

Westborough Advisory Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting No. 16 FY2007
March 26, 2007

Approved
April 2, 2007

Members Present: Ian Johnson, Chair, Judy Lucas, Cliff Watts, Ronn Moody, J. J. Malone, Jo Lown, Polly Howard, John Arnold, Carolyn Spring (arrived 7:10 p.m.). Absent: None.

At 7:02 p.m. Mr. Johnson called the meeting to order in the Selectmen's Meeting Room.

Open Forum

There were no requests to address the Committee.

Approval of minutes – Meeting No. 15, March 22, 2007

Discussion and Approval of the minutes was tabled until March 29 meeting.

Liaison Updates

Ms. Lucas reported on the last School Committee meeting. Dr. Towle gave a briefing on her revised budget and the rest of the meeting was a discussion of the changes. Proposed changes include:

- Eliminate proposed Mill Pond Grade 4 teacher
- Eliminate proposed Elementary Special Education teacher
- Eliminate proposed paraprofessionals (fill with transfers)
- Eliminate proposed Mill Pond E.D.B.D. teacher
- Eliminate current Fales Kindergarten teacher (ratio still 18:1)
- Reduce utility account with audit
- Reduce SPED tuition contingency from \$150,000 to \$100,000
- Eliminate one secretarial position in Central Office with reorganization
- Include non-union raises

These changes reduce the proposed budget request by \$234,588, to \$35,437,969. There was discussion about the proposed Wellness Program, with concerns voiced about future cost and system-wide curriculum review. Dr. Olson was not present at the meeting so discussion of the utility account was tabled. Elimination of the Activity Fee was discussed again, with the School Committee voicing concern about the loss of that revenue.

Ms. Lucas and Ms. Howard will meet with Mr. Carlo of the Assabet Valley Regional Technical School District tomorrow.

Budget Review – Building Commissioner

Joseph Inman,, Building Commissioner/Zoning Enforcement Officer, presented the budget proposal for FY2008 for \$283,403, an increase of \$6,131 over last year. Salary/Wages increases include only the cost of living increase as the 3 employees are at maximum grade. Increases in expenses are:

- Line 5219 Professional Services. Increase of \$1,062. Includes a 3% contractual increase for the contracted wiring inspector, and increases for the Assistant Wiring Inspector and the Assistant Plumbing Inspector.
- Line 5223 Office Supplies. Increase of \$300. This line has historically been under-budgeted, and the increase reflects actual costs.

Receipts for this department, from Permit fees, were \$598,522 for 2006.

Mr. Inman reported that the department has been very busy. When residential building decreases, commercial increases. Mr. Watts asked if resources were adequate. Mr. Inman says yes, but if the Electrical Inspector retires this will cause a budget increase.

Mr. Johnson asked about the estimated receipts. Rates were increased in 2005, and the total collected is estimated to remain the same for 2007.

Mr. Watts asked if fees are level all year. Mr. Inman explained that contractors pay fees all at once for several buildings in a project. The permit fees for six buildings at Downtown Crossing were paid two years ago although the buildings have not been built.

Citizen Request – Len Mead

Mr. Mead would like to ask the AFC to provide better disclosure on multi-year contract obligations at Annual Town Meeting. He determined that over ½ of the town's operating budget is spent through union contracts for police, firefighters, teachers, and other town unions and noted that retiree health benefits have increased.

Mr. Mead would like information in the first year of a negotiated contract about step raises, paid holidays, and other benefits. Mr. Mead suggested that the unions be asked to provide this information. Mr. Mead has determined that Westborough taxes are 37% higher than the state average which places us 35th of 351 towns in the state. Property taxes have increased 50% over the last five years. Mr. Mead believes that disclosure about these items will increase attendance at ATM, and give town negotiators more ammunition in future contract negotiations with the unions.

Dr. Malone pointed out that the AFC does not and should not deal directly with the unions, and that they are not responsible to the AFC.

Mr. Arnold noted that the AFC reports to the town and that the AFC has access to all public records and makes recommendations on budget proposals.

Mr. Moody pointed out that each department is in control of how the money is spent, not the AFC.

Ms. Spring thought that ATM voters would likely support a budget for schools, fire, and police even if they were unhappy with the union contract because they would not want to suspend any of these services.

Ms. Lown suggested that we can list what year of a negotiated contract this is, and the costs of insurance for the town as a whole.

