

Members Present: Gary Wells, Chair, Lisa Blazejewski, Ed Behn, Peter Allen, Tara Howard, Hank Rauch, Beth Blumberg. Absent: Jim Tepper, Sharon Kaiser.

At 7:03 p.m. Mr. Wells called the meeting to order in the Fire Station Meeting Room.

Approval of Past Minutes:

There were no minutes to approve.

ATM preparation and related items:

ATM – Budget Items: Mr. Wells wanted to spend tonight’s meeting reviewing the budget and getting footnotes in to the Report & Recommendations book. He also wanted to segregate budget line items that can be voted on right away, and then leave the departments with questions for individual review later on.

Mr. Wells read through the budgets for the various Town departments and asked Committee members to indicate “yes” or “no” as to whether there were questions or not:

Moderator – No

Selectmen – Yes (Behn)

Finance Committee – No

Accountant – No

Assessors – No

Treasurer/Collector – No

Legal – No – Ms. Howard verified that we are going w/outside counsel. Ms. Blumberg asked where the payments were coming from. It was noted that this budget went from “Salary & Wages” to an “Expenses” line item.

Personnel Board – No

MIS/GIS – No

Communications – No

Central Purchasing – No

Town Clerk- No

Elections & Registration – No

Conservation Commission – No

Planning Board – No

Zoning Board of Appeals – No

Buildings & Grounds – No

Town Insurances – Yes (Wells & Behn)

Police Department – No

Fire & Ambulance Department – Yes (Behn)

Building Department – No

Weights & Measures – No

Animal Control – No

Assabet Valley Vocational – Yes – Mr. Allen mentioned that he would like to get more detail.

Department of Public Works – No

Snow & Ice Removal – Yes (Blumberg)

Street Light Account – No

Sanitary Landfill – Yes (Behn)

Health Dept – Yes – Ms. Blumberg asked about the AFC Reserve Fund transfer.

Council on Aging – Yes – It was noted that the AFC is meeting with the COA tomorrow night.

Youth & Family Services – No

Veterans Services – No
Trustees Soldiers Memorials – No
Library – Yes (Behn)
Recreation Department – Yes – Ms. Howard asked about the salary increase.
Cultural Council – No
Historical Commission – Yes – Committee had questions.
Debt – No
Economic Development – Yes – Committee felt this department merited discussion.
Sewer Enterprise - No
Wastewater Treatment Plant – It was noted that Jack Goodhall and Mike Stanton were meeting with the AFC on 3/2 to provide an update on operations.
Water Enterprise – No
Country Club Enterprise – No
School Department – Yes

There was discussion about STEP and COLA increases. The graph on page 5 of the warrant was referenced for non-union employees. It was noted that this article falls under the responsibility of the Town Manager's office. Mr. Behn mentioned that Town employees are hired at the low end of the pay scale and then raises come along with STEP and COLA increases. Mr. Wells suggested that the Committee vote to defeat Article 6 and send it back to the Personnel Board and Town Manager for review, and they can bring it up again at the Special Town Meeting in October.

Printable Budget Footnotes: Mr. Wells read through each department for appropriate footnotes regarding budget changes. Mr. Behn felt that any department who had an increase greater than 3% should have a footnote.

Town Moderator – Nothing to footnote.
Selectmen – Footnote regarding \$20,000 proposal for staff professional development for Town employees.
AFC – Footnote for STEP and COLA increase to wages. Also, there should be a footnote for planned cost savings on printing since we are printing fewer documents.
Accountant – Nothing to footnote.
Assessors – It was noted that there was a new hire. Also, there should be a footnote for the increase to expenses.
Treasurer – There should be a footnote for increase to wages due to STEP/COLA, and also an increase to expenses.
Legal – There should be a footnote for change from in-house counsel to outside counsel.
Personnel Board – There should be a footnote indicating that tuition reimbursement is up.
MIS/GIS – There should be a footnote regarding the increase to wages.
Communications – Nothing to footnote.
Central Purchasing – Nothing to footnote.
Town Clerk – Expenses should have a footnote.
Elections – There should be a footnote recognizing overage in printing costs that was moved from Elections & Registration to Town Clerk due to an extra election. Ms. Howard will check with Town Clerk, Wendy Mickel, as to what the cost savings might be from centralizing voting at the high school and not having multiple sites.
Conservation Commission – There should be a footnote for the standard STEP/COLA increase to wages.
Planning Board – There should be a footnote for the standard STEP/COLA increase to wages and also a footnote for the increase to expenses.
Zoning Board of Appeals – There should be a footnote for an increase to expenses due to an increase in legal notices.
Buildings & Grounds – There should be a footnote for the increase to expenses.
Town Insurances – It was mentioned that medical insurance is going up. Mr. Malloy forecasted a 6% increase but Tufts came back with an 8.5% increase. They are still in the process of negotiating the new rates.
Police Department – Nothing to footnote.

