

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
April 6, 2004
Town Building
APPROVED

The meeting is brought to order at 7:05 p.m. In attendance are Steve Dungan, Charlie Kern, Mary Kerr, Tom Ryan, and Patti Heron. David Walrath arrives at 7:40.

Minutes

-The minutes from the 3/30/04 meeting are amended. Steve moves to accept the 3/30/04 minutes as amended, Tom seconds the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

Correspondence

- Notice to all departments from Stow Television Re: Process to submit announcements to put on the local access channel.
- April 2004 issue of the Massachusetts Municipal Association *Beacon*.
- E-mail from Robin Riley Re: Local services opinion on contingent appropriations of the school budgets.
- Benchmark data compiled by Jim Sauta on Council of Aging directors' salaries in nearby towns.
- Appropriations Status Report for the period ending 3/31/04.
- Revised pages four and five of the Planning Board budget.

Liaison Reports

-Tom states that the NRSB deficit bond payments were reported to have been lowered by \$300,000, but he is unsure of whether the current figures reflect this change or not.

Discussion of Elementary and Middle School Issues with the School Building Committee

Anne Draudt, Michael Wood, Ron Larivee, and Chris Way are present.

Anne states that it is too late to rent modular classrooms for the 2004-05 school year. The current plan to accommodate the growth in the student population is to renovate six amphitheaters, which will net two new classrooms for the 2004-05 school year. The goal for the 2005-06 school year is to add three double wide modular classrooms, which would yield six new rooms. Pompo is currently in poor to fair condition while Center is in fair condition. Both schools are on the verge of overcrowding. Any renovations done to the current facilities to accommodate the overcrowding will remove the outdoor play space. The School Building Committee recommends that the town build a new pre-k through 5th grade building on a different parcel of land since this is the most cost effective, least disruptive, and most beneficial option. The modular classrooms are only a temporary solution. Tom requests specific data about what the renovations to the amphitheater will encompass and what is covered by the lease agreement for the modular classrooms. The SBC clarifies that the modular classrooms will not be furnished, but will have all the necessary heating, electrical, and ventilation systems. Ron Larivee adds that the modular classrooms will also reduce noise in the main part of the school. Tom asks whether it is possible to stop the full day kindergarten program. Chris Way responds that this is just a pilot program this year, and was requested by many citizens in Stow. Both Bolton and Lancaster have full day kindergarten. Tom responds that the high costs associated with this program may add a significant expense to the town. David asks whether the added space will be used for existing programs. Michael Wood responds that the amphitheaters will become one music room, one room for the full day kindergarten pilot program, one room for first grade, and three for use as enclosed classrooms for

functions such as breakout sessions and tutorials in a quieter atmosphere. David asserts that the School Committee has given mixed messages. In the past they have told Stow to act more like its own town, while now they are asking Stow to think about the three schools in a district-wide sense. Steve states that Bill Wrigley has suggested the SBC evaluate the possibility of purchasing the modular classrooms, since they may be needed at Hale school in the future, and they can be reused for that purpose. Purchasing the modular classrooms also makes it possible to purchase them under by debt exclusion instead of by override. Linda Stokes suggests revising the articles to be printed in the warrant to show that the amphitheaters are being renovated, not just having the risers removed, and that there will be only two new classrooms.

Treasurer-Collector Budget Review

Carol Vogel is present.

Carol states that her budget includes a salary step increase for the financial clerk. She adds that to offset this increase she has cut funds from professional development and supplies. While Carol does not believe services will be impeded this year, expenses like professional development will be needed next year.

Carol states that the family plan for health insurance is \$6,800 for medical, \$1,800 for dental, and \$142 for life insurance per year. The town is insured through the Minuteman-Nashoba Health Group. Stow has historically been below market rate. Charlie asks if the lockbox is an efficient process. Carol responds that the lockbox is much more efficient and cheaper than if collection is done manually. Mary asks how long the process would take if it were done manually. Carol states that the office work would need to stop and focus entirely on collection for a few days. Carol states that the financial clerk is used only during busy times, and the hours and wages are split with the Accountant. Carol states that paying property taxes online is not very popular in town, but will not save the town money if more people do so. Carol states that she has cut expenses to make her budget level funded such as waiting to convert files to microfiche until next year, when she will need twice as many funds. Mary asks if it is possible to share equipment. Carol responds that the Treasurer already shares the mailing machine with other departments.

The FinCom convenes a joint meeting with the Capital Planning Committee at 8:35.

Arch Owen states that the Capital Planning Committee voted to support all the capital requests with the exception of all school building related articles, which have not yet been voted. The street sweeper will probably cost Stow \$60,000 instead of \$120,000 because half will be paid for by Chapter 90 funds. The generator for the fire department was taken out of their budget. If all articles are passed with the exception of the SBC articles, the anticipated override is expected to be about \$250,000. The exact price for a new school will not be determined until land is chosen and purchased. Tom states that new school will be paid off after a maximum of 20 years at an average cost of about \$800-\$1,000 per household per year. David states that humps in enrollment are due to fluctuating birth rate trends in Stow.

The FinCom reconvenes at 9:05.

Town Clerk Budget Review

Linda Hathaway is present.

Linda states that her budgets are slightly greater than level funded or a 3% increase because this is a national election year. A reserve fund transfer was needed for this year since there was an unanticipated special election in September. Mary asks which the higher and lower traffic days are at the Clerk's window. Linda responds that Mondays are busiest, and very little office work is

done since she is attending the window or other tasks for most of the day, while Friday afternoons are the least busy. The assistant Town Clerk is paid for five hours per week, and is usually used in lump sum during busy periods. Linda also relies on senior citizens who volunteer to help out with the work load. Steve asks how the Stow Town Clerk compares with other towns. Linda responds that other towns have a full department with more people in the office. Steve asks if the budget will give any critical problems. Linda responds that the Clerk's office may already be at a critical point. The budget is at the bare minimum and there is no additional work support. She will ask for additional help in next year's budget. If Linda is sick there is nobody that can perform the numerous tasks at the same level of service. The professional development conferences are vital for performing her job well, and she is asking for a very minimum cost to attend them.

Tom moves to adjourn the meeting, David seconds the motion. The motion passes unanimously. The meeting is adjourned at 9:30.

Respectfully submitted by Mitchell Samson.