

January 17th, Finance Committee meeting started at 7:55.

Meeting was attended by Larry Pape, Frank H., Matt Emsley, John Potter, Lisa Call, John Kilkoyne, Bob Brown, Terri Ackerman, Bruce Turner, Donna Couture, Dick Shepard, and a few others.

Building Needs discussion is being rescheduled as Shirley has the flu.

Larry requested history on departments as to illustrate which ones are consistently over or under-budgeting. Donna said that she could go back a few years and put spread sheets together to show this.

Terri lead a discussion regarding increased legal costs. The Fire Department unionizing is a big factor. Mr. Potter asked if a sit down with Dave Hurlbut might help this. FinCom questions how this may not really be in the best interest of the fire department. Terri reiterates that it is not her or our job to intervene in this. Sewer systems are another place with increased legal costs though here the town will be reimbursed about \$4,000. Increases also are due to post retirement benefits, estimating insurance cost increases and 765 medicare. Potential liability is about \$5 – 6,000.

Terri also is requesting another copier for the Town Hall and presented leasing and buying quotes. Discussion followed regarding service contracts and could the town have one contract for all copiers as a 'Site Contract'. FinCom voted to recommend buying the copier as well as a network card. Copier is \$3840 to buy and network card is about \$800. Motion made and passed to access Reserve Fund monies for this purchase.

It was reported that the DPW costs are "through the roof" as work continues on building. Already have \$186,000 in overrun costs and will run out of money. Permission to deficit spending voted in accordance with Ch. 44, Section 31D. It was noted that Snow and Ice will be a separate line item on next year's budget.

A new ambulance is being bought. The majority of the cost will be from receipts and the remaining from the Wachusett Fund. The Wachusett Fund was originally established from the sale of Holden Hospital.

Discussion on underpaying regarding Ambulance; about \$200,000 in uncollected funds to date. Water Enterprise has been underpaying. Rates will need to increase. FinCom feels this needs oversight. A letter will be directed to W.E. letting it know that it needs to balance its budget.

Terri reported that the building inspector had been in an accident. The car was totaled and he is looking to put the insurance money towards another vehicle. Dick Shepard stated that state vehicles are available with a lease agreement. It was noted that this vehicle would need to go off road.

Meeting adjourned at 9:25.

February 7, 2008 Finance Committee Meeting, started at 8:05

Meeting was attended by Terri Ackerman, Lisa Call, Larry Pape, Frank H., Matt Emsley, John Potter, John Kilkoyne, Bob Brown, Bruce Turner, Pat Campbell, John Dwyer, Albert Carlin and Chief Gary Chamberlain

Pat Campbell and John Dwyer led FinCom members through answers to our questions regarding their budget. Mr. Dwyer explained the library's role as: landlord, books/materials, systems and payroll. Pat just finished her first year of a 3-year contract. The contract is with the library's Board of Trustees. Frank opined about confusion when different directors seem to be reporting to many different heads; board of trustees or town administrator or a particular board. The Board of Trustees has been exceptionally pleased with Pat's performance. Pat and her staff are very resourceful and use every source it can. A cooperative venture within town is welcome and appreciated to help meet the town's needs.

Police Chief Gary Chamberlain reviewed his answers to our questions regarding his budget.

The difference in percent increases in wages is dependant on the officer, there may be an annual increase, per contract, combined with a step increase. The chief reported that the police department is now fully staffed. He also stated that the state reimburses, at the end of the year, 50% of the Quinn Bill expense. The IMC software will be purchased through the Capital Fund. Communications has seen a changeover, with all new employees.

Though we had no questions for Animal Control, Chief Chamberlain explained that the animal inspector is looking to increase hours and receive benefits. Ideally, this position could be combined with the hours he works in Princeton. We provided the vehicle and they could provide the benefits. Terri stated that as of yet, Princeton does not want to proceed this way. Talks will continue. Matt suggested a stipend to help cover cost of insurance.

Meeting adjourned by 9:00.

Feb. 13, 2008 Finance Committee Meeting, started at 7:00

Meeting was attended by Lisa Call, John Potter, Frank H., Bob Brown, Larry Pape, John Kilcoyne, Matt Emsley, Terri Ackerman, BNUC chair Shirley Rieven and two other members, COA Director Karen Phillips and Claire Fisher, Conservation Committee Chair Barbara Roberti, Roland Nelson of Veteran Affairs, Judy Janda, Bob Finizio of SPARC, Fire Chief Dave Hurlbut and Dick Farrar.

It was reported that there are two buildings in town needing urgent attention. Both the West Sterling meeting house and the Records Building need a new roof. The Records Building will be done for half the cost of a contractor and the West Sterling meeting house will be done by committee members, equates to a saving of 70%. Motion made and passed to approve \$6,000 for these repairs, with the understanding that the true cost is closer to \$5,000. There have been requests by various groups such as the Boys Scouts, Land trust and a cable company to use the West Sterling building and hopefully it will be available to rent out on occasion.

