

Upton Finance Committee (Fincom) Meeting Minutes **DRAFT**
March 16, 2011 at Upton Fire Station

Members present: six

Members Absent: two

Joan Shanahan, Chair (JS)
Jonathan Calianos (JC) (arrived at 7:30)
Karen Glowacki (KG)
Jennifer Malin (JC)
Herman Meisner (HM)
John O'Sullivan (JO)

Steve Bern
Paul Flaherty

The Chairman, Joan Shanahan, called the meeting to order with a quorum at 7:19PM. She advised of one addition to the agenda to set the date and place for a budget hearing.

The minutes for March 9, 2011 were approved as corrected, upon a motion by HM with a second by KG.

Town Clerk, Kelly McElreath, made a presentation about her budget needs. **Attachment 1: Town Clerk Proposed Budget.** She advised that since Upton's population will reach more than 6200 people when the results of the 2010 ten-year census is finalized, that we will need to add a second precinct. Although we can still vote in one place, at Nipmuc High School, she will need to set up two voting areas. This will require an additional Accuvote machine, voting booths and personnel. Only one police officer will be necessary. A postcard will have to be mailed to every voter advising them of their new precinct.

The rest of her budget is tight and level funded. She expects a revenue drop due to a ruling that since she issues birth certificates she cannot issue passport photos. This could result in a loss of \$3000 to \$4000 per year.

Town Manager, Blythe Robinson, and Michael Goodwin, Robert Fleming and Ken Picard of the Board of Selectmen were present to discuss various parts of the budget including the proposed school budget. **Attachment 2: Draft Finance Committee FY12 Budget Recommendation Summary.** JC updated those present on the School Committee meeting. It appears that there are no concrete numbers yet and that he suggests waiting to see what the outcome will be. Even asking for a level service budget it is \$573,000 more. This includes concessions from the Teacher's union. The union has agreed for no COLA and no step raises for one year. Health care costs are up 14% and this is an area that should be addressed. The schools have lost \$1,200,000 in one time grant money.

Using numbers put together by SB the draft budget is out of balance by \$485,000. If we have to fund additional money to the schools, we would have to add \$461,000 to that number. There is \$510,000 in the School Stabilization Fund. Again, JC recommended

waiting to see what happens with Mendon in respect to the school budget before we make any decisions.

The debt exclusion request for the Green Schools was discussed. The school would do the borrowing. The ballot deadline is March 31. The first payment would be due in FY 13. The Green Schools project is supposed to be completed by the end of 2011, but members of the committee said they felt this was not being realistic. The roofs would be done immediately. The school has two boilers, which allows a backup. The boilers are not dysfunctional but they are looking for efficiency.

The school budget is a continuing problem each year. The Education Reform Act is 59% of the budget. The school is trying to address costs by doing some of the special education in house. This would reduce the number of children being sent to other schools and open up the potential for revenue gained by children coming to Upton from other places. A Fincom member asked where the additional children would be housed. The answer was that the school population is declining. In the past, the Choice numbers had been between \$500,000 and \$600,000 but now we are only getting about \$100,000 for students choosing in.

This year half of the eighth grade has applied to Blackstone Valley Vocational Technical High School (BVT). The incoming freshman class at BVT has room for 300 students from thirteen towns. Some Upton students are leaving to go to private schools.

A comment was made that drawing all the money out of the School Stabilization Fund one time, does not fix the problem.

There are many DPW articles on the warrant. The Capitol Budget Committee has ranked requests and will be meeting with Fincom and the Selectmen to discuss this. That committee has to have another meeting soon but he is not sure of the date.

The Town Manager advised that the Assessor's have requested another article on the warrant of \$10,000 to fund GIS equipment to use with a state grant. She will be meeting with them to discuss this and make sure that the technology can be used by multiple departments.

Selectman Picard suggested waiting to discuss Capital items until we know what Mendon will do about the school budget. A Fincom member wanted to be reassured that if money was left over from the school line item that it be put into the School Stabilization Fund. Selectman Fleming reminded the Committee that if an override had been done there would be no money left in the School Stabilization Fund.

The Town Manager commented that it was important to know what our Capitol need are. Even though they may not all be funded this year it would help voters understand the needs of the town and that they are as great as the need for the schools. The roads are in terrible condition and we do not want to put off the inevitable. Mr. Fleming indicated that they are getting reports projecting needs.

JC advised the group that a RI District Court judge recently handed down a decision that municipal employees can be forced to take other health care options. The Town Manager mentioned that next year the union contracts are being renegotiated and that would be the time to discuss benefits. There is discussion about giving incentives to employees who opt out of town insurance to get coverage through their spouses.

The Fincom needs to set a hearing date. School vacation is the week of April 18. The date was set for the public hearing on April 27.

The Town Manager asked about free cash that will be available at the end of this fiscal year and what the Fincom would suggest doing with it. There has been a suggestion to spend it at the Special Town Meeting before the Annual Town Meeting. There was a suggestion to do an article to fund the Accuvote machine and voting booths needed by the Town Clerk. JO commented that there is a need to be consistent with Free Cash. The Town Manager said that one possibility is to put it into a capital stabilization fund and use it from there, although it requires a two-thirds vote to spend it. Another possibility is to fund the deficit for snow and ice removal that was at \$105,800 last week and is now about \$110,000.

There was discussion about holding a joint meeting with the Fincom, Selectmen and Capital Budget Committee after the School Committee certifies their budget.

There was discussion about the Green Roof project and the need for the School Committee to make a presentation to the voters about it. It would be inappropriate for Fincom to make a presentation.

There was a suggestion that the School Committee should have a member present at the Fincom meetings. The Upton Fincom has a member present at all the School Committee meetings.

Chairman Shanahan expressed appreciation to the Board of Selectmen for their attendance at this meeting. The Town Manager expressed that this was important so that everyone would have a clear understanding of the budget and needs.

Motion to adjourn at 8:10 by JC.

Respectfully submitted

Ellen Arnold

Attachments:

1. Town Clerk Proposed Budget
2. Draft Finance Committee FY12 Budget Recommendation Summary