

FinCom Meeting, February 21, 2008

Meeting was attended by Lisa Call, Frank H., Bob Brown, Larry Pape, John Kilkoyn, Matt Emsley, Terri Ackerman, Donny Murray, Tony Zahariadis, Dave Favreau, Police Chief Gary Chamberland, Louis Massa, Bill Tuttle, Chuck Ripa and Bruce Turner

Previous minutes were reviewed and approved.

Terri Ackerman further explained 4.55% increases. This is a combination of step and COLA increases. Terri also reviewed a new format to present the budget at town meeting. This would most likely replace page 6 of the Town Warrant with the goal of providing more detail and less confusion.

Discussion held on who would be the liaison to the WRSD as Lisa is not eligible. Discussion tabled until next week.

Don Murray spoke on behalf of the Board of Selectmen. Gates Terrace property is not resolved yet, and he has no specific time frame. The sale should be about \$30,000 which will cover expenses and back taxes. Net gain is expected. Mr. Murray also requested that the FinCom consider raising the BOS stipend to \$2000 per selectman.

Tony Zahariadis responding to questions. All gasoline budget lines have been moved to the DPW budget. He reports to the BOS though day-to-day issues go through Terri. Maybe a charter change would be beneficial. He also reported that there is a need for an alternate inspector. Previously he had an agreement with Clinton, however, that person has since left Clinton. He approached Lancaster, West Boylston, as well as Clinton, and each town is unavailable. The need is urgent, as if an inspector is requested and no one goes, there is a liability issue to the town.

Dave Favreau reported on behalf of the Board of Health to answer questions. He stressed the importance of the Associate Health Agent. He also clarified the difference between the Animal Control Officer and the Animal Inspector. The inspector reports to the State and handles agricultural situations under the BOH. The BOH is proposing to have an article at town meeting to require a stable license fee of \$20. This is per stable, not per animal housed in said stable. FinCom moved and passed to support article. Board of Health will present the article for review.

Chief Gary Chamberland reported on Louis Massa's role as is and the need to increase his hours to 20. He is requesting a change from casual part-time to regular part-time to include benefits. He presented a breakdown of Louis's duty and time on the job, and he already is working over 20 hours a week. The concern is having another part time employee receiving benefits with a total cost greater than his/her salary. The Chief did not support this change last year, though after reviewing another year's history of the position, feels now it is the right change to make. Frank asked if there could possibly be a change in the insurance split of new employees to 75% and 25%. Currently town employees only pay 10% of his/her insurance cost. What other options are there? One suggested would be to pay a stipend to help Louis pay for his own insurance. Right

now Louis also works for Princeton. Would they be willing to pay half of his benefits? Terri says right now, no. If Sterling hired Louis with more hours, and he is available to Sterling 24/7, and called to Princeton, we could have Princeton pay us a fee per call to use Louis. Regardless of decision, this position would have to go through the Personnel Board. Will continue after March 10<sup>th</sup>.

Chuck Ripa reviewed the DPW budget with FinCom. Original draft is very conservative. Chuck has not had a chance to look at it since Jan. 11. He explained how a typical winter includes 10 – 15 black ice incidents, 4 – 8 mediocre storms and 1 -2 large storms. This year snow and ice will exceed \$100,000. T.A would like to remove this line item from the DPW budget. Discussed WRSD refunding plowing of the schools. In negotiations regarding a new contract at the moment. T.A. says we will not renew as is. Line painting has been added as its own line item as it is not included with Ch. 90 money, unless the entire road is new or has been replaced. There is a possible deal with the light department to use their men for tree removal. Chuck feels the biggest danger to residents is overgrown trees. Cost is \$1500/day for a private contractor, and now only \$10,000 is budgeted. Deal with Light Dept. is best case scenario. Chuck also stated that roads are in tough shape. All Ch. 90 funds for 3 years has gone to building and FY08, though not received, is already slated for building as well. He feels that Ch. 90 funds should only be used for roads. Many roads that would have only needed re-paving now need to tearing up, draining and re-paving. Currently, cost of building stands at \$1,379,000 and there should not be any more changes. Matt asked if much of the increase for DPW budget is due to the new building. Chuck reiterated that he is being conservative with many unknown numbers. New building is 3700 more square feet and will cost more to operate. Discussion followed regarding increase in operating cost to other new buildings in town, including systematic problems with the fire station. Chuck insists that, even though lowest bidder gets the contract, if the specs of the project are specific, unrealistic bids are not submitted. Regarding wages, Terri asked if all the guys are getting step increases and Chucks replied, “Not necessarily.” Chuck will try to project costs for the next year the best he can noting that furniture for the new building was never included in the overall cost. He also agreed to adding the SPARC pump to the DPW budget.

Regarding Water Enterprise, it is reported that the Nashoba River watershed well project is completed and operational. In FY 09, will be flushing the entire town and this requires more electricity. Revenue should be \$858,000 and budgeted items equal \$853,000. Water rates will increase 12% starting July 1. It was stated that even with the increase, the rates are still lower than surrounding towns.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30