BNUC also asked about the new position for a facilities manager. Shirley asked about an informal group putting together the job description and informed Terri and FinCom that the BNUC has already completed a draft. Terri assured them that since this position will most benefit their committee's needs, that they will certainly be involved. Judy J. of Recreation and Chuck R. from DPW are also assisting with this.

Council on Aging answered a question regarding mini van expenses. It includes the cost for shirts and hats for 2 part time and 3 casual drivers. All drivers are covered under a general liability insurance policy. Fuel is covered by DPW. The 4.55% increase in wages was included in their budget because they were told to do so by Terri.

Roland Nelson requested to be present and to request \$100 to cover the cost of flags for cemetery. 75% of the cost of flags is reimbursed by the Dept. of Veteran Services. It is not part of the Cherry Sheet, a check is issued at the end of the year. Mr. Nelson receives \$3500 for his role which is about \$10/hour. Expenses do include attending two conferences.

Barbara Roberti answered questions. 4% increase for Matt Mauro is his merit increase. Budget is level funded from last year.

Judy Janda from the Recreation Dept. answered questions. She stated that casual wages is on the conservative side, it depends on how long the season is due to weather, and typically returns money to the town. Last year about \$6500 from this line was returned. Judy is increasing her hours from 30 to 35. She typically works closer to 40 to 45 hours a week for the town. Lisa Bristol's 7.5 hours is covered by revolving account funded by participation fees. Frank requested that the BNUC evaluate the bathrooms at the town beach. He also questioned the condition of the septic system. Judy said it is typically pumped twice throughout the summer. It was also noted that the bathrooms at Griffin Field should also be addressed.

Bob Finizio explained that he and members of SPARC were led to believe that the DPW would be paying the electricity to run the pump at the park's pond. Lou Manning had made a verbal agreement before leaving his position. DPW paid a bill for about \$1500 by mistake and is now asking that SPARC reimburse them. Dottie from DPW said that it is not the DPW's responsibility and the DPW has since pulled the meter from the area. Bob feels that that the realistic cost of the electricity to run the pump is about \$2000, requesting \$4000 to cover past bill paid by DPW and future bills. Typically, lights at fields are paid through the DPW, though sports organizations that use the fields actually pay the bill. Matt opined that regardless of the use, the electricity should be the responsibility of the DPW. It could be that some funds may come in if organizations use this park for events. FinCom will discuss with DPW their request for a possible transfer of funds to cover this electricity cost for this year. Terri feels that the DPW should be responsible for this in the future. Is this a decision for the BOS? Terri? Is an article necessary? FinCom assured SPARC that it will deal with the past \$1500 and that DPW will amend its FY09 budget to reflect this cost.

Dave Hurlburt answered questions. He stated that there is a new line item for technology. Discussion followed on who maintains the systems, is it in house, could it be part of town servicing? Sean Todorov now acts as an IT person. Terri asked if maybe we should fund a .5 tech position. Dave believes that there is not a direct correlation between wage increases and the number of calls. Unfortunately, when busier, call fire fighters simply do not respond as much. The make up of call fire fighters is very different today than it was 20 to 30 years ago. It's no longer mostly farmers who are more available. John P asked what is causing such an increase in calls. There are well over 100 accidents in a year, many involving Rt.190, but also around town. New carbon monoxide codes result in over 100 calls to check monitors. Dave also stated that electricity and for FY08 was underrated and was told to request 10% over the actual. An oil collaboration may help with this. Would not be possible maybe for FY10. Dave will give FinCom a detailed list of new equipment requested. It will be considered as a capital item. Terri agreed with FinCom that Dave's salary should in part be funded by Ambulance as that is part of his job. Dave thought that about 20% of his job is with Ambulance. At this time Ambulance is owed about \$200,000 in uncollected funds. Terri is trying to decide on an agency to assist with this collection.

Meeting ended sometime after 9:00.

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 10th.

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

February 28, 2008 Finance Committee Meeting, 7:00

Meeting was attended by Terri Ackerman, Lisa Call, Larry Pape, Frank H., Matt Emsley, John Potter, John Kilcoyne, Bob Brown, Bruce Turner, Claire Fisher, Loret Schur, Nancy Perry, Melanie Clark, Evelyn McNamara, Karen Pare, and Dick Shepard

Terri reported that the initial request from WRSD request a total increase from FY 08 of 4.5%. Larry raised the point that this may look okay, but we need to look at overall budget, including increase in state aid and may be reduced further. We still need a representative from our FinCom to represent Sterling with superintendent's task force. Our cost to Monty Tech has decreased because Sterling has two fewer students attending.

