



Finance Committee
Town of Halifax
499 Plymouth St.
Halifax, MA 02338

Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 21, 2012

Board Members in attendance: Peter Beals, Dick Wright, Gordon Andrews, Peg Fitzgerald, Nikki Newton, Karen Fava and Paul Weckbacher.

Meeting called to order at 7:15pm
Meeting Adjourned at 9:15pm

Introduction for Comcast viewers. The Finance Committee recommends a budget to Town Meeting. Town Meeting makes the final decision on the budget.

Interview Kendra Kelly for the position of Finance Committee Secretary. Two other applications came in by mail for the Secretary position.

Big Picture

School Budget – The School Committee approved an increase of 3.42% for Silver Lake but the Assessment went up 3.9% as there are more students. The school debt was structured differently so it doesn't go down each year and our portion went up.

Overlay (abatement and exemptions) stays in for about 3 years and the Overlay Surplus needs to be released by the Assessors. Peter presented 3 scenarios for the committee to consider:

Scenario 1 – Budgets are approved as submitted by each department.

Scenario 3 – Assume the debt went up by 75,000.00.

Scenario 2 – Somewhere in between Scenario 1 and 3 with a percent tax increase.

Between 300,000.00 and 700,000.00 must be cut from the budget as it is now.

Peg said we could look at other options such as taking money from Overlay or money from the Stabilization fund for Capital items. Sandy mentioned that there is more new growth according to Sue Duggan and the Capital Planning net is 288,500.00. Karen said that the revenue for Local Receipts is coming in better than last year so the estimates might be a little low. We won't really know the numbers until March. Kim stated that the State Aid is probably looking good.

Peter pointed out that unfunded liability is not included in these numbers. The water tower is not reflected in this either. The average family tax bill compared to all of Massachusetts is 33% higher but is 10% higher than inland Plymouth County.

Conclusion is that the taxes in Halifax are already high. Peg said that the taxes are a result of every town meeting up until now and that the tax payers have decided to keep services at the Town Meetings. If we want to lower taxes we will have to cut services.

She pointed out that Halifax has 24/7 paramedic service, low teacher/pupil ratios and youth activities. Sandy said that Plympton and Kingston actually have a higher average family tax bill. Peg would like to see Option 1 as she does not want to cut services and the only way to avoid that option is to cut. Kim said that if we are talking about cutting services maybe the Committee should meet with the Selectmen to discuss the vision for the Town. Peg agreed and said that the policy should be set by the Selectmen. Karen thinks that it is too early to meet with the Selectmen and suggested waiting another 3 weeks.

Karen asked what should be asked for from the departments. Do we ask for rebuilding the budget each year or just for a level budget? The departments should be asked what they need to run their department. Peg said we should protect General revenue and not let it seep into the water dept / solid waste. We need to tell the Depts. what services we want first. Sandy said that the Dept Liaisons should ask for more detail from the departments when submitting their budgets.

The number that bothers Paul is the debt. In the private sector you rebuild the budget each year, you cannot ignore the economy. We should be more conservative on spending. We don't get to see detail on each dept. budget so there has to be a middle ground. Things always come out of left field (water tower) and we should be looking at one or two different options. Sandy said that the water tower will come under the water Dept enterprise. It will not add to the tax bill and will not be debt exclusion. The water bill will increase.

Peter stated that if we can't tax enough to pay for the budgets that were submitted we will have to go back to the depts. Gordon said that trimming the fat is not enough. There is no fat in expenses. He thinks we can't sustain the "tax to the max" option anymore and we need to look at reorganizing. Nikki pointed out that the Committee just cut 240,000.00 from the Articles already and they have just begun. There are budgets that went up with leeway that haven't been looked at yet. Sandy said that there is Overlay Surplus and Free Cash for the Articles. You can't count on Free Cash and Overlay Surplus every year so you don't want to use it for the Operating Budget. We should be talking to the Depts. through Liaisons if the Committee feels that the submitted budget is too high. Nikki doesn't feel that we are at the point of cutting services yet. Kim and Peter will discuss cuts to services with the Selectmen. The Board of Selectmen will be invited to the Fin Comm. Meeting on Monday 2/27 to discuss.

Nikki gave a Beautification Committee Update. The committee would like to come before the Finance Committee to ask for/defend funding for their projects. They would also like to discuss foreclosures in town and discuss possible solutions.

COA Van

Nikki reported that the COA would like to increase the hours for one of the van drivers by 2 hours per week. There was some discussion of whether this could be justified. Peter would like to have the Selectmen appoint a board to look into who qualifies for rides and at what cost.

Reserve Fund Transfer

The Building Committee submitted a Reserve Fund Transfer Request for 2,000.00 for repairs to the Council on Aging.

Peg said that they will fix up a room on the second floor to allow for privacy meetings with clients. They will possibly move the Outreach worker upstairs. Cubicles are not an option as they are very expensive. Peter and Paul are concerned about opening the second floor to clients and will there be a problem with the handicap access laws. Gordon asked if the Building Inspector had given any recommendations yet. Kim indicated that he had not given any as of yet. Paul suggested we invite the Building Committee to the meeting next week to discuss. Gordon made a motion to wait until next week to vote on the Reserve Fund Transfer. Seconded by Paul Weckbacher. Motion passed unanimously.

Nikki Newton made a motion to offer the Secretary position to Kendra Kelly. Seconded by Dick Wright. Motion passed unanimously.

Peter will make a pie chart for next week showing the unfunded liability.

Gordon Andrews made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Dick Wright. Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Richard Wright, Corresponding Clerk