

Finance Committee

Meeting minutes – April 16, 2009

Present: **Committee Members:** Diane Gaspar (Chair), Burke Bero (Vice Chair), Stephanie Cronin, Chris Johnson, Jeanne LeBlanc, George Zacharakis

Absent: Chris DeSimone

Also present: Town Accountant Theresa Walsh, Scott Blackburn, Debra Spratt(Library Director), Sky Minckler (Library Board of Trustees)

Ms. Gaspar called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

New Business: Diane Gaspar started the meeting with discussion about Article 2 Elected Officials Compensation. Terry Walsh noted that the incumbent's Town Clerk's salary is \$59,471. The Town Clerk plans to retire in April. This amount includes her salary and pro-rated longevity through the end of April and two months salary for the newly elected Town Clerk.

On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, Article 2 Elected Officials Compensation of the Annual Town Meeting Warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 5-0.

At this point, the Committee felt it was appropriate to discuss the items in the budget that the Selectmen put back in the budget. There were several areas – the Fire budget, the street lights and Memorial Day. Upon further discussion, Terry Walsh noted that the Chief adjusted the Police budget slightly downward and that the Clerk's hours were reduced. Both the Fire budget and the street lights were big differences compared to what the Finance Committee had recommended.

In looking at the Fire budget, apparently the Selectmen felt that Chief Tyler worked many hours and wanted the salary cut that he took put back. The difference in the budget is \$8,240. Terry Walsh noted that instead of Chief Tyler taking this cut out of his budget, he took it out of his own salary. Burke Bero commented how many extra hours does he work, what was the Selectmen's thought process? Jeanne LeBlanc commented that this is unfair because other departments took the cut out of the budget or staffs budget, while Chief Tyler took it out of his own salary, then he gets it back. In some ways, some people feel this is a "who you know" type of deal. Stephanie Cronin commented that there is no argument that Chief Tyler works a lot, and she's not against paying him, but he should take it out of his budget somewhere. The Committee members still felt that the cut in the Fire budget was a Finance Committee recommendation.

The Committee went on and discussed the street light issue and how they recommended that street lights be shut off which would save \$16k and the Selectmen wanted that back in the budget. Terry Walsh tried to speak of some of the reasons that the Selectmen might have had –

some of the lights could not be done right away, some of the money would not be seen right away, and the whole process could not happen right away. Several Committee members felt that Bob Hanson was against the whole idea, as well as Al Davis, due to safety issues. Scott Blackburn commented that the town had shut off the street lights many years back – and there were no problems with it. It did take some time because there are leases on some of the lights, and there were concerns of safety, but everything did work out just fine. The Committee members still felt it was a viable option.

Diane Gaspar brought up the subject of the Memorial Day events and how to fund those. Debra Sprat again brought up the Hazel Brook Fund that she had mentioned in the April 9, 2009 Finance Committee meeting. That fund apparently had been mistaken as a library fund, but is not, it is a trust fund for certain events for the town, which the Memorial Day events fit perfectly into. Terry Walsh commented that there are issues with getting money from the fund due to the fact that 2 of the 3 trustees have passed away, and the third lives out of Town. Ed McDuffee, a lawyer in Hollis, NH, has information about the fund, and supposedly can also access the fund. Diane Gaspar is going to follow-up with Ed McDuffee to try to resolve the trust fund issues so that the funds can be used for this Memorial Day, as well as future town events that would fit the funds criteria.

George Zacharakis arrived at 7:22 pm.

Diane Gaspar noted that at the Saturday Selectmen meeting, there was a lot of outrage over the budgets that were eliminated. She heard comments about having the schools come back to the table to re-do school budgets. Diane wanted it clear that having the schools budgets come back was totally unrealistic. She also commented that the town has absolutely no control over the school budget. The Finance Committee tried to work with the schools, but the school district does their own thing.

At this point in the meeting, there was quite a bit of discussion over the zeroing out of the library budget and the Council of Aging budget and putting them on the override. Scott Blackburn was very concerned about senior citizens on fixed incomes being put in the situation of having to vote for the override. The Finance Committee agreed with him, and felt that there were other people on fixed incomes besides senior citizens that would be impacted. Nobody had any other solutions, and nobody at the Selectmen's meeting on Saturday could come up with other viable solutions.

Scott Blackburn questioned when Pepperell last voted for an override. Burke Bero commented that it rarely occurs. Scott Blackburn was very concerned that this could be shooting ourselves in the foot. Burke Bero, among others, is sincerely hoping that the town realizes what the town is facing and what is needed. The entire Committee again agreed that the education process about the override is extremely important.

On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, Article 3 Budgets of the Annual Town Meeting Warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list, with the exception of the Fire budget, the Street lights, and the

Memorial Day events. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6-0.

There was a brief discussion about the enterprise funds and whether they could be charged rent. Diane Gaspar noted that they could not, they are part of the town, as well as there are legalities involved.

A citizen attending brought up the parks and whether charging town team sports an increased fee, which could get passed on to all members could help out at all. Burke Bero noted that he runs the lacrosse teams and due to increasing fees this year has lost almost 50% children. The Committee did not feel that it was a viable solution, as well as bringing in the needed \$600k.

On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, the Fire budget for \$224,044 (100-2210) was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6-0.

