

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
March 30, 2004
Town Building
APPROVED

The meeting is brought to order at 7:05 p.m. In attendance are Steve Dungan, Charlie Kern, Pam Glauner, Tom Ryan, Patti Heron, and David Walrath. Janet Wheeler arrives at 8:50 and Jason Robart arrives at 9:00.

Minutes

-The minutes from the 3/23/04 meeting are amended. Tom moves to accept the 3/23/04 minutes as amended, David seconds the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

Correspondence

- Notice of a Western Workshop sponsored by the Association of Town Finance Committees on Thursday 5/6.
- Revision of Planning Board zoning change article for the warrant.
- Bill for \$2.90 from DG Inc for publishing a notice of a public hearing.
- Mass Municipal Advocate *Beacon*.
- Planning Board legal notice of a public hearing on 4/13 Re: Zoning change.

FinCom Report for Warrant

Pam and Charlie volunteer to draft this report before 4/22.

Minuteman High School Budget Review

Superintendent Ron Fitzgerald and Minuteman School Committee Representative Alice DeLuca are present.

Superintendent Fitzgerald states that the Minuteman budget is less than level funded for the second consecutive year. Programs are less than level funded, but additional equipment costs are needed. Transportation costs are increasing because the state has drastically cut transportation aid to the district. This is especially difficult for Minuteman since there are 16 member towns which are located far away from the school campus. Health insurance costs are also increasing. The current health insurance split is 75% to 25%. The school is looking to sell property which it owns to gain funds for FY '05. This property cannot be used for school or educational purposes and could only be used as residential areas. The FY '05 budget also includes five less staff positions. While the student to teacher ratio is still good, eliminating any more staff positions would make this ratio much worse. The Stow assessment to Minuteman has increased since Minuteman has become more popular among Stow students. About 53% of the cost is raised by revenue from the students. SPED students make up about 55% of the students at Minuteman. The minimum contributions are based upon very illogical state standards. Until these procedures are fixed, they must be followed. Ron Fitzgerald states that there is a four year shift in aid where vocational aid will increase while other school's aid such as Nashoba's will decrease. There are currently negotiations with the teacher's union to propose a 2% salary increase. The usual salary increase is around 3%. The choice program has been completely stopped in Minuteman since the revenue for one out of district student was only \$5,000. This means that the choice program is losing money for each out of district student. Certain exceptions have been made, but the out of district students must provide transportation to the school themselves. Minuteman is proud that it has no user fees for sports since student projects bring in revenue for the school. The cost for the sports programs

is less than other comparable districts. There is a sizeable SPED population of students that also play sports.

Community Preservation Committee Budget Review

Bob Wilber is present.

Bob states that the Community Preservation Act is doing well, and the state is still matching 100% of the funds raised. The 10% mandatory state minimums will be met and \$59,000 will be put into the reserves. Bob adds that the affordability restriction program is popular among seniors and this is the top priority of the committee. \$20,000 is being used to add an all person access to the West School and an unpaved parking lot, which will be built by the Highway Department. The CPC has funds to facilitate the transfer of open space town ownership. Bob adds that the budget has a line item to give the Mosely property an agricultural preservation restriction to put 21.6 acres of land into conservation. Stow must pay only 10% of the total cost, while the state pays the other 90%. The budget also includes a line item for \$50,000 for the purpose of small projects or getting proposals ready for town meetings. The last item is \$350,000 to purchase 37 affordability restrictions in the Pilot Grove development. The current restrictions are only temporary, and are in danger or expiring in six years. This expenditure would not add any new units to the affordability minimum, but would keep 60 units affordable in perpetuity. The 23 other units in the development are not affordable but count towards the minimum figure. Tom asks if it is possible to put in less money, therefore buying fewer restrictions and still count all 60 units as affordable while leaving some at market rate.

Council on Aging Budget Review

Jim Sauta is present

Jim states that he plans to hold the budget for the COA at town meeting and submit an amendment to reclassify the director to the next pay schedule. The FinCom responds that there are many positions in town that would like a similar reclassification, but it does not fit into the budget. Jim responds that the director works hard and would like to stay with Stow until she retires. The level funded budget takes this reclassification into account, and includes two step increases. Steve requests that Jim forward benchmark data on similar positions from other towns. Jim adds that the COA revolving funds are all donation driven.

Nashoba Regional School District Budget Review

Superintendent Michael Wood and Assistant Superintendent John Antonucci are present.

Superintendent Wood states that the district has followed basic zero based budgeting goals. They focused on reducing the class sizes at the high school and adding related arts at the K-8 level. Superintendent Wood states that the class sizes for certain grades were expected to be as follows: 15 students per class in Pre K, 18 students per class in K-3, and 20-24 students per class in grades 3-8. A new idea in FY '05 is to lease technology in order to better meet the needs and demands of the district. The high school renovation is currently being reviewed, but there is no funding in place for any repairs that may be needed.

The budget as approved by the School Committee is a 5.2% increase over last year. The enrollment is expected to grow about 1.9%. This budget meets the needs of the district and addresses only major disparities. Salaries have increased 4%, which is somewhat offset by grants. There is a net increase of 15.1 full time equivalent additions to personnel, three of which are custodial support. The transportation bids are out to bid on the last year of a three year contract. Operating costs are down 3% due in part to a favorable Bond Anticipation Note Premium rates. For the federally mandated No Child Left Behind program to succeed there is a requirement for

highly qualified teachers. Pam and Jason state that the budget is very well organized and easy to understand. The funds in the revolving account are planned to be used as seed money for capital projects. The Financial Advisory Board would like to see \$700,000 in the Excess and Deficiency fund at the beginning of FY '05. Assistant Superintendent Antonucci states that the Stow assessment is \$10,193,897, which is a 3.7% increase from last year. The small increase in the Stow assessment compared to other towns is due in part to lesser enrollment and corrected state minimum contribution calculations. Superintendent Wood states that line items such as those for new personnel and new site based funds are 'wants', and these wants are driving needs. He believes this budget addresses true needs, and they are not unreasonable. He adds that this budget represents a great deal of fiscal restraint. Assistant Superintendent Antonucci adds that the district is also responding to mandates and pressure to succeed in MCAS testing. Nancy Fleming adds that this budget was unanimously adopted by the School Committee, is educationally sound and fiscally responsible. Chris Way adds that this budget is not necessarily adding programs, but is restoring those lost over many years.

Tom moves to adjourn the meeting, Jason seconds the motion. The motion passes unanimously. The meeting is adjourned at 10:25.

Respectfully submitted by Mitchell Samson.