

Finance Committee Public Hearing Minutes
October 2, 2003
Approved

In attendance are Steve Dungan, Pam Glauner, David Walrath, Tom Ryan, Patti Heron, Laura Rome, and Charlie Kern. Jason Robart arrives at 7:10, Janet Wheeler arrives at 7:30 and Mary Kerr arrives at 7:50.

The public hearing is opened at 7:05.

Discussion of the October 25th Special Town Meeting and Warrant

Steve describes current financial situation in Stow. He states that the deficit is still at \$585,000. The Town Administrator believes he can find \$235,000 in unexpended funds from prior years. The free cash figure is expected to be \$651,576, and the stabilization fund has \$429,000. If the deficit and the capital requests of \$273,000 are funded completely by stored assets minus the unexpended funds of \$235,000, the stored assets will be drawn down to \$436,937.

Article 1 Zoning Bylaw Amendment (Site Plan Approval)

Ernie Dodd from the Planning Board states that this article is a housekeeping article to change the bylaw for accessory apartment permits. The permits are now obtainable from the Building Inspector.

Article 2 Zoning Bylaw Amendment (Parking)

Ernie Dodd from the Planning Board states that this article will change the town bylaws on parking to simplify the parking requirements due to environmental factors. This article has no direct financial impact on the town.

Article 3 Zoning Map Amendment (Great Road)

Ernie Dodd states that this article will rezone an area of land near Bose as a business zone on Great Road farther west so that an access road to Bose does not cut through a residential area. This article has no direct financial impact on the town. These three articles (1-3) have not yet been voted on for approval by the planning board. The voting will take place at their 10/21 meeting. Joe Fleming asks if the change is temporary. Ernie Dodd replies that the change in zoning is permanent until another change is instituted. Jim Dunlap asks what businesses can go in the new business zone. Ernie replies that any small business can be built such as a convenience store or a service station. Linda Stokes asks how this will affect the permit process. Karen Kelleher replies that the change in zoning simply changes where the business will be located and reduce traffic through a residential area.

Article 4 Assabet River Rail Trail Transfer

Patti states that funds appropriated a few years ago need to be spent by the end of FY '04. The funds are not near enough to purchase the land for the rail trail and no negotiations are currently pending yet. To complete this purchase, another special town meeting will be needed to raise additional funds and to continue pursuing this trail. The funds will return to the town eventually, but, if passed, this article will accelerate the process. Patti adds that Greg Jones, who is spearheading this project, is in favor of this article since the land purchase will probably not be complete by the end of FY '04.

Article 5 Reserve Fund

Linda Stokes asks if the Fincom has prior year's expenditures from the reserve fund.

David replies the following:

FY	Appropriated	Spent
98	\$80,000	\$30,000
99	\$80,000	\$50,000
00	\$80,000	\$47,000
01	\$90,000	\$61,000, additional funds were spent for the Snow and Ice fund.
02	\$100,000	\$87,000, including \$40,000 for legal expenses.
03	\$80,000	\$53,000, \$5,000 was used to fund the Snow and Ice deficit.

Linda believes that before FY '98 the amount that was spent was closer to the amount appropriated.

Article 6 Household Hazardous Waste

This article will rescind the annual town meeting vote to appropriate funds. Linda Stokes believes that the town should have more and not less of these collections days. Since this is a special article, any unspent funds will carry forward.

Article 7 Emerson Hospital Home Health Care

Ellen Sturgis asks what services will be affected by this article. Steve responds that this article funds flu shots for the elderly and the service that is funded by this article deals with younger parent and drug issues.

Article 8 Cultural Council Transfer

Patti states that these funds are no longer matched by the state. Springfest will not be affected since it is almost self-sufficient.

Article 9 Water Hole Construction and Maintenance

Linda Stokes asks if this will have a significant impact on insurance rates. Patti believes the difference will be negligible.

Article 10 Legal Services

Steve states that fewer legal expenses are expected this year since the cell tower litigation is coming to an end. The majority of legal expenses are in this budget, but smaller amounts also come from other areas.

Article 11 Town Building Improvement Transfer

These funds are unexpended funds from the Town Building improvement project. The money was saved from less than expected costs for drywall and insulation.

Article 12 Recreation Commission Project Transfer

The project to build the concession stand at Pine Bluffs may be dropped. Tom states that the Rec Commission has not yet voted on this position.

Article 13 Town Hall Improvement Transfer

While much of the project is complete, Ernie Dodd states that some Community Preservation funds are being considered to improve the Town Hall fire detection, sprinkler, and extinguisher systems.

Article 14 Library Roof Repair Transfer The consensus of the forum is to make sure that the library roof is in good condition before the funds are cut.

Article 15 Capital

1. Six Wheel Highway Truck Chassis and Cab

Malcolm Fitzpatrick suggests that a list of capital items and their status be included in the town report. Daisy Dearborn states that the Highway Department is one of the best in the region and is very reliable. Linda Stokes adds that the Highway Department has a very

regular replacement schedule for its capital, and a delay here may mean more in following years. Nancy Fleming adds that considering the regularity of the Highway Department replacement plan, the Highway Department may ask for \$90,000 next year.

2. Used Bucket Truck

Malcolm Fitzpatrick questions the reliability of a bucket truck for this price. Bruce Fletcher responds that there is a glut of good used bucket trucks. The new truck would be used primarily in winter if there is less snow, and 2-3 times per month in the summer.

3. New Fire Pumper Truck

Daisy Dearborn suggests that the current pumper truck is in sorry shape and a pumper failure could cause a problem if there is a fire in Stow. Linda Stokes suggests that the town vote to borrow within the limits of Proposition 2 ½.

4. Fire Dispatch Communications Equipment

Malcolm Fitzpatrick suggests applying for a FEMA grant to cover this expense. Patti believes there is a small chance of this being granted to Stow since most of the funds go to larger towns and cities.

5. New Police Cruiser

Malcolm Fitzpatrick questions the need for 5-6 cruisers when only 2-3 officers are on duty at one time. Malcolm further questions the cost of insurance, license, and maintenance for the old 4x4. Joe Fleming states that this article passes at the annual town meeting as a debt exclusion but failed at the polls.

Article 17 Balancing the Budget

Steve states that the number depends on the voting of the prior articles and if a rebate comes back from the NRSB budget for unexpended funds. Malcolm Fitzpatrick believes that the town needs to consider the next few years when voting to spend stored assets and voting overrides.

Tom states that approving the capital makes the net budget about the same as last years. Tom states that the town can't balance the budget with education or debt. Joe Fleming asks if there have been any cuts since the annual town meeting. Steve replies that none have been made so far.

Steve closes the public hearing at 8:35.

Respectfully submitted by Mitchell Samson.