

Westhampton Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
March 22, 2016

Meeting opened at 7:00 pm

Present: Thomas Cleary (Interim Chair), Jackie Brodeur, Mary Cleary, Maryanne Duggan, Aniko Giordano, Ellice Gonzalez Brandow, Joe Pipczynski, Chevy Seney, and Celeste Whiting

Also Present: Deane Bates (Elementary Principal), Joe Boudreau, and Phil Dowling

Minutes from March 8, 2016 were amended to read that the “Out of District Tuition increase will continue for **several** years.” Tom wanted to note that the per pupil expenditures for WES and comparable districts as recorded in the minutes were not accurate. In reference to Chief White’s time spent at the High School the parenthetical “(pro bono?)” needed to be deleted as there is no formal agreement. Finally, the last sentence in the New Business section should read, “Craig and Bobby guessed that it was most likely due to a stipend paid to an interim principal while the **principal** was out.”

Motion to accept amended minutes of March 8, 2016, approved 9-0-0

Review of Correspondence: Tom opened with a concern about e-mails and open meeting guidelines. Aniko reported that there is a violation if the result of e-mail communication, even if it is from less than a quorum of members, is a decision that is made without the community having an opportunity to “view” how the committee arrived at the decision. This conversation is relevant because pursuant to e-mail input, Deane Bates was invited to return to share more information about the WES budget.

Old Business

Aniko would like to discuss the per pupil expenditure numbers that were forwarded to the Committee from Superintendent Jurgenson. She expressed concern that she is not receiving all Finance Committee e-mails.

Ellice suggested that it might be useful for Tom to “cc” other committee members when communicating with other entities; representatives of committees, organizations, etc.

New Business

Discussion of the SB Budget focused on salaries. Current SB proposal is that salaries (except for those under contractual agreement) are “level funded” as a “place holder.” Phil was hopeful that there would be some “room” to offer 1.5% - 2.5% salary increases. Tom C. presented

information about the “CPI” and “real earnings.” He wondered if these numbers could provide a rationale, a “target,” for raises. Aniko thought that this discussion was a “policy discussion” that should be postponed to a future meeting. Mary felt that the SB might consider this possible benchmark for salaries. Phil expressed his concern that the “people who work for the Town are underpaid.” He believes that “2.5% is what the State allows.” Celeste clarified that the 2.5% refers to “2.5% of the whole budget.” She said that the SB “needs to discuss which wages to adjust.” Ellice is concerned about a “lack of consistency in Town for how people are paid.” She said, “It’s not fair to raise salaries across the board.” Tom said that in a “market economy” underpaid workers would for look elsewhere for better remuneration for their services. Ellice asked Phil if the proposed raises were based upon merit or cost of living. Phil said the proposed raises were based on “cost of living.” Celeste added that “2.5% gets you close to inflation.” Ellice asked Phil if it would be helpful if Fin Com sent a letter regarding merit and cost of living raises to the SB. Phil said it would be helpful. Aniko said that “if there’s wiggle room” Fin Com could inform the SB.

Deane then spoke about potential use of funds that remained from the school roof project. In short, the boiler at WES is “not an immediate need.” He mentioned some energy improvements defined in a recent energy audit. Mary asked if the boiler was part of a planned replacement; part of the “capital plan.” Deane said he keeps a list of capital needs and shares them with the Town “as needed.” The conversation then shifted to the possible effects of cuts to the proposed WES FY17 Budget. Deane said he would not pursue new initiatives such as band and math intervention. He would consider reducing reading specialists down to one. He could cut a little from summer programs. It is possible to increase preschool tuition. Deane’s main concern was that in order to keep students coming to WES the Town needs to “slowly improve programs.” Aniko asked if the “spike in SPED” was from students from town or “choice” students. It is from both populations and Deane explained that the sending town does “pitch in.” Celeste asked about the “line that defines what is family insurance versus Town responsibility for testing special needs students.” Deane explained that it is the Town’s responsibility when it “impacts access to curriculum.” Mary asked Deane if possible cuts to band and reading specialists would add to the “risk of a downward spiral.” Deane said that WES is attractive for academics, but is not offering band and arts programs. In reference to neighboring towns that have closed elementary schools, Celeste asked, “When a school closes what happens to the students?” Deane knew that in the case of students from Cummington, some students were being schooled at home, some were choice students in other districts, and some were at charter schools. Tom asked, “Who is the charter school competition?” Hilltown Charter, PVPA and the Chinese Immersion School are the main competitors for students. Deane reminded us that WES is a Level One school (State Rating) and that many charter schools are not.

