

Westhampton Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
March 29, 2016

Meeting opened at 7:00 pm

Present: Thomas Cleary (Interim Chair), Jackie Brodeur, Mary Cleary, Maryanne Duggan, Aniko Giordano, Chevy Seney, Celeste Whiting, and Ed Zawacki

Also Present: Steve Gagne

Motion to accept minutes of March 22, 2016, approved 6-0-0

Correspondence: None to review.

Old Business

Communication between Cheryl and Fin Com regarding the proposed budget will need weekly updates.

Verification is needed that there will be no payment on the tanker truck in FY17. Aniko wondered if the remainder of the borrowed money for the school roof project could be used to cover/augment the cost of the tanker.

New Business

Since the SB expressed a desire to grant salary increases for town employees (if the budget allowed), the Committee discussed whether salary increases were to be based upon merit or were to be made “across the board.” Mary asked for analyses that would: 1) compare current Town salaries to other towns, and 2) implement a documented policy, perhaps basing increases on the CPI or merit or cost of living. She was uncomfortable with “across the board” increases, BUT she felt that the proposed budget should “stick with 2.5% this year.” She said that she has looked at the budget and she feels it can be done. Tom C. felt that he could provide a rationale for 1.5%. He reminded the group that there was no Social Security increase this year. He felt that current data “supports a wage increase, efficiency is improving.” Celeste observed that there was “no systematic way to document” the improvement. Aniko added that the Library was asking for ~2% and that “fairness” was mentioned during the Patty’s (Town Clerk) presentation. Jackie felt that 1.5% was “a good compromise.” Maryanne asked what other departments were getting. The highway department averages 2% over the years of the current contract. Tom C. observed that there are only a few line items that Fin Com can comment on; Police Chief, Tax Collector, Assessor. Maryanne feels that “if you’re going to give raises, give them to everyone.” Tom C.

asked, procedurally, how the Committee determined consensus. Mary said, “line by line.” Maryanne recalled that “salaries were separate from lines.”

A motion was made that it is the Finance Committee’s intention to increase salaries, not stipends, for town employees. The intended increase would be in the range of 1.5% to 2%.

The motion passed 8-0-0

Tom C. asked members to list the lines that they would like to discuss in the proposed budget. He recommended that we not vote until the Cherry Sheets were available.

Line 2 Counsel Fees Is it possible to decrease this line? It probably is not possible because members of the Committee believe that there are at least two more cases “in the pipeline.”

Line 9 Audit Tom C. wonders if there is “wiggle room” here. It may depend upon the timing for the proposed safety complex. We need more information from Joe B.

Line 40 WES Aniko is frustrated with the reported per pupil expenditures. They are hard to compare. Ultimately, she would scale the proposed increase back to 2.5%. Both Mary and Chevy feel that using per pupil expenditures “may not be the best way to make a decision” about the school. Jackie recalled that Deane did indicate there might be “wiggle room.” Mary is reluctant to assign a number. She feels that WES is “in line with other rural regional schools with expenditures.” Tom C. recalled “\$32,000” as a figure that Deane mentioned. Aniko shared the results of some calculations. A 5.44% increase was requested. That represents an increase of \$82,700. A 4% increase would be \$60,823 and a 2.5% increase would be \$38,000. Tom C. observed that it sounded like two strategies were emerging; one based on a percentage and one based on Deane’s dollar amount (\$32,000 or \$16,000).

Line 41 School Committee Salary Mary feels that stipends need to be analyzed. Tom wondered how stipends came to exist. Mary thinks that at one time they were linked to providing health insurance to Town employees....but not anymore. Tom C. said that some positions require expertise and, in those cases, a stipend would make sense. Jackie wondered about the stipend for the Historical Commission (**Line 86**). Aniko will ask Bill Tracy about this.

Line 55 Police Salaries The Department Budget is up 7.6%. Salaries up 2.5%. Chief White predicted a decrease in patrol hours if there was a reduction.

Line 58 Fire Department Tom C. was exploring the possibility of deferring ~\$8500. Mary thinks that there may be ~\$10,000 to be gained from previous “one time cost” increases that may have been carried through to the current proposed budget. Specific areas discussed were

Equipment Repair and Maintenance and Vehicle Repair. Celeste wants to be sure that “we’re not building into the budget what we understand to be one-time expenses.”

Line 59 Safety Complex Aniko wondered with the current price of oil why this line was the same.

Line 60 EMS There was a discussion about the necessity of the Town having its own ambulance. Maryanne reminded the Committee that SB needs to make this decision. Mary is concerned that the Town voted to take on the ambulance on a “trial basis” and then evaluate. She feels that it is time to evaluate. Maryanne feels that it is the Chief’s job, not other members of the town. She said, “Give it a year.....receipts are just beginning to come in.” Celeste said, “It makes sense to recall how the decision to run an ambulance was made at TM because we can expect such questions from the floor at TM.” Aniko agrees with Mary that data is needed to assess whether to continue. Mary predicts that this line item will probably be questioned at TM. Currently, we don’t have enough information to decide.

Line 82 Town Offices Tom C. will seek clarification from Cheryl about whether there is a duplication for web design in Lines 82 and 83. We need more details.

Line 86 Historical See comments for Line 41.

Line 99 Paint Town Hall Tom C. wondered if there was another way to fund this, perhaps an override?

Line 121 New Growth Mary wonders if this number is accurate. Mary will contact the assessor (Delores Thornhill) for more accurate information.

Line 131 Free Cash Aniko believes this number is \$211,839.

Next Meeting: April 5th **IF CHERRY SHHEETS ARE AVAILABLE.**

Otherwise, Next Meeting: April 12th

Meeting Adjourned at 8:50

Respectfully submitted by,
Chevy Seney