

Westborough Advisory Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting No. 12, FY2011
January 10, 2011

Approved
February 10, 2011

Members Present: John E. Arnold, Chair, Brigitte Casemyr, Bill Linnane, Jo Lown, Ian Johnson, Jim Tepper, Ed Behn. Absent: Kevin Cronin, Peter Allen.

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

Mr. Arnold welcomed the newest member of the Advisory Finance Committee, Ed Behn. Mr. Behn is a 30-year Westborough resident and was Scoutmaster of Troop #100 for five years. He is employed in information technology and software development, and looks forward to bringing his expense budgeting and capital budgeting expertise to the Committee.

Call to Order/Open Forum

There were no requests to address the Committee.

Approval of Minutes

Meeting No. 10, December 6, 2010

Mr. Johnson moved to accept the minutes. The vote to approve the minutes is unanimous, 7 in favor with 7 being present.

Meeting No. 11, December 27, 2010

Mr. Johnson moved to accept the minutes. The vote to approve the minutes is 6 in favor, 1 abstention (Mr. Tepper), with 7 being present.

AFC Preparations for Annual Town Meeting budget and article reviews

Review and consideration of 'Budget Background Information Request' document for approval

Mr. Arnold noted that the 'Budget Background Information Request' was to be submitted to the various Town departments prior to their meeting with the Committee. Ms. Lown proposed that a copy of each department's annual reports be requested by the Committee in advance of their publication in the booklet distributed at Town Meeting. This would avoid repeating information on the 'Information Request' already included in the annual report. Mr. Arnold is to ask Nidia for a copy as soon as possible after January 31.

Mr. Arnold noted that he had made some changes to the FY2012 Budget Background Information sheet to reflect points made at the last meeting, specifically to ask not only about each department's plans but the impact of those plans, and their efficiency. Mr. Arnold added that these questions were a first attempt, and the Committee would perhaps need to rephrase some questions going forward in order to get the best responses. The document was accepted as amended by consensus of the Committee.

Discuss process for communicating request to boards, committees, and departments

Mr. Arnold noted that he intended to email the Budget Background Information Request document and an explanation of its purpose to the Town's elected officials and Town Manager. Mr. Johnson felt the email was a heads-up for the elected officials and Town Manager, as they have oversight, and all other departments could be notified by their Committee liaisons. Ms. Lown preferred to have an official notice from the AFC to all departments, with liaisons following up to answer any questions. Mr. Arnold agreed to send an email to the appointing authorities giving a general outline of the request for information, with liaisons presenting the actual form to their respective departments. Mr. Linnane noted that this is not necessarily something new, just a better way of organizing information.

Review and consideration of “Department Liaison Worksheet” document for approval

Mr. Arnold noted that this document would be a “living document,” maintained by liaisons over time. He felt the annual reports did not provide the same level of detail regarding how each department is run and the services that each department provides, information which could help the Committee better focus their questions. Ms. Lown noted that liaisons should read their department’s annual report before meeting with them. Following up on a question, Mr. Arnold explained that liaisons are not intended to be advocates for their departments, but should understand the department in order to translate to the larger Committee what the department is actually saying and doing. Ms. Lown added that the liaison facilitates the flow of information from the Committee to the department, better preparing the department for its meeting with the Committee. The worksheet is accepted as amended, by consensus of the Committee.

Discuss process for gathering information during liaison meetings

Mr. Johnson felt each liaison should handle the distribution of this worksheet. Mr. Arnold noted that this document should be accessible to the whole Committee but was not sure how best to achieve this. The Committee agreed to figure out the details of sharing the information at the end of the current budget process. Mr. Linnane noted that the date should be on the form. Mr. Arnold agreed to put the ‘revision date’ on each of the two documents.

Review list of ‘open questions or topics’ about which the Committee would like additional information during its Town Meeting Preparation

Mr. Arnold asked for suggestions of items to be added to an ongoing list of information the Committee would like to have. He noted two items which the Committee has been asked about: unfunded obligations of retiree pensions, and health insurance information. Ms. Casemyr mentioned plans to improve the effectiveness of services, and felt more tasks should be posted online to keep the public informed. She noted that the survey had exposed a number of areas where respondents didn’t have the latest information, and felt residents’ questions could be addressed upfront if more information was published online. Ms. Lown mentioned the graphs which had been included in the Committee’s booklet in the past, which were helpful ways of presenting information: “Prior Year’s Expenditures” vs. “Appropriations,” for example, or “Actual Expenses” vs. “Appropriations.” Mr. Arnold noted that Mr. Allen had suggested including a graph showing how many dollars of a typical resident’s tax bill goes to which department’s services. He added that the Committee has 10 years’ worth of financial information that can be drawn upon to develop useful charts and comparisons. Mr. Behn noted the importance of this historical information to pinpoint trends and help to put things in perspective, so departments can see how they’re doing over time. He added that Town Census information could show the Town’s growth and be mapped back to expenditures. Mr. Arnold noted that Jim Malloy, Town Manager, has gathered some of this information. Mr. Behn felt that this kind of information should be kept in one place and edited as a “golden copy,” understood to be accurate and used in any analysis. Ms. Lown noted that the Committee’s figures should be reconciled prior to Town Meeting with the Town Accountant and the Assessor’s office. Mr. Arnold will circulate an amended document incorporating the Committee’s comments.