Discussion then resumed regarding salaries for people in Town. Ellice asked why “some salaries were there.” The School Committee stipend and Board of Health were used as examples. Phil

suggested “not to rock that boat.” Ellice said it would be good to review why some boards get paid and some don’t.

Tom then asked Joe B. how the budget got compiled. Both Cheryl and Joe B. “check the numbers.” However, the latest proposed budget is about a month old (2/22), not up-to-date. According to Joe B., Cheryl “starts the process to up-date the proposed budget.” Numbers need to be added. In particular, SRECs?, Voc Ed, EMS, and HRMC. SREC is available now. Joe B. thinks that an estimate of \$5,000 in FY17 is not too high. Ellice asked about ambulance revenue. Joe B. said it goes into “ambulance receipts reserved.” Phil said that Chris (Fire Chief) wants to use this money for a new used ambulance. At this point, Mary tried to clarify the process for determining how the ambulance revenue was to be spent. Phil said the SB found Chris’s proposal to be reasonable....to “keep this money in the same pocket.” Joe B. observed that there was no money in this account as of December 15th. Mary returned to her question about the **process** for determining if having an ambulance service was a good decision for the Town. Maryanne said, “We are saving money.” Mary asked, “What is the process?” Phil said, “It goes through SB.” Aniko wondered about the status of the two separate budgets; Fire and EMS. Phil explained that the SB “does not recommend combining the two budgets.” Joe B. supports keeping the two budget line items. Tom then asked why Pioneer Valley (ambulance) would provide service in Westhampton for no charge. Maryanne explained that Pioneer Valley only charges for certain hours. The rest of the time, Westhampton runs its own ambulance. Tom said that comparing ambulance service with other towns is difficult. Some private ambulance services provide other services, like training. Phil recalled that the Town voted to purchase the used ambulance. Ellice is concerned about the process for making the decision to have a town ambulance. Phil felt it was important to “listen to the people involve.” Maryanne said, “It was clear that it (the used ambulance) would save for 50 runs ~ 3 years.” Joe B. asked, “What is the cost of a run?”.... so it would be possible to “guesstimate” revenue. Maryanne said that it depends on the type of run. Celeste thanked Tom for investigating how other towns were handling ambulance service. Joe B. explained that “ambulance receipts reserved” is not on the budget. He provides a receipt report. Tom wondered if there were other accounts like this.

Ellice asked if we had up-to-date information about contracts for oil.

Joe said there is currently \$12,000 remaining in the Snow Budget.

Ellice did some rough calculations and predicted that the budget was ~\$100,000 over the levy limit. Joe B. predicts the second round of cherry sheets will be out in mid-April.

Since all proposed budget requests go through Cheryl P., Tom will remind Cheryl to up-date the budget proposal.

Mary asked Phil about Information Technology Support. That line item is still not certain.

There may be a need/request for networking to facilitate town wide back up for technology.

Ellice did a quick check to confirm there would be a quorum for next Tuesday's meeting (3/29). She also requested that Cheryl send the next up-dated proposed budget as a pdf.

Aniko expressed some frustration with how we really seem to have "no say on how the money is divided up" regarding the WES budget. Chevy said that although we don't have control, it is useful to hear from Deane how any budget reduction would possibly impact the school. Mary said that Deane's comments "inform the decision" that ultimately the Town makes about the WES budget.

Tom will remind Cheryl of the Committee's need for an up-dated budget by 3/29. He also will request two separate budgets for Fire and EMS from Chris (Fire Chief).

Next Meeting: March 29th

Meeting Adjourned at 9:00

Respectfully submitted by,
Chevy Seney