.
  - Retirement of debt is open pending the town accountant's finalization of the amounts.
  - Long Term Interest is open pending the town accountant's finalization of the amounts.

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- Retirement and Pension Contributions is open pending the town accountant’s finalization of the amounts. This is an assessment from the county. The FY2011 contribution will be less the school’s portion. The county cannot assess the regional school until it exists on July 1.
  - Payroll taxes of Unemployment and FICS will reduce by the regional school’s portion in FY2012. Unemployment was increased from .2% to .4%.
  - Group Health will be for the town’s portion only. Expenses are anticipated to increase by 15% per person. The town employees’ health plan is Minuteman Nashoba Health Group. The governor’s request for town’s to move to GIC will not save the town any additional money due to Minuteman’s current costs.
  - The 75/25 benefit grid needs to be reviewed. The health Buyout option has been used sparingly
- Jesse Reich made a motion to support the ballot question on February 5<sup>th</sup> to allow the regional school committee to borrow \$750,000 for a feasibility study to renovate the high school.

Motion	JR
Second	AC
B. Muldoon	Aye
J. Reich	Aye
S. Houde	Aye
A. Crowley	Aye
Vote	4 – 0

- Motion to adjourn at 9:00pm

Motion	JR
Second	SH
B. Muldoon	Aye
J. Reich	Aye
S. Houde	Aye
A. Crowley	Aye
Vote	4 – 0

Brian Muldoon, Chairman \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Jesse Reich, Vice Chairman \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Scott Houde, Clerk \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Andrew Crowley, Member \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_