

Westborough Advisory Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting No. 25, FY2010
April 12, 2010

Approved
April 29, 2010

Members Present: Judy Lucas, Co-Chair, F. Robert Brown, Bill Linnane, Brigitte Casemyr, Ian Johnson, John E. Arnold, Michael Meachen (7:25 p.m.), Kevin Cronin. Absent: Jo Lown.

At 7:00 p.m. Ms. Lucas called the meeting to order in the Selectmen's Meeting Room.

Call to Order/Open Forum

There were no requests to address the Committee.

FY2011 Proposed Budgets & Warrant Articles

Cultural Council Budget & Bylaw Article

Lynn Watts, Chair of the Cultural Council, Helena Engberg, Secretary, and Carolyn Spring appeared before the Committee to present their budget request for FY11. They are level-funded, with a budget of \$2,000. They asked the Committee to return to their budget the \$36 that was previously cut. The Cultural Council was set up by the Massachusetts Cultural Council. There was a small profit of \$1,000 from "Arts in Common," which goes back to the town in the form of grants. This event was a huge success, and could not have been achieved without the involvement of the whole community.

Article 28. Last year the Cultural Council was required by town bylaw to apply for hawker's licenses for each vendor participating in "Arts in Common." This article deletes the existing article 12, and replaces it with language exempting events sponsored by a department of the town from licensing fees and permits. This reduces a great deal of paperwork, with which the Council struggled last year. The various vendors involved have signed up with the Cultural Council to participate in this town-sponsored event, and will be covered under a blanket permit.

School Department & School Committee

Karen Henderson, Chair of the School Committee, Steve Doret, and Dan Hendricks, Board of Selectmen member, appeared before the Committee to present their budget request for FY11. Ms. Henderson expressed her appreciation for the Committee Liaisons; they have found these contacts very helpful. The budget process is not yet complete. Though they don't have a solid final number, they are giving their best estimate. Their budget is basically level services from last year. Last fall they reduced 28 positions totaling 40 personnel in order to counteract a decrease in expected funding from the state. This year they avoided any cuts to personnel, mainly because the school unions realized the situation and acted accordingly. They tried to keep expenses flat, searching out cost savings and working more efficiently. The primary reason for the increase in the budget is not school spending, rather a reduction in state and federal funding.

Mr. Doret and Mr. Hendricks explained that overall enrollment was stable. Kindergarten enrollment, however, is down significantly—this was a surprise and will be monitored closely. Six years ago there were 80 English Language Learners in our school system. This year we had 300 students from 18 countries, almost 10% of the school population. Westborough was the recipient of a special grant from the state because our ELL students made such significant gains. ELL students need specialized services so this impacts the budget. Keeping class sizes as low as possible is a priority, so teachers can teach efficiently. In 2009-10 some classes hit the class size limit, but 2011 looks good. The real estate market picking up should help matters.

Westborough Advisory Finance Committee minutes
April 12, 2010

The School Department has negotiated a 1-year contract with all units. Expenses have increased 9.63%. Salaries are up \$156,000, and SPED tuition (a big one) is up \$730,512. The bid came in at a 1% increase—increases going forward are 2% for the next 2 years, with an option to renew for the next 2 years. The Utilities budget is down. Supply budgets are down in the district. The Salary line includes the 3 additional teachers.

Bus fees have been considered but they would like to avoid this. The traffic in town would increase if more students did not take the bus, so this is an issue of last resort. Eliminating late buses was considered, and routing was examined for efficiency, with the possibility of reducing one bus route. The same buses are run in three tiers: High School/Middle School, Mill Pond, and the elementary schools. The High School routes are under capacity. Eliminating the HS/Gibbons run, however, only amounts to a savings of \$12,000. They looked into parking fees as well as bus fees.

Special education is level-funded—they are requesting \$100,000 for growth. Tuition ranges from \$25,000 to \$300,000 per student for a variety of needs. Total tuition is over \$3 million, and next year this will increase. These expenses are also paid through grants, federal money, IDEA, and ARRA, and federal stimulus money, but they anticipate losing a little over \$.5 million of this next year. This budget is an 8.6% increase. They are estimating Circuit Breaker numbers at this point. The funds from the state earmarked for special education are down \$530,000. Special Education students number about 42-43 students. Westborough schools are responsible for the tuition and transportation of these students. Transport is another \$25,000 which is not included in the special education numbers. We get no aid for transportation. The parent, teachers and the administration all decide where a child will go. If they can, they keep the student in the district, to try and maintain core services and keep transportation costs down. They are looking into a collaborative approach, where different school districts would pool resources for programs geared to specific needs. Mr. Craig Harris noted that in the past, 60 students were going out of district—now that number is in the high 30s. Mr. Johnson agreed that the preference should be to keep those students in town. Some programs involve a 45-minute bus ride which is not ideal and most families prefer staying in the district.

