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Advisory Board
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4/5/2010 Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Advisory Board members present:

Ron Mikol, Dan St. Jean, Harold Simmons, Christine Muir, Dana Metzler, Joe Dean

Meeting opened at 7:00 p.m.

Cemetery

Alan Chaney came back to the Advisory Board after discussing with the Cemetery Commission the possibility of Highway Dept. employees digging graves for the cemetery. He said the commission unanimously felt that this should not happen, for the following reasons:

1. The skill of the current contractor is right for the intricacy and delicacy of the job, and the importance of not damaging other memorials or sites.
2. The contractor has equipment that the highway dept doesn't have, and this equipment is best suited for the job. The contractor also does other work such as grading.
3. The contractor is always available, unlike the highway dept which has responsibilities such as snow removal and public safety that must come before the cemetery's needs.
4. The most common time for burials is on weekends, when Highway employees would get overtime wages.
5. The commission doesn't think it's fair to reduce the amount of work given to the contractor, but they would still need to rely on him because Highway can't always be available for every burial.

He also mentioned the philosophical opposition to using the cemetery as a way of generating revenue or offsetting other department's costs.

Budget

We picked up reviewing the budget at the Technical Committee line items. There were some questions about how the website contract monies were spread out over the three-year time commitment. It isn't clear what the exact costs are for each of the three years. Dan asked if the contracts were with a known vendor and we don't know the answer to that. Ron asked if the total request, approximately \$17,000, is included in the budget overview. It is.

Cable TV had \$100 last year and both Ron and Dana recommend changing it to zero for FY2011. Harold suggested that someone should be keeping track of the money given to the town by the cable companies. We aren't sure if it is \$0.50 per box or more or less. Everyone agreed with keeping the recommendation at zero.

Recreation Department's budget is approximately \$2000. Dana asked if we should be putting aside more money in this line item and doing more for this department. For now, we will leave the budget at the amount needed to cover the porta-potties.

No one had any arguments or discussions regarding the budgets for Arts/Lottery/Cultural Council, Historical Commission, Memorial Day, or Summer Concerts. Joe mentioned that he was considering not showing any items with a zero budget or with no account numbers (none of those just mentioned have account numbers associated with them). Dan thought these budgets should remain in the budget. Dana said they are budgets driven by the people, and they should remain in our spreadsheet for as long as the town people are funding them and interested in them.

Town Debt

We continued to better our understanding of the town debt number. Dana asked if we had the \$60,000 for the new fire truck in the debt number twice. Dan says it is not there twice. The \$436,138 debt exclusion number reflects one payment of \$60,000. We added another line to the overview sheet to show the \$60,000 that was raised and appropriated last year, and that will actually be paid out this year. This is a roll-forward from 2010 and it not money being raised and appropriated again. We need to make sure this is clear at Town Meeting.

In the Group Health number, we added \$11,200 for health benefits to the new police administrative assistant.

Dana asked Danice Palumbo for the current number on Building/Vehicle Insurance Liability. Last year's number was \$67,000 but it will rise this year to cover the new highway truck. Danice did not have the new cost but suggested that we increase the total to \$70,000.

Dan suggested we take another look at the police budget. Based on the latest expenditure sheet from Kim, the police department has spent 63% of its budget in 75% of the timeline (9 of 12 months in one fiscal year). Joe said the police chief waits until the end of the year to spend money on supplies and new tires, etc.

Overall the town spending is at 72%, which is right on track for 75% of the fiscal year. Ron says this is a clear indicator that there is no fat in the budget.

Dana asked if we should include the bill for Minuteman Vocational Technical school in the budget. We did not add it in at this time.

We were left with an \$86,000 deficit after walking through the entire budget. The question is how to make up that difference? Also, how do we fund the articles?

Christine noted that we had talked about coming back to the Snow & Ice budget since we increased it so much to cover the previous override. Ron said that money is not "fair game" for balancing the budget.

Free Cash balance is \$71,800 after paying the bill for Minuteman.

We received a quote for a new copier at town hall, too. The cost is about \$4300. Dan asked about the cost of a lease instead of a purchase. We decided to do some price comparisons before making a recommendation on this issue. Dana thought that this kind of purchase should have been planned for earlier in the year.

Harold suggested that perhaps the police admin could be a part-time position, under 20 hours a week, to save not just the \$19,000 in wages but also the \$11,200 in health insurance.

Harold also asked how we could justify the new position but not give a 3% wage increase to town employees.

We also noted that we expect the school override amount to be \$310,000.

Veteran's Agent

Peter Georges joined us to explain his comment at a previous meeting regarding reimbursements for veterans who live in Dunstable. Essentially, almost \$250,000 is paid to veterans in town for pensions, benefits, etc. The state reimburses the town 75% of costs paid upfront for veterans. Dana asked why the money comes from the state instead of the federal government.

Dan asked how the money comes back to the town and Peter answered that the reimbursements go on the cherry sheet.

The FY2011 budget request is \$4308, up almost \$2000 from the previous year. The increases are partly due to the need for a new computer and classes to comply with state mandates to go paperless.

Budget Review, cont'd

We turned back to our budget and balanced it out by using free cash of \$71,800 and increasing local receipts by the remainder, which was \$17,000. Christine asked if it was wise to use all the remaining free cash to balance out the budget. New free cash amounts will be certified in Fall 2010 so the zero balance won't last long. And we still have the Reserve account if needs arise.

Dana suggested that we write up our recommendations and why we support a particular position.

Transfer for Railing Work on River Street Property

The selectmen requested a transfer of \$4114 to their Repair & Misc account to pay for work done at River Street to bring an outside deck railing up to code.

A motion was made and seconded to approve this transfer, but the motion ultimately failed with 5 opposing votes and 1 supporting. The reasoning was that the railing wasn't changed at all; the ground below was re-graded so that there was less distance between the ground and the deck. So the work that was supposed to be done, wasn't.

Other business

In a previous meeting, Joe Dean asked a highway employee if David Tully was conducting business with Matt Raymond. Although this was a side comment not related to the evening's agenda, the statement was made during an open meeting and got back to David Tully. Joe apologized tonight and read a letter that he sent to Mr. Tully and the Board of Selectmen saying that he was not making a judgment about Mr. Tully or implying anything about the quality of Mr. Tully's work for the town. Ron cautioned all of us to remember when we are speaking in an open forum and exercise better discretion.

We adjourned at 9:30 p.m.