

Westborough Advisory Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting No. 26, FY2013
April 1, 2013

Approved
May 6, 2013

Members Present: Ed Behn, Chair, Peter Allen, John E. Arnold, Lisa Blazejewski, Sharon Kaiser, J. J. Malone, Kathy Rosenblum Senie, Jim Tepper, Gary Wells. Absent: None.

At 7:00 p.m. Mr. Behn 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. 25, March 16, 2013 (ATM)

Mr. Arnold moved to accept the minutes. The vote to approve the minutes is 9 in favor with 9 being present.

Open Forum

New to Westborough, resident Santi Mulukutla was present to express her interest in becoming involved in the Committee's work in some way. An electrical engineer by degree, she presently works in the private sector integrating business and technology. Ms. Rosenblum Senie suggested informing Town Moderator Joe Harrington of this potential candidate for the Finance Committee.

Review and discussion of the Committee's process in preparing for the 2013 ATM

Mr. Behn asked members to comment on the Committee's process leading up to the Annual Town Meeting (ATM). Mr. Wells noted that the new budget book format was very helpful. Ms. Blazejewski also approved of the new GAO format, as well as the new Revenue & Expenditures spreadsheet. Mr. Malone felt improvement was still needed on the School budget. Mr. Allen pointed out that the Committee should schedule discussions of any Planning Board-related issues in advance of the public hearings, so Committee concerns can be communicated while there is still time to make adjustments to articles or motions. Ms. Kaiser felt presentations at Town Meeting should be more succinct, and that long town meetings deter residents from attending. Mr. Arnold felt the Committee had done very well scheduling only certain departments, and relying more on liaisons to have questions answered, which had reduced the number of meetings. He also suggested the Committee meet during the week prior to Town Meeting, to review any presentations. Mr. Tepper expressed frustration that there was not enough time to deal with major issues, articles, and budgets; he noted there were no significant changes to the budget over the last three years. He felt residents looked to the Committee to make an impact on the budget; but there was no such impact. Mr. Behn noted that the off season could be used to meet with large departments to better understand those budgets. Mr. Arnold felt the booklet should be formatted to include footnotes on the same page they are referenced in the report. Mr. Tepper suggested residents be notified about the report's availability, perhaps via email, as most questions asked at Town Meeting could have been answered by reading the report. Mr. Behn thanked the Committee for its work.

Committee's work in the upcoming months

Mr. Behn noted two issues for the Committee's focus. First, the OPEB issue; in January the state government released a report by a special commission which had been tasked to study retiree health care and other non-pension benefits at the state and municipal level. Westborough has about \$50 million in unfunded liabilities; the report indicates changes should be made for new employees, and timing issues addressed for existing employees, to address this problem. He will distribute documents to the Committee on this issue. Ms. Rosenblum Senie would like to ensure enough time is given to digest this

information before further discussion. Mr. Arnold noted that Northborough is suggesting using the meals tax to start funding their OPEB. Also, that the Committee requires the input of those guiding town financing strategy on the best way to approach this issue. Mr. Behn noted that though funding is not legally required at present, it is possible in the future that this liability could impact the town's credit rating.

The second issue is the School budget. Mr. Malone felt the Committee needed to determine how much detail is required, and referred to the Assabet booklet as an example. Mr. Arnold felt it would be helpful to sketch an outline of a format which included all information the Committee would like to have, and then ask the School Department to use this format to provide their information. Mr. Malone also wanted the same type of information received about other town departments, such as previous year's actuals and year-to-date information. Mr. Behn noted that the School department uses MUNIS, the same town accounting system used by Town Accountant Leah Talbot; much of the detail desired could already be captured and available in the system.

Mr. Malone noted two other possible projects: one, the revision of the FINCOM bylaw, the other an examination of the Capital Expenditures Committee setup. Ms. Blazejewski felt Fall Town Meeting would be appropriate for a bylaw article. She also wanted the Committee to consider introducing an article to change Town Meeting back to May. Mr. Behn noted Town Assessor Linda Swadel's frustration that a large percentage of new growth comes from personal property; however, those numbers are not available in time for March Town Meeting. Even a mid-April town meeting would be preferable.

Ms. Rosenblum Senie felt it was important for the Committee to quickly identify a process for developing the proposed School budget format. Mr. Wells has an analysis of the School department budget which he will make available to the Committee. Mr. Arnold felt that this analysis, plus the Assabet example, and the information presently provided by the School department, could assist in developing a format for what information the Committee would like to see.

Mr. Behn noted that members might want to attend Wayland's town meeting to observe their electronic voting system.

Chairman, Committee Liaison, and Department Liaison Reports

Mr. Behn will send members his updated paper on personal property.

Mr. Wells will send members another draft of the memo to the Building Department asking for clarification on that department's performance measures. He is also working on an article for Fall Town Meeting to increase the DPW's Snow & Ice budget, to bring it in line with actual expenditures. He plans a future presentation to the Committee of a budget calculator he has developed utilizing the DPW budget, which takes actual expenditures and CPI values to generate a theoretical budget number.

Mr. Allen reported that the Municipal Building Committee continues to meet every Monday morning, getting bid specifications finalized for the new Fire Station and Town Hall renovation. A Planning Board meeting will address concerns by the School Department and taxpayers about Westborough Woods, a 250-apartment development. Mr. Behn felt this was a Zoning Board of Appeals issue.

Mr. Tepper noted that Heery has begun their process on the Gibbons renovation project.

Comments and Concerns of Committee Members

Mr. Wells felt the official evaluation in November should be used instead of March evaluations; if this had been done the tax rate would have increased only 1.63% rather than 2.46%, while still raising the same amount of money. Mr. Arnold noted that historically the most recent numbers are used.

Mr. Tepper encouraged residents to attend Spring Festival, 4-5 May.

Adjournment

Mr. Arnold moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:38 p.m. Vote to adjourn was 9 in favor, with 9 being present.

Document List

Financial Revenue & Expenditures with School budget as voted spreadsheet.
March 2013 Appropriations Report.