The School Department has 700,000 sq. ft. of buildings divided among 6 schools, and usually has a \$250,000-\$300,000 Facilities Budget. Repairs needed this year included some a/c repairs, duct work, air balancing at some schools, lab hood unit repairs at the High School, etc., and a little more money is needed to finish those repairs. They need \$130,000 to maintain roofs. An assessment is needed of the portables at Hastings. There are various exterior repairs. The old intercom system is being replaced at two schools.

Gibbons Middle School Article

Karen Henderson, Chair of the School Committee, Steve Doret, and Dan Hendricks appeared before the Committee to present their article. Repairs are needed to the roof of Gibbons Middle School. This article provides \$175,000 to hire an Owners Project Manager, because an agent of the town must be in place before an assessment of the repairs needed to the school can be made. State funding is available for up to 50% of the costs of the repair—but without this individual, we are not eligible for this money. This person would not be hired until needed. Action is required now, because our project may get to the top of the list before Fall Town Meeting. The roof repair would also allow for the installation of solar panels to help save on electricity. The School Committee also mentioned that the ASBA are favorable to putting money into a facility which has been well-maintained. Mr. Harrington questioned the wording of the article, which doesn't clearly communicate what is being done. He also recommended adding the language "or some such other amount" (at present \$175,000 is the cap) to give some wiggle room.

Police Department Articles

Police Chief Gordon appeared before the Committee to present his articles.

Article 10-B. Police Cruisers. This is a recurring article, providing \$119,595 for 3 police cruisers, including associated equipment. Three Crown Victorias will replace the vehicles currently owned by the town, and will not increase the size of the fleet. Most of the equipment is being replaced (new computers are included in the amount), but the old radios will be kept.

Approval of Minutes – Meeting No. 21, March 29, 2010

Approval of the minutes was deferred until the next meeting.

Deliberation and/or Voting on FY11 Budgets

Ms. Casemyr expressed her concern about covering operating costs by using free cash, and departments being told to restore their 1.8% cuts. She felt it unwise to use free cash when the future is still uncertain. She urged the Committee to think seriously before approving budgets without the 1.8% cut.

Advisory Finance Committee, Dept. No. 11312, 11313

Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Salaries/Wages of \$2,927 and Expenses of \$2,000 (total of \$4,927). The increase from last year's budget is 2%. Vote to approve the budget recommendation is unanimous, 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Town Accountant, Dept. No. 11341, 11343

Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Salaries/Wages of \$138,530 and Expenses of \$545 (total of \$139,075). This is the level-funded budget as originally proposed by the Town Accountant. The Committee discussed Ms. Talbot's taking a cut in pay but not in hours. Ms. Casemyr felt the Committee should approve the budget with the 1.8% cut. Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 5 in favor and 3 opposed (Casemyr, Brown, Linnane), with 8 being present.

Board of Assessors, Dept. No. 11371, 11373

The Committee noted that the 1.8% cut was mostly from professional fees. Ms. Swadel did not come before the Committee to present her budget. Voting was deferred pending more information from Ms. Lown.

Treasurer/Collector, Dept. No. 11381, 11383

Ms. Casemyr moved to recommend Salaries/Wages of \$212,571 and Expenses of \$49,125 (total of \$261,696). Mr. Johnson noted that the \$20,000 reduction in line item 5243B had not been finalized yet. He recommended waiting until the contracts were final. The Committee felt the vote could be revised before Town Meeting if necessary. Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 7 in favor and 1 opposed (Johnson), with 8 being present.

Legal Department, Dept. No. 11511, 11513

Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Salaries/Wages of \$121,972 and Expenses of \$48,415 (total of \$170,387). The Committee noted that the 1.8% cut came primarily from the line item for outside council. Vote to approve the budget recommendation is unanimous, 8 in favor with 8 being present.

