

Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 27, 2012

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

Others in Attendance: Charlie Seeling, Town Administrator; Mike Schleiff, Selectmen Chairman; Kim Roy, Selectmen Vice-Chairman; Troy Garron, Selectmen Clerk; Cassey Hanson, Silver Lake and Halifax Elementary School Committee Chair; John Campbell, Municipal and School Building Committee; Tom Millias, Building Inspector; Gerry Elliott, Municipal and School Building Committee.

Meeting called to order at 7:00pm
Meeting Adjourned at 9:38pm

Mail

Forms have been provided to every department for completing an annual review of every employee and must be filled out in order for step changes to take effect.

There is a reminder regarding debating on email. An example of an open meeting law complaint from the Planning Board in Abington was provided. Please remember to keep any debates off of email.

Building Committee

Request for \$2,000.00 from the Reserve Fund for renovations to the COA Popes Tavern Building. The ceiling on the second floor is coming down and they will be building a new office for Barbara on the second floor to give her a space for privacy as she shares the first floor office with three others. This will be an overall quick fix for the current space problems.

Peter asked if we are making public space on the second floor in a building with no elevator will that put us in violation of code. Per Tom Millias, as long as it is not necessary for the public to access it we should be fine. The director of COA has an office on the first floor which has access for all for meetings etc. A small handicap ramp to the front door would make it more accessible to all but they need to get it approved by the Historical Committee.

Peter also asked if the work would be done by town employees or by an outside Contractor. Contractor Estimates are already in and the Building Committee will take care of some of the work as well (painting etc.). The repair work to be done is beyond the scope of our town employees.

Paul asked what has changed to require more office space. Nothing has changed but it will give more space to deal with services. In addition it will give Barbara some

private space to deal with issues that should not be dealt with in public or to get work done without interruption.

Gordon asked if any of the money set aside for the town roofs had been used. One bill is out so far but they are unsure of the total at this time.

Peg made a motion to make a \$2,000.00 Reserve Fund Transfer to improve the ceiling at Pope's Tavern. Nikki Newton seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Selectmen

Finance Committee asked the Selectmen to attend tonight's meeting to find out their thoughts on where to go from here. Just to review, in last weeks meeting we discussed the "Big Picture" with three possible scenarios. The General consensus in a 5 to 1 vote with 1 abstention was to go somewhere between Scenario 2 (modest increase) and Scenario 3 (as close to no new taxes as possible). In order to do this we would need to cut \$328,000.00 in services so we need to have a discussion about this.

The budgets that have come in are not all level funded. All that have come in level funded have been approved at this point. Budgets that are not level funded have not been approved at this time.

We have received a curve ball from the Silver Lake budget. They have an increase of 700,000.00, 34% of which belongs to the Town of Halifax based on the assessment. They did receive an additional state aid bump so that has helped. If it was not received our portion would be higher. The bottom line is that Halifax's share of the Operational Budget will increase by \$150,000.00.

The Elementary School budget increase is \$45,000.00 after deleting 2 full time positions as the SPED budget has increased because they no longer have grants to cover some of that expense.

Paul asked if there is any recourse for us to reason with the School Committee to address this. They have level funded for the last three years so they don't want to move on it. Kim said negotiation at Silver Lake isn't very flexible. The Elementary School has more flexibility but how much do you want to sacrifice the educational services? She also said that state aid numbers should hold which is good news.

Peter said that compared to the rest of the state our property values are at 93% but we are 23% higher in our tax rate.

Paul said that the burden is a tax burden and it is on the taxpayer.

Peg said that we represent the people. The Silver Lake budget is not level funded which is why we need to talk about the tax rate. There is concern about reaching a balance budget before April 1.

The point was brought up that Department heads have budgeted step increases for their employees. Should we cut services that taxpayers have approved? For cuts this large you need to look at the personnel. We can't cut personnel in any of the financial departments. Are we willing to do that?

There is not a lot of fat to cut in the budgets that have come in. The 1.2 million in payments on debt is high. A plan to ramp it down going forward in order to change the trend of tax increases is necessary. For this year, finish the audit process on the current budgets first.

Paul asked the Selectmen to think strongly about the articles and Capital Plan items first. It is the easiest and most painless plan.

Gordon asked if we could ask the Department heads to submit a list of items that may not be necessities.

Gordon made a motion to write to the Department heads as suggested. Paul seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Summary

Selectmen will return to our meeting in two weeks to revisit the discussion.

Peter will write a letter to the Department heads and send it to Charlie to email.

Everyone will follow up the letters by contacting their liaisons.

The remaining unapproved budgets will be gone through to see if there is any fat to trim.

Next week, Youth and Recreation is scheduled to be at the meeting. We need to reschedule him and the Beautification Committee for the meeting in 3 weeks, Monday March 19, 2012.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:38pm

Richard Wright
Corresponding Clerk