

Town of Sterling



Joint Finance and Capital Budget Committee BUTTERICK MUNICIPAL BUILDING 1 PARK STREET, Room: Conservation Tuesday, February 20, 2024, 6:30 pm MINUTES

Finance Committee (7):

George Handy, Chair (FinCom)

Joseph King, Vice Chair (FinCom)

Members: Paul Austin, Ezequiel Ayala, Mark Gauthier, Christina Lashua, Lynne Sheppard

Capital Budget Committee (7):

Lynne Sheppard, Chair (CBC)

Liz Pape, Vice Chair (CBC)

Members: Paul Austin, Ezequiel Ayala, Mark Gauthier, Joseph King, Christina Lashua

Recording Secretary: Valerie Handy

I. PRELIMINARIES

Attendees: G. Handy, J. King, P. Austin, E. Ayala, M. Gauthier, L. Sheppard, L. Pape,

Absent: C. Lashua

Approval of Minutes 2/13/2024. Motion G.Handy, 2nd and unanimously approved.

II. AGENDA ITEMS (time permitting)

Stand and Present: Fire Department Chief David Hurlbut. The Chief gave an overview of Omnibus budget wage and expense increases. The preponderance of the wage increase is due to union contractual obligations plus the request for one additional fire fighter. The additional fire fighter and associated costs will be presented in a separate warrant article at TM. The chief gave an overview of the ambulance service the town provides its citizens and surrounding municipalities. He described the difference in EMT training (3-6 months) vs. Para-med training (2 years). We are fortunate to currently have 15 Para-medics available. The chief gave a brief description of how the mutual aid system works and though we had 797 mutual aid calls for medical response in 2023 half were cancelled prior to crossing town lines. His explanation of the department's capital requests was accepted with little comment. The chief introduced Lt. Kokernak who gave an explanation regarding the request for additional fire fighter staff. There were no further questions. The Committees and audience thanked the Chief and his representatives for a clear and thorough presentation as well as their service to the community.

School Budget Targets with School Committee Member Jeannie Winters: Jeannie mentioned that this was her first year and she was just learning the budgeting process. After a brief discussion on WRSD funding, the finance committee chair stated that the primary purpose of asking for school committee attendance was for them to understand the finance committee's position on the WRSD budget. WRSD administration should contain any cost growth from FY24 to the growth dictated by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). DESE has constructed their foundation budget for the WRSD and it shows an increase of approximately \$1.5M over FY24. WRSD should not go over \$1.5M in their FY25 budget. This is the message school committee members should forward to WRSD administration.

Board of Health Budget: David Favreau, Agent: D. Favreau presented a revised budget that has been decreased 5.6%. This represents a more realistic forecast of employee hours. When asked about the large increase in wages over the last several years, D. Favreau was not able to answer the question and stated he would investigate it and get back to FinCom member Paul Austin who had asked the question. The FinCom then asked if the Board of Health had discussed Regionalization. Board of Health member Rich Lane responded that they had not. R. Lane did have a brief conversation with the Nashoba Board of Health Association, and it would take several years if membership was desired. It was noted that some of the Sterling B of H current practices would not be in alignment with the regions' practices; membership would require Sterling's to be changed. The Association is made up of 16 communities. Membership in the Nashoba association would save a considerable amount of money for Sterling.

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Brief Initial Recap of U Mass Presentation and Slides: Lynne Sheppard and Liz Pape: Lynne S. asked the Committee members to forward any thoughts regarding the presentation and she would consolidate and report back. It was noted the U Mass Presentation and spreadsheet was very similar to the Capital Committee's recommendations.

Setting next meeting agenda topics/date/time – Tuesday, February 27, 6:30

Other/new/old business.

Capital Plan, Lynne Sheppard: Lynn mentioned the Capital Plan was not totally accurate on the Request side. She and Joe King have been reviewing the Capital plan and a reconciliation has been completed. Liz Pape stated the need for firming up the Capital Process. CBC members agreed that only one updater and one version of the Capital Plan should be kept, to avoid data inconsistencies.

Liz Pape – Article for Meetinghouse News: As the deadline is approaching for inclusion in the Meetinghouse News, Liz asked for committee input to her article. Rich Lane, Board of Health, encouraged the article and thought a reference to a 2 ½ % override would get taxpayer attention. Some committee and audience members thought specific dollar amounts may be confusing for inclusion in the article.

Motion to Adjourn: 8:45pm