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Advisory Board
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March 21, 2016

Present: Dana Metzler, Amie Stevens, Harold Simmons, Ron Mikol, Christine Muir, Pam Crocker

Also attending: Town Administrator Tracey Hutton, Board of Selectmen Ken Leva and Walter Alterisio

Several members of the public were also present.

Meeting opened at 7 p.m.

This is a joint meeting of the Finance Committee and the Board of Selectmen. One purpose of the meeting is to hear the findings and recommendations of the Personnel Board, which has been developing a Wage Classification chart.

We began with an overview of the FY17 budget as it currently sits. The budget overview sheet shows a need for \$665,000 to fully fund the GDRSD budget request. Ron pointed out to the selectmen that while more than \$500,000 in article funding was requested, only \$70,122 is currently recommended. Two items are listed as Notes, meaning we anticipate borrowing those funds through a 3 or 5 year statehouse note. Ken asked about the Stormwater funding, which is not included in the Recommended articles. There is funding left in FY16 and additional funding in the Highway budget for the stormwater requirements. The Advisory Board is also recommending that the money for the Middle School roof and the Greater Lowell Tech renovation be put to the ballot for debt exclusion. This would put about \$50,000 back into our operating budget.

Personnel Board

Board members include Chair Jean O'Brien, Peter Georges, Frank Antonelli and Madonna McKenzie. Frank made tonight's presentation. He began by showing the Wage Chart Comparisons document, which showed the wages of six similar communities within Middlesex County. Towns in Western MA, while more similar in some regards, are too different in terms of cost of living. The State Ranking on this chart indicates the overall wealth of a community, comprised of property values and income. Higher numbers indicate lower wealth. Dunstable is 49th.

The Draft Town Wage Comparison dated March 18 lists all job titles in the six communities, as well as hours worked, minimum and maximum wages and averages. Ron asked how this information was collected: Madonna collected from town halls and websites, all within the past few months. Essex lists a stipend for its fire chief, but he also receives a wage for responding to calls. This amount will be listed on a future version of the spreadsheet. Ken asked about the absence of police lieutenants, and Madonna answered that some communities do not have a lieutenant.

The Draft Proposed Grade Changes is based on averages from all communities plus a 2% wage increase. The Draft FY17 Wage Classification Plus Costs document shows a 2% increase between steps (years of service in three year intervals). Dana noted that it is longevity pay and not based on merit. Tracey said the whole chart would increase by 2% annually. Madonna pointed out that future charts should allow for relevant experience in other towns, since this one only includes time worked in Dunstable. Asterisks indicate how many years of service an employee currently has; an X after an * indicates that an employee will reach the next level within FY17. Line 63 shows the FICA/Medicare number, which is 1.45% of a person's salary.

This "plus costs" spreadsheets shows the impact to the town budget if it is implemented in one, two, three, four or five years. These numbers include a 2% increase but not changes in longevity. Harold asked why two Grade 5 jobs with similar responsibilities (and completed by the same 'person) have different salaries, by almost a full dollar. One department increased the employee's salary, which they should not have done as salaries are voted at Town Meeting. Dana asked if this looks like a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) and Frank said that the board consulted with legal counsel to ensure that policies dictate employees are "at will." Ron asked about included licensing requirements or other qualifications for a job, which also led to a discussion about the need for job descriptions. Descriptions would help ensure that jobs are listed in the right grade level. Tracey noted that her job description is the only one approved by the Selectmen at this time. Ken asked that we consider the town's ability to pay the proposed amounts.

The Personnel Board left at 8:30 p.m.

The Advisory Board and Selectmen discussed the FY17 budget and how to address an override. We considered asking for \$655,000 or so to cover the GDRSD assessment, increasing that amount to cover the impact of the Personnel Board's work, adding in payments on statehouse notes for the Highway truck and library entrances. Tracey reminded the Selectmen that they need to come to a recommendation for her salary line item.

Both boards also discussed the request to purchase a Conservation Restriction on property on Westford Street. Although the Selectmen have voted to support this purchase, there are hesitations on doing so now. Since 2012, a total of \$90,000 tax dollars has come off the books because of conservation restrictions. That amount is then distributed among other taxpayers, so the money is in the budget but it has impacted other residents' tax bills.

We adjourned at 9 p.m.

