TOWN OF DARTMOUTH
MASSACHUSETTS

Finance Committee
400 Slocum Road
Dartmouth, MA 02747
Phone (508) 910-1802
Fax (508) 910-1885
cabrantes@town.dartmouth.ma.us

Peter Friedman, Chairman
Greg Lynam, Vice-Chairman

Pursuant to a call to order and notice duly given in the manner required by law and the By-laws of the Town of Dartmouth, a meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Thursday, March 18, 2008 at 7:00 P.M. at the Dartmouth Town Hall, Room 315.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Greg Lynam, Peter Friedman, David Ferreira, Melissa Haskell, Stewart Washburn, George Jacobs, Francis Pettengill, Larry Fox
MEMBERS ABSENT: Shannon Jenkins

BEGINNING RESERVE FUND BALANCE: $639,438.60
ENDING RESERVE FUND BALANCE: $639,438.60

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Peter Friedman called the meeting to order and indicated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the override questions that will be on the April 1st ballot and make a decision as to whether or not the Finance Committee wants to publicly weigh in on the questions.

Stewart Washburn stated that the Town is in very bad financial shape and said he planned to personally support all of the override questions. In his view, the FinCom should be supporting all of the override questions.

Francis Pettengill offered his opinion that the Town is well run by the various department head and the Finance Committee should be supporting all the override questions.

Peter Friedman pointed out the stark financial reality of the Town and the need for funds. In his view, there are questions of financial necessity and policy questions. Mr. Friedman suggested that the FinCom might recommend those items that were of financial necessity and maybe not provide an opinion on those questions that are policy questions.

David Ferreira opined that the FinCom needs to recommend those items that will maintain services we have and must be assured that any additional services could be sustained over the course of the next three years. He pointed out that the decision about what should be supported should be based on a financial not political point of view. These issues needed to be looked at solely from a financial point of view.

Larry Fox believed that everyone agreed there is a need for additional funds. Mr. Fox felt that level services should be maintained over the next three years, but did not think a specific position on each override question should be taken. It was Mr. Fox's suggestion that the community be told the funding needed to run the Town for the next three years, but not recommend how it should be spent.

Gregory Lynam expressed his concern about being able to vet the budget as it is presented and to express an opinion on the specific questions that do not clearly lay out specifically how funds will be spent. Mr. Lynam did, however, feel there is clearly a need for an override.

George Jacobs questioned the function of the Finance Committee and his concern that the Finance Committee not become involved in political or policy positions. His suggestion is to provide information to the voter telling them the implications of the passage of specific override questions. Mr. Jacobs thought is that the FinCom should limit their positions to the impact of voting for or not voting for a particular question.

Melissa Haskell said that it is tempting to try to impose her own political ideas on this process. Her feeling was that the failure of these overrides would be further dismantling of what has historically been a very good community. The failure to fund libraries is an example of the dismantling. However, she stated her agreement with Mr. Jacobs that the committee weigh in on the implications of voting for or against override questions.

Mr. Lynam expressed concern about giving people a reason to not vote for an override when one was clearly needed. He pointed out that he did not want us to do or say anything that would give people cause to not vote for the override.

Stewart Washburn pointed out that the CIP's recommendations have been well vetted by that Committee and the Town clearly has capital needs.

Mr. Jacobs pointed out that the FinCom is an advisory group and we need to be careful not to allow ourselves to be turned into a political arm of government. We are purely data driven and searching for information. His view was that we should go through each specific question and state what a yeah or nay vote would do.

MOTION
Stewart Washburn moved that we take a position on all the articles as a whole.
Francis Pettengill seconded the motion.

There was further discussion. Gregory Lynam pointed out that an override is clearly needed, but he did not think there was adequate information to take a position on the individual questions.

David Ferreira stated his agreement with Mr. Lynam. He thinks there is definitely a need for an override, but some of the questions create a revenue stream for a particular purpose.

Gregory Lynam pointed out that one alternative is to go back and say individual override questions are important. George Jacobs stated his concern with doing this. He pointed out that there is a substantial body that feels we can tighten the belt more. Whether this is an informed or ignorant position, he stated, was not for him to judge, but by voting up or down on each article, we are taking a stand and remaining an advisory group.

Francis Pettengill pointed out that the Finance Committee needs to impart information to taxpayers. Taxpayers expect the Finance Committee to be informed about these issues more than most and in not taking a position, we would be side stepping a critical issue.
(Vote 2-6-0)

MOTION
Stewart Washburn moved that the Finance Committee take a vote on each question individually. Motion fails do to a lack of a second.

MOTION
George Jacobs moves that the Committee gives its informed opinion as to the implications/impact of a yes or no vote on each of the articles. Gregory Lynam seconds the motion.

Larry Fox expressed doubt as to the Finance Committee's ability to quantify the suggested impact of each question. Gregory Lynam and Francis Pettengill expressed similar concerns. Stewart Washburn said that while the Committee would probably not be as good as they would like to be at project the impacts, the Committee could produce something that suggest the probability that certain things would happen. Peter Friedman stated his agreement with Mr. Washburn and said that some of the impacts were self explanatory.

Melissa Haskell asked if the Committee would feel comfortable stating that some sort of override is necessary to avert a significant reduction in services? She asked if the Chair would allow a straw poll of the Committee to be taken. The straw poll indicated comfort by the members with this position.

George Jacobs withdrew his motion.

MOTION
Melissa Haskell makes the following motion: Vote that the sense of the Finance Committee is that an override is necessary to avoid a significant reduction in Town services and this vote is not to be construed as the finance committee taking a position on any individual override item currently before the Town. George Jacobs seconded the motion.

Gregory Lynam stated that this is in keeping with the information available to the Finance Committee. *(Vote 8-0-0)*

8:30 PM Peter Friedman asked that the meeting go into Executive Session so members could be briefed on personnel contract negotiations. Vote to go into Executive Session:
Gregory Lynam: yea
Stewart Washburn: yea
Larry Fox: yea
Melissa Haskell: yea
Peter Friedman: yea
David Ferreira: yea
Francis Pettengill: yea
George Jacobs: yea

Executive session begins. The Committee is briefed about ongoing contract negotiations.

8:49 PM MOTION
Melissa Haskell moves that Executive Session be ended. David Ferreira seconds the motion. Vote to end Executive Session:
Gregory Lynam: yea
Stewart Washburn: yea
Larry Fox: yea
Melissa Haskell: yea
Peter Friedman: yea
David Ferreira: yea
Francis Pettengill: yea
George Jacobs: yea

End Executive Session

MOTION
Melissa Haskell moves that the meeting be adjourned. David Ferreira seconds the motion.
(Vote 8-0-0)

Meeting adjourned at 8:55.

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Haskell