Mr. Johnson thanked Mr. Mead for coming and giving his input.

Mr. Vincent Borkowski added that at town meeting most people have blank expressions on their faces when voting on budgets. More information may help this.

Budget Review – Legal Department

Gregory Franks, Town Counsel, presented the budget proposal for FY2008 for \$181,953, an increase of \$6,953 over last year. This is Mr. Franks' first budget, as he started in this position last October.

Mr. Watts asked if there was any legal exposure going forward. Mr. Franks foresees no legal issues with large potential judgements at this time. Currently there are some pothole issues, etc., which the insurance companies handle.

Dr. Malone asked about Line 5243 Miscellaneous Services. Mr. Franks explained that this covers his Bar dues, social law library fees, etc. Dr. Malone asked about Line 5219A Legal Services. Mr. Franks explained that this covers outside legal services for specific expertise or consultation. Dr. Malone asked if this could be decreased. Mr. Franks agreed that \$60,000 (decrease from \$82,076) would probably be adequate, and stated that he hopes not to spend even that much.

Mr. Johnson noted that this year's budget for Line 5219A Legal Services is almost used up. Mr. Danis replied that there is \$12,000 left in the budget and it will hopefully cover the rest of the year.

Discussion with Town Coordinator

Mr. Danis commented on each Article for which he is the sponsor in the warrant (draft dated March 26).

Article 2: This is standard language.

Article 3: This year the town will dissolve the School Building Committee.

Article 4: This includes a transfer of \$52,851 from Water Retained Earnings to FY2007 Water Budget to cover an outstanding electrical bill. Mr. Danis would like the AFC to transfer \$50,000 in funds from the Water Enterprise reserve fund to cover the rest of this bill. Mr. Moody suggested using the Sewer reserve fund to cover the requested \$25,000 transfer from Sewer Retained Earnings to FY2007 Sewer Debt and Interest Budget. Mr. Danis will remove that transfer from the warrant.

Article 5: There are three prior year bills which came in too late to pay from current funds, totaling \$3,416.

Article 9: Regularly Recurring Articles have already been discussed with each department.

Article 14: This is to increase the size of the Municipal Building Committee from five to seven residents of the town in order to cover the amount of time necessary for them to complete their tasks.

Article 30: The Nathan Fisher House Property has many restrictions on it, making the property difficult to transfer. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has declined to accept the transfer to state ownership. In order for the town to dispose of the property the restrictions must be lifted.

Article 33: Mr. Danis would like to move Annual Town Meeting to Monday night in an effort to increase attendance. Data from March and May meetings, when there has not been a major article under discussion, is the same. Mr. Danis feels that beginning the meeting on Saturday is difficult for many people to attend as it conflicts with many other family activities.

Article 36: This article would allow deferral of taxes due for members of the National Guard and Reserves while on active duty outside the country, and for a period of 180 days after that service. This was requested by George A. Perry III, Veterans Agent / Director Veterans Services, and Mr. Danis feels it should be done. Deferred taxes would include all taxes (usually property and excise taxes.) Mr. Danis does not think this would include any town residents at this time.

Mr. Danis noted that Article 7 Amend Section 25 Wage and Salary Schedule (Personnel Board) does include the amounts for step increases. Mr. Danis also reported that the Recap Report produced by the Town Accountant will be updated by Thursday evening.

Liaison Updates

Dr. Malone has spoken with Leah Talbot and Henry Danis as mentioned during budget review.

Ms. Lown reported that Carolyn Delude, Library, has contacted the Sheriff's Office about using the Community Service Program to do painting at the Library and she will continue to follow up. She is still waiting for a third bid on replacing the air tank. She has also prepared a handout on Library Trust Funds and the justification for putting wireless internet in the library building. Mr. Johnson will speak to Ms. Savignac about the Library Trust Funds.

Ms. Howard gave several schedule notes.

Mr. Johnson will schedule time to vote on some budgets for the April 2 meeting.

Comments and concerns of Committee members

Mr. Johnson noted that Ms. Lown is scheduled to attend the School Committee meeting on Wednesday, but that other members of the AFC would be welcomed as well.

Adjournment

At 8:41 p.m. Mr. Watts moved to adjourn the meeting. The vote to adjourn was unanimous (9 present and in favor).