Fire & Ambulance Department – There should be a footnote for the increase to expenses due to higher electric and heating costs in the new building.
Building Department – There should be a footnote to wages for adding a part time building inspector.
Weights & Measures – Nothing to footnote.
Animal Control – Nothing to footnote.
Assabet Valley Vocational – The Committee would like enrollment figures for FY15 and FY16.
Department of Public Works – There should be a footnote for the standard STEP/COLA increase to wages.
Snow & Ice Removal – There should be a footnote that increases reflect actual experience over time.
Street Light Account – There should be a footnote regarding net metering credits.
Sanitary Landfill – There should be a footnote on why there is a decrease to expenses.
Health Department – There should be a footnote to wages for adding a part time health inspector.
Council on Aging – There should be a footnote regarding the COA's request for an additional bus driver.
Youth & Family Services – Nothing to footnote.
Veterans Services – There should be a footnote that this department is now operated as a regional service.
Trustees Soldiers Memorials – Nothing to footnote.
Library – There should be a footnote regarding the request for a new Teen librarian, and also explaining the 15% requirement for materials in order to receive State aid under expenses.
Recreation Department – There should be a footnote for the standard STEP/COLA increase to wages.
Cultural Council – Nothing to footnote.
Historical Commission – There should be a footnote regarding their Administrative Assistant.
Debt – Nothing to footnote.
Economic Development – There should be a footnote regarding the request for a full time employee.
Sewer Enterprise – Nothing to footnote.
Wastewater Treatment Plant – There should be a footnote regarding net metering credits.
Water Enterprise – There should be a footnote regarding the decrease to debt.
Country Club Enterprise – There should be a footnote for the standard STEP/COLA increase to wages.

Mr. Wells will correct the footnotes and send out a revised copy to the Committee for a final check.

Current R&E Report/Current Transfer Report: Mr. Wells handed out a current Revenue & Expenditures Report for FY16 to Committee members. He mentioned that Mr. Behn has spent a lot of time with Town Accountant, Leah Talbot, in getting the numbers reconciled. Mr. Wells pointed out that these numbers are as close as we are going to get to final numbers but they are still estimates. He noted that we won't know final numbers until Town Meeting in October. Mr. Wells mentioned that Town Assessor, Linda Swadel, was still waiting for the values on a couple of big properties in town, which are due March 1st. Mr. Wells indicated that currently the increase to the average tax bill is around 3.66%, or almost \$300 per household. Mr. Wells mentioned that the average home value is up approximately 5%. Mr. Behn pointed out that housing is going up faster than industry and business. Mr. Wells referenced the back side of the R&E where the transfers report is located. Mr. Wells noted that he left Article 4 and 8C open (blank), and then reviewed the rest of the report. It was mentioned that there is a slight discrepancy between the Free Cash summary and R&E report for 2015 ATM transfers (\$20). There was some discussion about OPEB (Other Post-Employment Benefits) funding. Mr. Behn felt there should be a footnote on OPEB. Mr. Wells presented a "Proposed Expanded Format" of the R&E report and asked for Committee member's opinions. Mr. Behn asked why OPEB was placed under Town Expenditures since some of that amount is driven by the schools. Mr. Wells said he could break out the OPEB amount and disperse it between the Town and schools. Mr. Rauch asked about the Enterprise Funds and wondered if there should be an explanation as to how they are accounted for. On the back of the R&E report in the expanded format, Mr. Wells said that he plugged numbers in starting with the schools and the \$495,000 credit from the reserve funds. Mr. Wells mentioned that if the schools gave that back, and we reduced funding to OPEB from \$1.1 million to \$1 million, and then funded the amount of \$250,000 for the AFC Reserve Fund from free cash, we could save approximately \$750,000, which is the amount we are over budget. He wanted to throw that out for Committee members to think about but he didn't want to get in to a debate tonight.

Discussion returned to the format of the R&E report. Mr. Behn mentioned that he re-did the format about two years ago to streamline the report and make it easier for voters to read. There was discussion over giving too much detail on the R&E report. Mr. Rauch felt that at this stage there wasn't much anyone could do, and if someone wanted to affect the numbers, they should have done that in the beginning of the process. Mr. Wells thought that if he provided more detail it might eliminate questions at Town Meeting since a lot of time is spent educating voters on Town Meeting floor. Mr. Wells suggested that Committee members consider the expanded format versus the current version of the R&E report. Mr. Rauch pointed out that numbers provided in the expanded version would need to be verified if we are providing detail and breaking out information. Ms. Blumberg felt the expanded version was more confusing to read. After some discussion, Committee members seemed to like the current format.

