

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING
TOWN HALL
334 MAIN STREET
GREAT BARRINGTON, MA 01230
JUNE 16, 2015

Present: Michael Wise, chair, and members Walt Atwood, Will Curletti, and Jennifer Tabakin- Town Manager

Absent: Tom Blauvelt and Leigh Davis

Meeting called to order at 6:00 p.m.

1. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The opening statement was revised to acknowledge that the meeting may be recorded by people who are not members of the media.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES-MAY 14, 2015

Motion by W. Atwood to accept May 14, 2015 minutes, second W. Curletti, unanimous vote 3-0.

3. COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Appointment of Representative to Community Preservation Committee: W. Atwood motion to appoint Tom Blauvelt as representative to CPC, W. Curletti second, unanimous vote 3-0.

Annual Report for FY15: Annual Reports for FY 15 are due by August 15, 2015. The chair will do this, taking advantage of the fact that the FY14 annual report submitted earlier this year had actually covered FY15.

M. Wise noted that the Finance Committee should have a member attend the meetings of the school committee' finance-budget subcommittee. M. Wise will ask Leigh Davis if she is willing to do this. W. Curletti is willing to be the alternate.

4. CITIZEN SPEAK TIME

M. Wise observed that the Citizen Speak Time item might more often be at the end of Fin Com meeting, but that putting it at the beginning seemed appropriate now because this meeting was about planning future work. Michelle Loubert inquired whether the practice would be for citizens to speak only at the end of the meeting, or to engage at other points. M. Wise stated that although most meetings are not hearings, the committee would continue its practice of recognizing members of the audience for questions and comments during its discussions. A member of the audience said that 6:00 p.m. is too early for citizens to attend. M. Wise stated that an earlier meeting makes it easier for the staff to attend. Ron Banks questioned the effect of a split tax on small businesses, saying that they deliver a

service and should not be punished by raising their taxes. W. Curletti stated he has a small business on Main Street and there will be a voice on this committee for small businesses.

5. REPORTS & STATEMENTS

No reports or statements from the committee. Town Manager apologized for being late - she attended at a Procurement Seminar in Huntington, MA.

OLD BUSINESS:

6. FINANCE COMMITTEE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR FY16

W. Atwood supported scheduling the Committee's work around the dates that routine reports are due. These would include the quarterly reviews of spending against budget, and the annual review at the end of the fiscal year. Other events would be the Selectboard's Classification Hearing at the of August, (with the Board of Assessors) the joint meeting with the Selectboard in September to set the next year's budget policy, and the annual audit report in November. Members will continue to receive monthly expenditure reports from the town financial coordinator.

M. Wise suggested regular "strategic" reviews of departments and programs. This would be done in collaboration with the Selectboard. M. Wise stated it is a good management practice to review departments on a regular basis, rather than doing it ad hoc and thus implying that the department being reviewed had done something wrong. W. Atwood suggested doing two departments per year. The Town Manager was asked to comment on where to start. The auditor might also make suggestions.

M. Wise proposed maintaining and improving the "functional" presentation of the town's spending and budgeting. He noted that the reports done in the latest budget cycle were useful, but could be improved in at least two ways: better correlation of capital costs with functions, and allocation by headcount rather than by salary of "per capita" fringe benefits. The Town Manager observed that the capital items can be addressed without much trouble. For the other information, it could be easier to obtain through a new module to add to the town's MUNIS software. Annual maintenance cost will be \$6,000.

7. HEALTH CARE & INSURANCE COSTS AND OPTIONS

M. Wise observed that the Committee decided earlier this year to look into the town's health care and health insurance situation, going beyond its work last year on OPEB issues. Putting health insurance out to bid might lower costs. The Town Manager stated that for several years the Town's health insurance costs did not increase because premiums had been subsidized with reserves. Property and casualty insurance cost has gone up and this may go out to bid. MIIA is our present provider and other options should be considered.

Berkshire Health Group will be analyzed and staff will look into options which is best for the town. The Town Manager noted that there may have been a problem with network doctors for other insurance plans. We need to shop around, analyze options and do a comparison with other companies. The town offers Blue Cross Blue Shield HMO and employees can purchase different plans.

The committee will set a meeting in September or October to examine the health care cost issues. The OPEB and related pension issues may await the completion of the audit that is due of the county pension system.

NEW BUSINESS:

8. PROPERTY TAX POLICY OPTIONS: PROCESS FOR CONSIDERATION

J. Tabakin is trying to schedule workshops to be run by the Department of Revenue. DOR can answer questions about various programs and options the town could adopt, including the residential exemption and the split rate. M. Wise mentioned exemptions for seniors and some others, some of them reimbursed by the state. He also mentioned tax deferral for seniors, a program that is not used yet by any other towns in Berkshire County, and the senior "circuit breaker", which is available without the need for adoption by the town. These workshops will be educational meetings open to the public. Target dates for workshops would be July or August.

9. BYLAW REVIEW

The Selectboard has asked committees to examine their sections of the Town Bylaws. M. Wise appointed T. Blauvelt and W. Atwood as a subcommittee to review the Bylaws relevant to the Finance Committee.

10. SCHEDULING MEETINGS

After discussion, the members concurred on setting a regular meeting date for every fourth Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. On July 28th the meeting will be at 6:00 p.m. because of a ZBA hearing scheduled for 7:30 p.m.

11. ADJOURNMENT

Without objection the meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Wise", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Wise
Chair

