

Upton Finance Committee (Fincom) Minutes  
March 9, 2011 at Upton Police Station

Members Present-Eight

Members absent-None

Joan Shanahan, Chair (JS)  
Steve Bern (SB)  
Jonathan Calianos (JC) (arrived at 7:25)  
Paul Flaherty (PF)  
Karen Glowacki (KG)  
Jennifer Malin (JC)  
Herman Meisner (HM)  
John O'Sullivan (JO)

Meeting called to order with a quorum at 7:16 PM by Chairman, Joan Shanahan. The Chairman announced additions to the agenda.

1. There is a request for a transfer from the Fincom Reserve Account to the Fire Department Fuel Account.
2. Green School Initiative Grant for repairs at Miscoe Hill Middle School
3. A note has been received from Karen Varney at the Selectmen's office, asking about scheduling a second night for the Annual Town Meeting. Due to the number of articles, the need for a second night is being anticipated. Proposed dates are May 10 or May 12. The first night of the Annual TM is May 5.

The minutes from March 2 were reviewed, with changes noted. There was a motion by PF and second from HM to accept the minutes as corrected. Passed unanimously.

Blythe Robinson (BM), Town Manager, and Chief Goodale from the Fire Department were present to answer questions about the request for the requested transfer of funds from the Fincom Reserve Account to the Fire Department Fuel Account. The fuel budget for this year has been under estimated for a number of reasons. In the past, the DPW has absorbed the cost of diesel fuel. The amount requested is to allow the department to operate until the Annual Town Meeting. **Attachment 1: Analysis of Fire and EMS fuel use.**

There was discussion of the need to identify the actual fuel usage by Fire, EMS and DPW and to budget accordingly. A question was asked about the possibility of an Enterprise account using ambulance fees to offset department expenses was also discussed. It was pointed out that, if this is done, revenue would be lost from the General Fund. JO pointed out that it would be useful to do fuel projections for next year's budget rather than basing it on the previous year.

Chief Goodale advised there is a new state mandate for incident reports that requires more work by the person presently doing the ambulance billing as well as serving as an EMT. He has an RFP out for outside firms to do the billing. We are currently collecting

about 55% of what we are billing. It is the Chief's belief that with the requirement for MA residents to be insured that an outside firm would be able to collect closer to 90% to 95% of what is billed which would more than offset the cost of their services.

There was a motion by PF, seconded by SB to transfer \$800 from the Fincom Reserve Account to the Fire Department Fuel Account. Unanimous approval.

There was a discussion regarding the need for a new ambulance to replace the one that is 15 years old. A front line ambulance should be on a replacement cycle for every five years. We currently use mutual aid from other towns for backup when one of our ambulances is on a call. We also use services from other towns when Advance Life Support (ALS) is used. Our department works at the level of Basic Life Support (BLS). The Chief would like to see the department move toward being able to provide ALS. We will need training and equipment to make that happen. This would reduce our need for mutual aid. JC asked about a previous discussion with the Capital Budget Committee about purchasing a demo ambulance. This is no longer available according to the Chief.

With no further questions for Chief Goodale, Joan invited BR to discuss the **Draft List of Articles for the Annual Town Meeting. (Attachment 2)** There will be a Special Town Meeting on May 5 in advance of the Annual Town Meeting. The warrant closes on April 5.

There is currently \$317,778 in Free Cash. Discussion of needs that could be addressed using Free Cash. It was suggested that some be put into a Stabilization Account.

1. There is a shortfall in the water fund.
2. There is a shortfall of \$105,000 for snow and ice removal.

Free cash could be allocated at Special Town Meeting before the Annual Town Meeting.

Discussion of whether snow removal equipment could be purchased from snow and ice removal budget. BM indicated that should not be done with a town meeting vote.

Other special Town Meeting articles explained,

1. Repairs of collapsed culvert pipes in area of Westborough and Southborough Roads.
2. Green Roof schematic design to be explained by the School Committee when they make their presentation tonight.
3. Water Enterprise account. Rates are being raised and notices have been sent to residents that are impacted. The goal is to have the third water source on line for the summer of 2013 so there is a need to act on this so work will not be delayed. Suggestion to delay this expense for next fiscal year beginning July 1.

Two articles were added by the Community Preservation Committee. One of their articles is to fund an archaeologist to evaluate the chamber at the Elm Street property. The other articles are customary monetary transfers.

BM explained the TIP request for design work to do the upgrades to the Hopkinton Road/Hartford Av/High Street areas. Once the design is accepted by the state the town would go on a waiting list for state funding to do the work.

The town is using an auction website to see sell some surplus equipment.

The work on the Station Street pumping station is complete.