ATM – Warrant Articles: Review questionable warrant articles and set aside for debate and discussion. Mr. Wells read through the articles in the warrant to identify those with questions and asked Committee members to indicate “yes” or “no” if an article required further review:

Article 1 – No

Article 2 – No

Article 3 – No

Article 4 – Yes – need final values. Mr. Wells mentioned that this is where we may fund snow and ice directly,

Article 5 – Yes – Mr. Behn wanted clarification on the effect reclassification had on salaries this year and long term – beyond standard STEP and COLA increases.

Article 6 – Yes – Mr. Wells felt there should be a longer range before an employee was at their salary maximum and wanted smaller STEP increases. He thought 7 years was too short for an employee to already be at the maximum end of their salary range.

Article 7 – No

Article 8 – Yes – Mr. Wells would like to see the \$250,000 for the AFC Reserve Fund coming from Free Cash rather than as a Raise and Appropriate.

Article 9 – No – Mr. Behn mentioned that this article corrects the amount received for Chapter 90 funds for last year, since it increased, and also appropriates the money for the upcoming fiscal year.

Article 10 – YES

Article 11 – No – it was noted that this article only approves that the Town can borrow the money needed for the new street sweeper.

Article 12 – Yes – it was noted that these items will be funded out of Free Cash or Retained Earnings. Mr. Allen brought up voting against borrowing for the sweeper in Article 11, and instead voting to purchase the street sweeper entirely with Free Cash. Mr. Behn pointed out that the plan is to pay back what is borrowed out of Free Cash over five years at a short term interest rate of 1%. Mr. Allen mentioned Article 12L for \$120,000 and proposed putting off - for another year - the money that is being set aside for the new fire trucks. Ms. Blazejewski was concerned that the Town will never be able to save toward the new fire trucks if we keep putting it off.

Article 13 – No

Article 14 – No

Article 15 – No

Article 16 – Yes – there was a question as to what the \$192 is for.

Article 17 – Yes – there was a question as to whether the \$50,000 allocated last year can be used for an Administrative Assistant.

Article 18 – No – Ms. Blazejewski noted that these funds are coming out of retained earnings and not from taxpayers.

Article 19 – No

Article 20 – No

Article 21 – No

Article 22 – No

Article 23 – No – it was noted that the change to the Senior Tax Work Off program was because minimum wage went up.

Article 24 – No – this article is similar to Article 23 except it concerns veterans.

Article 25 – No – it was mentioned that monies collected and spent on legal expenses and titles will go in and out of this fund and not jeopardize the Treasurer's budget.

Article 26 – No

Article 27 – Yes – this article involves the Spurr House, and Committee members felt this issue will most likely involve a long discussion. It was noted that the Town Manager has jurisdiction over all town buildings and that he had the Spurr House properly winterized since it is a surplus property. There was a discussion about the heat and the possibility that the fire alarm may not work if the interior temperature goes below freezing, which is why the neighbors want the heat back on. Mr. Rauch felt that, at the advice of the Fire Chief, the Town Manager should take action if there is a concern. There was mention that more details and further clarification was needed. Mr. Behn said that this article involved two issues. The first issue had to do with the heat since the neighbors are concerned about a fire that could destroy their homes if the fire alarm isn't working. Mr. Behn wondered if there were other town buildings that have been winterized that are located next to other buildings or residential properties. The second issue was appointing a committee to look in to other uses for this property. Mr. Rauch mentioned the lengthy Town process that is necessary in order to dispose of a property, and also the State process. Mr. Behn agreed and pointed out that money would need to be requested at Town Meeting in order to make any changes to that property. The Committee was in agreement that the Town Moderator should not appoint a committee and instead it should be the Selectmen if a committee is needed. Mr. Allen was concerned that the AFC was overstepping their duties. He pointed out that the AFC's job is to recommend to residents – as taxpayers – on how to vote. He felt that the citizen's who filed this article should get up at Town Meeting and address any concerns or questions.

Captain Bob Rand stopped by so Mr. Behn took the opportunity to ask him about Article 16 and what the \$192.30 was for the 10T GVW Truck for the Fire Department. Captain Rand explained that it was for items to add to this vehicle so it is "fitted out". He also mentioned that the \$2,962.95 was a balance left over that could be reallocated since they no longer needed it.

Chairman, Committee Liaison, and Department Liaison Reports

None

Comments and Concerns – Committee Members

None

Public Reminders for Viewers

None

Adjournment

Mr. Rauch made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:00 p.m. The vote to adjourn was 7-0-0 in favor, with 7 being present.

Document List

Financial Revenue & Expenditure Estimates for FY2016 Report – dated 2/25/15

Financial R & E Estimates for FY2016 Report – Proposed Expanded Format – Gary Wells

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica Thomas
AFC Administrative Assistant