

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
August 12, 2003
Town Building
Approved

In attendance are Steve Dungan, Jason Robart, Pam Glauner, Patti Heron, David Walrath, Charlie Kern, and Tom Ryan.

The meeting is opened at 7:04.

Discussion on Citizen Input

Steve requests the consensus of the Fincom on when to have the citizen input part of the meeting. Tom believes that it is the chair's discretion on when to call on the citizens, however, Pam feels that having all citizen input at the end of the meeting will lengthen the meeting by having a discussion two times during the meeting. The consensus of the Fincom is to add relevant citizen input before the vote or end of discussion on an issue by the Chair's discretion, and all other citizen input at the end of the meeting.

Minutes

The minutes from the 7/22/03 meeting are amended. Patti moves to accept the minutes as amended, David seconds. The motion passes with Steve, Jason, Patti and David in favor and Tom abstaining since he did not attend the 7/22 meeting.

Correspondence

- Memo from Bill Wrigley dated 7/24 Re: budget process to eliminate the town debt
- Memo from Bill Wrigley dated 8/7 Re: budget process to eliminate the town debt
- Memo from Representative Walrath Re: Copy of Act for Relief and Flexibility for Municipal Officials.
- Memo from the Suburban Coalition requesting membership.
- Memo from Representative Walrath Re: Summary of the final FY '04 state budget.
- Memo from William Ross from the NRSD Audit Advisory Committee Re: Roles of the committee. Steve suggests a joint discussion with this committee at a future meeting.
- Association of Town Finance Committees July Newsletter.
- Memo from the Minuteman High School Business Manager Re: Quarterly assessment is due.
- Memo from the Minuteman High School Superintendent Re: Final assessment to Stow was reduced slightly due to greater Financial Aid than anticipated.
- Memo from the NRSD Treasurer Re: Revised certified Stow Assessment to the NRSD is \$9,947,492.
- Planning Board Meeting Minutes from the 6/10 meeting.
- Notice of care when opening e-mails.
- Notice of Town Picnic at Pine Bluffs Beach.
- Town calendar of all committee meetings.

Liaison Reports

- Tom states that the Police Station roof has been fixed with less money than requested. The problem developed when certain sections of the roof were not properly installed.
- Charlie states that the Minuteman High School has hired the law firm of Ropes and Gray for their lawsuit over the state denying school choice students from certain towns. The funds for this process are not to exceed \$100,000.
- Jason states that the NRSD School Committee passed a high school sports user fee of \$328 for all sports with additional venue fees for skiing and ice hockey. The new superintendent Michael Wood attended a recent school committee but the issue of bus routes has not yet been finalized. Steve inquires about the progress of Zero Based Budgeting. Jason states that the School Committee is still waiting for a detailed line item budget. The topic comes up occasionally at the School Committee meetings, but Jason will pursue the idea at a future meeting. Tom suggests that Steve draft a letter to the new superintendent introducing himself.
- Steve states that the Town Administrator has not been receiving prior notice of reserve fund transfer requests. This policy was instituted to determine if the requested funds can be taken from other areas. Steve distributes an updated reserve fund transfer request form and policy. David adds that the policy should state that the request should be accepted before the funds are spent.
- Steve states that the Highway Department snow and ice budget deficit was \$60,898.72. The net amount of the transfer after funds were taken from the overlay reserve fund and from the Federal Emergency Relief Fund was \$5,585.05

Origin of the FY '04 Deficit

Pam distributes a report on the FY '04 budget that she compiled with updated figures. This includes actual figures for local receipts and updated figures for the BAN premium, new growth, Chapter 70 aid, and debt exclusions. Pam believes that she understands the rationale behind the changes after compiling this report and receiving answers from the Town Administrator on any items that were unclear. Pam believes the FinCom could have done a better job understanding the origin of the numbers before town meeting, recognizing that the data the Fincom had was not always up to date.

Voter Education

Jason states that he is following up on the difference in the calculation of Stow's minimum contribution to the NRSD between the Governor's budget and final House version.. Stow's contribution under this act would be 38%, but after the state budget was passed, this percentage is higher.