There was a discussion about putting placeholders on the town meeting warrant for stabilization accounts for the schools and a general capital stabilization fund.

**JC made a motion, seconded by SB and PF to put a placeholder on the town meeting warrant for a School Stabilization Account. Unanimous approval.**

**JC made a motion, seconded by JO to put a placeholder on the town meeting warrant for a General Capital Stabilization Fund. Motion passed by majority vote.**

At 8:30, Joan thanked the Town Manager and invited School Superintendent Fernandes and Heather Applegate (HA), representing the Budget Subcommittee of the School Committee to make their presentation. **Attachment 3: Total Project Budget Mendon-Upton Regional School District. Attachment 4: Mendon -Upton Regional School FY12 Preliminary Budget**

Heather Applegate reviewed MCAS scores. Mendon Upton tenth grade students scored in the top 13 towns for language, the top 29 for math and the top 32 for sciences. Grades three through eight scores are considerably lower.

Members of the Fincom expressed that they have requested wording regarding prior overrides be eliminated. There was a discussion of the preferred wording. The Superintendent acknowledged that this should have been reworded.

The total school budget is asking the town of Upton for an increase of \$1,414,420 and \$1,061,535 for Mendon. Members of Fincom expressed concern over this amount and discussion ensued with the superintendent. Health insurance is going up 14%. Teachers currently pay 25% of their health care with the District paying 75%. Special education out of the district is fluid depending on how many students will need services. Transportation costs are up. There are new leases on computers. A high school teacher who has been running the Technical program at no extra cost is leaving. There is a new Behavior Program and 14 students have been identified who would be involved. Chapter 70 money is being reduced. The Stimulus Funding is eliminated.

Class size has been increased and positions have been eliminated. If the towns do not support the requested budget, more positions will be eliminated. Expenditures for some special needs are going to be reduced by doing some of the work in house. If this is successful, there could be the possibility of students coming in to the district and this

would bring in revenue. The VISTA program for ages 18-22 is successful at Nipmuc the School Committee wants this to continue.

There are 300 students currently on school choice to other schools. This year Upton had twelve choice openings that were not filled. Some of this is due to the loss of Spanish Immersion to Millis. There is a suggestion to open up choice for the kindergarten and preschool levels.

Athletics are zero funded with students paying out of pocket. If money is allowed for athletics, it will mean doing away with two teacher positions.

There was a discussion of transportation costs, and the way that buses are scheduled with times there are buses with only a few students on them. The Superintendent explained that the block scheduling being used has proven to be the most cost effective.

Thoughts were expressed by members of the Fincom about the desire for a realistic budget presentation. The budget has to be presented in its final form at least 45 days before the town meeting. There was recognition that difficulties with school funding are a national problem.

Contractual negotiations with school personnel will be ratified on Monday. That will make it easier to have realistic projections.

The transportation contract has one more year.

The Superintendent introduced the **Green School Initiative Grant for the Miscoe Hill Middle School. Attachment 5.** The Middle School is eligible for this grant in three areas.

1. The roof.
2. The boiler.
3. Window replacement.

The school is asking the two towns to fund the schematic design in advance of the funding to allow this to go forward. BR indicated that this is on the special town meeting warrant. Total estimated cost of the project is \$5,975,632. The schematic design cost is \$48,589 with Upton's share being \$26,446. The grant could fund the project costs up to 50%. The funding for the schematic design could be done through debt exclusion with between 30% and 50% of the cost reimbursed to the towns. All of this work needs to be done. When the temperature reaches single digits, the boiler is currently using 600 gallons a day. The roof is the most critical of the needs.

There was a discussion of the cost of clearing the roofs during the recent school emergency. The superintendent has contacted the insurance company. They will cover the \$6000 damage done during clearing, but not the labor cost to do the clearing. Town Manager said that if an article requesting debt exclusion is to be included in the special town meeting warrant, the deadline is Tuesday.

The chairman opened the discussion to the public.

A question was asked if the Governor's request to declare a disaster for snow clearing would help get funding for the roof clearing. The answer was that Worcester County was not included in the emergency declaration.

A question was asked if the Superintendent was aware that there was a grant available from the MA Life Science Education Committee for biotech education. The Superintendent indicated that he was not aware of it, but that in order to apply it would mean funding a teacher to do a biotech program.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 upon a motion by PF with a second from JC.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Arnold

Attachments:

1. Analysis of Fire and EMS Fuel Use.
2. Draft List of Articles for the Annual Town Meeting
3. Total Project Budget Mendon Upton Regional School District
4. Mendon -Upton Regional School FY12 Preliminary Budget
5. Green School Initiative Grant for the Miscoe Hill Middle School