We have no questions for Extension Services.

Loret Schur spoke on behalf of the Personnel board. She wanted to know the best way to contact the FinCom should it need to. Larry volunteered his e-mail to be used as necessary. Terri will act as the go-between our two boards. FinCom will attend the Personnel Boards June meeting to discuss mutual goals and expectations. Loret stated that the board would welcome outside professional help though it has never been in the budget.

Melanie Clark explained the increase in election costs. She is able to take \$2000 from the election expense account and put it into the elections wage account. She will reduce the election expenses by \$1000, making the FY09 election wages account \$7300 and the election expenses budget to \$11,000. Melanie also discussed dog licenses, each is \$8 or \$12 and the town receives a lot more due to the \$25 late fee. There have been a number of court cases as well. The goal is to break even and towns are not allowed to profit from dog licenses. The state is considering a cat license, and Melanie is praying that does not happen.

Bruce reported on the treasurer's budget. Increases are in part, due to mailings, (quarterly and excise taxes), unemployment spike, two claims this year, (one is regarding someone who is still working part time, Bruce is very angry with the IRS), and some legal costs. The biggest increase is with support for new software. Eventually, this software will save money.

Evelyn McNamara discussed the Assessor's budget. She explained that an outside contractor does the re-evaluations. Every three years is re-certified by the state. This does not cost any more, though it is more work for the contractor. The fee is already set. Discussion followed regarding past articles. Larry thought that it was established to have a set amount each year, rather than a spike at particular intervals. Evelyn knows nothing about this. The account, \$60,000 has remained the same since she came on board in 2001. The budget request is not actually a request, we realized. It is existing accounts. She will report back to us.

Karen Pare reported regarding Information Technology. She oversees the need of the Butterick building only at this time. When purchasing licensure for this building, can it be grouped with other town systems/computers? She believes so. It was noted that other heads should be aware of this. FinCom feels Karen's role should be to consult for all departments. Tasks to include purchasing, (always town wide) negotiating, licensing, service person, web design and disaster planning. As of yet, the town does not have a computer usage license, needs a policy. Matt requested a list of what Karen feels should be done, recommendations for the town, basic requirements and how to bring it together. She noted that she didn't want to step on anyone's toes, who may be servicing other departments already. Dick Sheppard agreed it is best dealing as one entity. We could establish standardized protection, it'd be more efficient and easier to maintain. I.T. budget should include needs of other departments. FinCom feels we should move forward to centralize to be most cost affective.

Terri presented the board with a draft of the description for the Facilities Director. Depending on hours, could this be a half time position. It would be best to start with fewer hours and add as needed. Rather than start at full time and have to reduce later.

Terri also discussed how Sterling is unique in how its DPW board signs off on all Ch. 90 monies. She could not find another community that manages this fund in this manner. Changes may be made to reflect at least some oversight. We will also discuss further new state laws to divide stabilization account.

Meeting adjourned at 9:45.

March 6, 2008 Finance Committee Meeting, 7:00

Meeting was attended by Terri Ackerman, Lisa Call, Larry Pape, Frank H., Matt Emsley, John Potter, John Kilkoyne, Bob Brown, Bruce Turner, Donna Couture, Bill Tuttle, Chuck Ripa, Jimmy Simpson, Donna's son-in-law, and another Capital Committee member I don't know. (Sorry, will change minutes when I know names.)

Town accountant Donna Couture is requesting to go from 25 hours to 30 hours. T.A. supports this. She is already working these hours, just not compensated for them. Lisa Bristol is going to be trained as assistant town accountant to cover during vacation time and/or emergencies.

DPW is requesting a reserve fund transfer of \$4,000 for Water Enterprise and \$2745 for electricity for Sterling Greenery Park water pump. FinCom wants to first look within the water accounts before any transfer is to be made. Waiting on the electricity transfer as well, it may be there come June within the DPW budget. Tabled discussion regarding DPW superintendent to be partly funded through Water Enterprise. Now position is about 20% Water Enterprise, 80% DPW. Water rates just went up. Will revisit how to work this into the budgets next year. Chuck has tried to sort through confusion left by former superintendent regarding some wages, supposedly, guaranteed to some employees. He feels that it has been straightened out to the best of his abilities. All snow expenses and overtime will be pulled from DPW budget and given separate cost center.

Chapter 90 Funds: Bill Tuttle and DPW board agrees with BOS regarding oversight of these funds. He feels strongly that in the future, the funds should strictly be for road repair and maintenance. FinCom questioned whether some of these funds should also be used for new equipment. Chuck stressed that we will be playing catch up on the roads for many years due to know repairs in over three years.

Capital Committee met following FinCom meeting.

Next meeting will be March 13, 2008 at 8:00.