MIS/GIS

The Committee discussed the cut of the 4 hrs/wk part-time help, and felt the impact would not be severe. Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Salaries/Wages of \$139,346 and Expenses of \$175,480 (total of \$314,826). Vote to approve the budget recommendation is unanimous, 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Town Clerk, Dept. No. 11611, 11613

Westborough Advisory Finance Committee minutes
April 12, 2010

The Committee felt the 1.8% cut was too difficult, as Ms. Yendriga can't cut expenses, and she would lose her conferences and training. It was agreed that a cut would dramatically impact what is already a small budget. Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Salaries/Wages of \$183,353 and Expenses of \$4,350 (total of \$187,703 without the 1.8%). Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 7 in favor and 1 opposed (Casemyr), with 8 being present.

Election & Registration, Dept. No. 11621, 11623

The Committee noted that most savings were in salaries, so the cut would not have much impact. Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Salaries/Wages of \$16,910 and Expenses of \$19,655 (total of \$36,565). Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Conservation Commission

The Committee noted that the 1.8% cut was from salaries and was reluctant to recommend the cut. Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Salaries/Wages of \$39,004 and Expenses of \$1,185 (total of \$40,189). Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Planning Board, Dept. No. 11723

The Committee noted that this cut was out of expenses, which impact the economic development of the town. Mr. Robbins had not been comfortable with the cuts—and the Planning Board had a 50% cut last year. Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Salaries/Wages of \$201,930 and Expenses of \$5,302 (total of \$207,232). Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 7 in favor and 1 opposed (Casemyr), with 8 being present.

Board of Appeals, Dept. No. 11732, 11733

This budget is level-funded from last year. Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Salaries/Wages of \$12,183 and Expenses of \$1,610 (total of \$13,793). Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Regional Vocational School (Assabet)

Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Expenses of \$686,187. The Committee noted that the budget is down because enrollment is down. Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Veterans Services, Dept. No. 15431, 15433

Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Salaries/Wages of \$16,680 and Expenses of \$55,116 (total of \$71,796). Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Trustees of Soldiers Memorial, Dept. No. 15483

Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Expenses of \$2,800. Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Recreation Commission, Dept. No. 16201/16202, 16203

Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Salaries/Wages of \$186,336. Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 6 in favor and 2 opposed (Casemyr, Meachen), with 8 being present.

Historical Commission

The Committee noted that their original request had already cut 5.5% over the prior year. Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Salaries/Wages of \$18,400 and Expenses of \$5,725 (total of \$24,125). Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Country Club Operating, Dept. No. 60200

Westborough Advisory Finance Committee minutes
April 12, 2010

Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Salaries/Wages of \$7,310 and Expenses of \$456,430 (total of \$463,740). Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Debt-Principal & Interest, Dept. No. 17103, 17203

The Committee noted that this increase was due to the revised debt schedule, and had no effect on tax levy. Mr. Johnson moved to recommend General Fund Principal Debt Interest Expenses of \$9,525,793. Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Sewer O&M Debt Principal & Interest, Dept. No. 64305, 64306

Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Sewer Operations Salaries/Wages of \$645,593 and Expenses of \$318,521 (total of \$964,114). Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Debt & Interest Expenses of \$804,845. Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Water O&M Debt Principal & Interest, Dept. No. 64505, 64506

Mr. Johnson moved to recommend Operations & Maintenance Salaries/Wages of \$509,633 and Expenses of \$1,803,423 (total of \$2,313,056). Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Mr. Johnson moved to recommend 220 Debt & Interest Expenses of \$1,808,913. Vote to approve the budget recommendation is 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Comments and Concerns of Committee Members.

Mr. Arnold reminded the Committee that as final numbers come in, budgets can be revisited and amendments made.

Mr. Johnson urged the Committee to reflect on the impacts of the 1.8% cut as voting proceeds. Some departments will have difficulty functioning with the decreases, or some employees will have to take a cut in pay, or there will be longer processing times as a result of cuts.

Mr. Meachen added that town departments have been reducing expenses year after year, and felt the insurance changes had given us the flexibility to put some line items back in place.

Mr. Johnson warned the Committee that free cash should never be used to pay for budgetary expenses.

Ms. Casemyr reminded the Committee that in the past 2-3 years the town has been very close to levy capacity. She felt this left no leg room to run services. The community should take a hard line this year to adjust to the difficulties we'll be facing. Departments should be encouraged to become more efficient—limited means encourages innovation. She would like FY11 to introduce a little pain, in order to prepare for FY12.

Mr. Meachen added that the School budget will be harder next year, due to less money from the state. Also, since they only signed a 1-year contract, this will be another pressure on the budget next year.

Ms. Lucas noted that most departments came in level funded to begin with.

Mr. Brown felt we should be reducing expenses, but he doesn't like to cut people's salaries.

Adjournment

Mr. Johnson moved to adjourn the meeting at 9 p.m.