Preparation for Override Discussion

Pam distributes a possible scenario that she developed to cut services if the override vote fails in September. She explains the cuts that may be needed to cover the \$585,000 budget shortfall. Jason states that this document may create panic in town if it is misinterpreted. Tom adds that if the document is distributed, it should state that this is only a possible scenario and not yet final.

Availability of Public Documents

Bill Wrigley is present. Steve states that the town charter states that the operating budget should be submitted 60 days prior to town meeting. The school budget should be submitted 75 days prior to town meeting. Bill states that his report is made independent of the Fincom. His report is made before the Fincom has debated the budget. He added that this year the NRSD School Committee did not comply with the Stow timeline, and since the NRSD budget is 60% of the Stow budget, following this deadline without the school budget submitted would not have yielded meaningful results. Bill adds that if he is asked to follow the town charter and its deadlines, he requests that all boards and committees that submit a budget also follow the deadline. However, Bill believes that the current charter procedures produce budgets that are not always meaningful by the deadline and can change after the deadline. Bill suggests forming a workgroup, which he volunteers to give his assistance, to discuss this issue and possibly revise the charter procedure to a more meaningful timeline. Tom asserts that the purpose of a public hearing is to have a discussion on the warrant, which is the requested budget. Bill adds that his report is not necessarily supposed to be discussed at the Fincom public hearing. Charlie asserts that it is important for the public to have some numbers to see even if it is not yet finalized.

Citizen Input

Linda Stokes adds that the purpose of the public hearing is for the Fincom to gain public input to help determine the budget. Nancy Fleming adds that the School Committee budget was late this year due to extenuating circumstances. Carole Makary states that she found it difficult to give public input without the document to see. Nancy Fleming asks when the Fincom receives the preliminary budget. Tom replies that the preliminary budget is received in January, but this is only a “wish list” budget and is subject to change. Jason states that the problem with the current protocol is that the public needs a document to present at the public hearing, yet the document needs to be meaningful to provide adequate feedback to determine the Fincom recommendations.

Dawes Update

Pam has been following up with the school districts on the enrollment of students from the Dawes estate. Pam said she would follow up with the Assistant Superintendent for the answer for enrollment in grades 9-12 in the NRSD. Tom and Mitch are working with Bob Billups from the Assessors office on the tax impact of the houses in the Dawes estate, and a meeting between Bob and Mitch will be scheduled at a later date. Tom estimates that a report on the Dawes property will be completed by the end of the calendar year.

40B Impact Work

Charlie states that he has been compiling information on 40B’s for a report. It is stated that Greg Jones has 40B modeling information that may be useful in this report.

Economic Development

Patti states that she has been studying documents on the Bose property. She adds that the Special Permit application has recently been filed. She states that a timeline or plan will be developed by the next meeting.

Budget Process Feedback

Pam states that Mary Kerr contacted Ken Troup, a Bolton Selectboard member, for information on the Bolton budget process. Pam asks that the Fincom provide constructive criticism on the budget process.

Recommendation Letter for the Secretary

Steve distributes a recommendation letter written by him and Tom for Mitch. Corrections and amendments are made. Tom and Steve will edit and give to Mitch.

Citizen Input

Carole Makary and Chris Way both believe it is a mistake to not have a town meeting before the override vote. Carole adds that it is not too late to propose one yet. She believes that the voters need to be informed about the choices they have and a public forum or hearing does not properly educate the public.

Jason moves to adjourn the meeting, Tom seconds. The motion passes unanimously. The meeting is adjourned at 9:37.

Respectfully submitted by Mitchell Samson.

Action Items

- Fincom to schedule a joint discussion with the Audit Advisory Committee at a future meeting.
- Steve to draft a letter to Superintendent Michael Wood to introduce himself.
- Steve to edit reserve fund transfer request form and policy, discuss with Bill Wrigley, and distribute to Fincom. (Mitch to distribute to all town boards and committees)
- David to distribute a spreadsheet of FY'03 reserve fund transfers to the Fincom and to the Town Accountant.
- Patti to develop a plan or timeline on Economic Development for the 8/26 meeting
- Fincom to provide constructive criticism on the budget process. (Contact Pam)