Discuss how we can better serve residents/voters

Ms. Casemyr shared with the Committee 25 suggestions from residents for improving communication. She felt that the AFC should clarify that it is not involved in union contracts or the school budget, and that all Committee members are appointed and unpaid. This information could easily be provided on the Town Web site. Another misunderstanding was library ‘underfunding’ discussed at the May 2010 Annual Town Meeting, which was more accurately falling short of a state funding requirement due to retirements. These things can be explained better before they lead to misunderstanding. Ms. Casemyr felt the Committee’s booklet should be expanded, giving more information, explanations, charts, rationale for votes, etc. She added that although much information is available online it is hard to find if you don’t know where to look. She felt venues for information should be expanded; perhaps a Facebook page for

the Committee would complement the Town Web site and provide another way to get information out to residents. Ms. Casemyr also mentioned publishing a monthly article in the local newspapers, giving residents a heads-up on the Spring/Annual Town Meeting. A video could explain how the AFC operates. Mr. Behn felt that, although there were benefits to looking at other avenues, there was also a benefit to having one central venue for information. Ms. Casemyr noted that there should be a link on the Town Web site to the Committee's recorded meetings on WestboroughTV.org. Finally, Ms. Casemyr expressed concern that the work needed was too much for the Town's small GIS department, and welcomed Committee members with Web site knowledge to help with the task.

Mr. Linnane noted that Jim Malloy was revising the Town Web site, and that these ideas could be brought to his attention. He added that some years ago Mr. Dodd (BOS) had a quarterly newsletter on the Town Web site. Finally, he felt that an explanation of the Library situation (underfunding referenced above) could be included in the Town Meeting booklet, as well as an explanation of why the AFC is not involved in union contracts. Mr. Tepper asked if residents' email addresses could be used to get information out, either in the form of a quarterly newsletter, or just an announcement of the survey results; he felt it was an effort to find the information on the Town Web site, and that the Committee had created a party without inviting anyone to it. Mr. Behn felt it would be helpful to find out how many residents had subscribed to receive information on the Town Web site. Mr. Johnson added that although communication is key, the Committee should be careful not to overstep its bounds, and should work through the channels of Town Manager and BOS where appropriate. Mr. Arnold noted that the Committee was not responsible for solving all communication problems.

Discuss or plan working session

Mr. Arnold noted the Committee's strengths/weaknesses exercise from an earlier meeting, and suggested having a special meeting to deliberate the big picture of how the Committee runs meetings during the budget and article reviews leading up to the Town Meeting. This meeting would also be for the training of the new Committee members. The Committee agreed this was a good idea. Mr. Arnold is to arrange a time and venue via email. The meeting will be posted as an Open Meeting.

Latest update on Town Budget schedule

Mr. Arnold informed the Committee that the Town Budget was running behind schedule. He noted that Mr. Malloy's spreadsheet, in its initial form, might have the Town Manager's recommendation in the column we typically use for the AFC recommendation. This will be fixed once the Town Manager's budget recommendation is done. Ms. Lown expressed concern that the Town Manager would have control of the AFC worksheet. Mr. Arnold will address this concern with Mr. Malloy. Ms. Lown felt the AFC's data should be kept separate. Mr. Arnold felt the draft budget would be ready in the next week.

Chairman, Committee Liaison, and Department Liaison Reports

Mr. Arnold noted that the Committee's own annual report is brief, highlighting major activities of the year, and will include a summary of the survey. The Committee should send additions or suggested edits/updates to Mr. Arnold. Mr. Johnson felt it would be beneficial to include a reminder of what the AFC is, what it does and what it does not do, and a summary of its charge.

Mr. Linnane informed the Committee of the Capital Expenditures Planning Committee meeting. The Fire Department has some needed items, some of which can be delayed. Regarding Building & Grounds, the front of the Town Hall needs painting again. A request has been made that the Facilities study not call for any renovations which would penetrate the new roof on the Forbes Building. The DPW are looking for three pieces of equipment. Regarding the Council on Aging, their study will have two parts: first to see what the needs are, and then to decide what is required of the building. The Library is in need of ductwork cleaning. Ms. Lown requested the minutes of the Capital Expenditure Planning Committee meeting.

Ms. Casemyr noted that the School Committee voted last week to increase kindergarten fees, albeit reluctantly. Ms. Lown wanted to know the total estimated increase in annual revenue from this increase.

Ms. Lown noted that the Municipal Building Committee is meeting this month to go over the architect's plans. The Trustees of Soldiers' Memorials meets on Friday. There will be a meeting with Chief Perron on Friday as well.

Mr. Linnane noted that the Wastewater Treatment meeting has been postponed to a week from Wednesday, January 19th.

Comments and Concerns of Committee Members

Mr. Linnane noted that some vehicles seem to be circulating between departments, and that there is a need to know whether this increases the total fleet, not just a particular department's fleet. Mr. Johnson noted that past Town Meeting booklets read "the Town's fleet." Mr. Arnold felt the Committee should have a list of Town vehicles more readily available and updated as changes are made.

Mr. Johnson will put in a request to get the Snow Budget via email rather than hard copies. Mr. Arnold explained that the AFC box in the mailroom contained the latest copies of the Beacon, the Appropriations Report, and the Newsletter of the Association of Town Finance Committees, if anyone is interested. Mr. Linnane requested that no one take the last copy from the file.

Adjournment

Ms. Casemyr moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 p.m. Vote to adjourn was 7 in favor, with 7 being present.

Document List

Edward Behn Resume.

2011 Budget Background Info Request document, from John Arnold.

2011 Department Liaison Worksheet, from John Arnold.

Westborough News Results Article, .pdf file, from Brigitte Casemyr.

Community Advocate Results Article, .pdf file, from Brigitte Casemyr.

2011 Budget Background Info Request Proposed addition, from Jo Lown.

AFC Annual Report 2007, from Jo Lown.

AFC Annual Report 2008, from Jo Lown.

AFC Annual Report 2009, from Jo Lown.