

Westborough Advisory Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting No. 1, FY2011
July 12, 2010

Approved
August 30, 2010

Members Present: John E. Arnold, Chair, Brigitte Casemyr, Jo Lown, Peter Allen, Ian Johnson, Kevin Cronin. Absent: Bill Linnane (arrived 7:30 p.m.). [Note: 2 openings awaiting Moderator appointment]

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

Call to Order/Open Forum

There were no requests to address the Committee.

Approval of Minutes – Meeting No. 32, June 28, 2010

Ms. Lown requested two amendments to the minutes. Mr. Johnson moved to accept the minutes as amended. The vote to approve the minutes was unanimous, 6 in favor with 6 being present.

Transfer Requests

Snow & Ice

The Committee considered two budget transfer requests to offset the deficit in the Snow Budget due to the many plow and sanding/salt operations through the course of the winter season.

Mr. Johnson moves to transfer from the FinCom Reserve Fund the sum of \$12,638.25 to Snow Wages Budget No. 14232-5105M. The vote to approve the budget transfer is unanimous, 6 in favor with 6 being present.

Mr. Johnson moves to transfer from the FinCom Reserve Fund the sum of \$128,152.41 to Snow Expense Budget No. 14233-5221A. The vote to approve the budget transfer is unanimous, 6 in favor with 6 being present.

Street Lights

The Committee considered a budget transfer request of \$443.20 which is due to an unforeseen increase in electricity charges. Mr. Johnson pointed out that there is an investigation now ongoing about how the Town is charged and how much, due to some concerns about lights which are not operating. Mr. Johnson moves to transfer from the FinCom Reserve Fund the amount of \$443.20 to Street Lights – Electricity Budget No. 14243-5212. The vote to approve the budget transfer is unanimous, 6 in favor with 6 being present.

Mr. Johnson summarized the current state of AFC membership and noted that Mr. Harrington, Town Moderator, is working on recruiting new members to complete the Committee.

AFC Survey Project

Ms. Casemyr reviewed her proposed Resident Survey Proposal through which the Committee would receive input from Town residents on a broad range of services and budget priorities. She invited the Committee to look at the sample questions and give feedback. Ms. Casemyr would like to have the survey on the Town website up and running in time to announce the survey at Special Town Meeting. There would then be a 30-day deadline to have the survey completed before Thanksgiving and results compiled before the Committee starts debating next year's budget.

Some caution was advised in the wording of the survey, to ensure it kept within the bounds of the Committee's purview. The Committee in general felt the survey was a good idea and should be used to

Westborough Advisory Finance Committee minutes
July 12, 2010

gauge the Town residents' priorities: what services do people want and are they willing to pay for? Committee members will go through the sample questions in the meantime and get back to Ms. Casemyr with comments/other questions. Mr. Arnold summarized the main points: the survey should be objective, not too detailed, focused on helping the Committee do its job, and shorter.

AFC Goals, Objectives, and Processes for FY2011

Mr. Arnold opened a discussion of how the Committee could better do its job. Mr. Johnson noted that the Committee has built up a solid reputation among the townspeople as an independent and rational voice, whose decisions are respected even if not always agreed with. Ms. Lown felt the Committee's key role is looking carefully at the information in ways individual members of the community aren't able to do. Mr. Cronin expressed some concern at the amount of information to absorb. The Committee agreed that the liaison role to various Town departments was valuable, and Mr. Linnane noted that this role could be extended, with the Committee keeping abreast of department developments even when budgets weren't the focus.

There was some discussion about the amount of data and information the Committee is required to review. Mr. Linnane felt the Town Manager and department managers could be relied on more, without the Committee getting involved in such detail. Mr. Johnson added that perhaps instead of going through the budget line item by line item, the liaisons could report back in summary, perhaps collaborating with the Town Manager. He thought some might be reluctant to be on the Committee due to the time commitments required. There should also be more delegating to reduce the demands on the Committee Chair, which can be overwhelming. Ms. Lown noted the great number of changes which impacted the Committee over the last two years. She felt the budget book was useful and important as a public document, but difficult to keep current.

Mr. Arnold noted the higher level of professionalism in the town departments as compared with the 1950s and 60s and felt the Committee would not want to micro-manage these managers or interfere with them doing their jobs. He urged the Committee to consider what would be the best way to keep up-to-date with the budget, streamlining to become more effective. He felt perhaps the minutes were more detailed than they needed to be. There was some discussion of whether the availability of online video of the Committee meetings obviated the need for more detailed written minutes.

Another suggestion for streamlining the Committee's process was to provide departments with questions to which they could prepare statements and answers prior to coming before the Committee. Such as, what are the key services provided by the recommended budget, what services are not provided which were provided in previous years, and what would be provided if more funding were available? Mr. Johnson liked the idea of consistent questions for each department and felt 45 minutes of the Committee's time with one department was too much.

Comments and Concerns of Committee Members.

Ms. Lown omitted at the last meeting to thank Assistant Town Manager Maryanne Bilodeau.

Mr. Arnold is to check whether the actual document need be attached to the minutes, or just be included in a document list.

Mr. Linnane reported that the Treatment Plant is moving ahead of schedule.

Mr. Arnold will wait until September to appoint new department liaisons until Mr. Harrington has appointed the rest of the members of the Committee. The next meeting of the AFC will be August 30th.

Adjournment

Ms. Casemyr moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 p.m.

Westborough Advisory Finance Committee minutes
July 12, 2010

Document List

Reserve Fund Transfer Requests for Snow Wages, Snow Expense, and Street Lights – Electricity.

Advisory Finance Committee Town of Westborough Resident Survey Proposal, by Brigitte Casemyr, July 2010.

Excerpt of Town Bylaws, Sections 4 and 5, summarized by Ms. Casemyr, July 12, 2010.