On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, the Street Lights (to be shut off) for \$24,086 (100-4240) was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6-0.

At this point in the meeting, Scott Blackburn suggested that having information about every department and the impact(s) from the budget, the net effect of the budget on all departments, for the town meeting would be powerful and a big impact to the town. It was done in a town meeting in 1991 and was very successful. The information needs to be presented by the Selectmen, but the Finance Committee could help pull it together. There was some discussion around this suggestion.

On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, the Memorial Day events for \$0 (100-6920) was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted. It was noted that in the past the amount used was approximately \$500 PA system, \$400/band, and remainder was for refreshments. It was approved by a vote 4-2.

The Committee moved on to discuss Article 11 Departmental Revolving Fund of the Annual Town Meeting Warrant list. The Board of Selectmen would be responsible for monitoring the fund. As explained by Terry Walsh, if this fund is not setup, the Fire operating budget is at risk of being depleted when hazardous materials are used. Burke Bero noted that this is basically a check and balance system. On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, Article 11 Revolving Fund of the Annual Town Meeting Warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6-0.

The discussion went on the Article 13 Nashoba Boards of Health of the Annual Town Meeting Warrant list. There was some discussion about the difference of the Board of Health budget with and without the Nashoba Associated Boards of Health. On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, Article 13 Nashoba Boards of Health of the Annual Town Meeting Warrant list

was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6-0.

Debra Spratt brought up that she had requested Article 29 Supplemental Funding, the override of the zero'ed budgets, be brought closer to Article 3 Budget of the Annual Town Meeting. Scott Blackburn thought it should be after the school articles and Terry Walsh thought it should be with the Budget article. Jeanne Leblanc, with other Committee members' agreement, felt it should be before the Nashoba Boards of Health article.

The Committee discussed Article 15 Conservation Fund of the Annual Town Meeting Warrant list. As per the Pepperell Conservation Commission memorandum dated April 16, 2009, which requests no recommendation of the article is needed at this time since they plan to take no action on the article. The Finance Committee agreed to pass over the article.

On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, Article 25 Chapter 90 Funding of the Annual Town Meeting Warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6-0.

The Committee moved on to discuss Article 29 Supplemental Funding of the Annual Town Meeting Warrant list. It was noted that even though the Finance Committee had initially recommended, per Bob Hanson's initial thought, that each budget that was being zero'ed out should be a separate line in the override, the Selectmen had lumped it all together in one. The Selectmen had also taken away the lost positions from the override which was part of the Finance Committee's initial recommendation.

Scott Blackburn brought up the idea that there could potentially be a petition process going on in Pepperell, and how would this be handled in the town meeting. It was brought up again that Bob Hanson stated before that if a budget is brought up higher than what the Finance Committee recommends, then those bringing it up have to state where the money is coming from, the funding source. Diane Gaspar also noted that it may not be a proper motion, depending on when a petition is raised in the town meeting. Scott Blackburn noted that he still had to research it.

Jeanne Leblanc left the room briefly.

On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, Article 29 Supplemental Funding (\$646,797) of the Annual Town Meeting Warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list. There was additional discussion about this article and the concern about the override being voted in. It was also noted that the perception in the town is that the Finance Committee is hanging these departments. It was approved by a vote 5-0.

Jeanne Leblanc came back into the room.

Diane Gaspar noted that doing the presentation at town meeting like Scott Blackburn suggested and having letters to the Editor in the papers, and other kinds of education are all they can do. Jeanne Leblanc commented that she did not agree with having the Community Center in the override, but Diane Gaspar felt that the Community Center budget was just a drop in the hat (\$37k) compared to the other two budgets. Debra Pratt commented that maybe the Community Center could be more self-supportive in the future. Some felt that was a good idea, but not totally since the Community Center is used by so many town organizations (Scouts, etc).

Debra Pratt noted that she discussed the matter of providing for a 1/12th budget at the last Selectmen's meeting and that the Selectmen agreed with the idea but that she did not see it on the warrant. This was suggested in the event that the override failed and the Library and Council of Aging had to close, they would need some time to close. She had asked for and it had been approved for 1/12 budget, approximately \$50k. There would also have to be taken into account how to handle the library since the building is so old, and there are so many old documents contained in the library. There would still be maintenance fees. It's not just a simple shut the door.

On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, Article 1 FY'09 Snow Removal Costs of the Special Town Meeting Warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6-0. Terry Walsh noted that if the money came in from FEMA before the town meeting, this article would be passed over.

On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, Article 2 Debt Service Payment (sale of buildings, etc) of the Special Town Meeting Warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6-0.

On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, Article 3 Personnel By-Law Amendment of the Special Town Meeting Warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6-0.

On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, Article 4 Transfer of Funds of the Special Town Meeting Warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 5-0. (Jeanne Leblanc left room during this vote.)

Debra Gaspar talked about what kind of information she could put together about the different departments and the net effect all of this budget process has taken. It was almost 10%, but some departments were different if the lost headcount. Chris Johnson felt it was important for it to be seen that no department was untouched.

Acceptance of Minutes: On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, the minutes from April 9 meeting was approved by a vote 6-0.

Other Boards/Commission Meetings: Public Forum – Saturday, April 25th at the Senior Center, 10:00 am

Upcoming Meetings: Fri, April. 17, 2009 – Last date to post the ATM/STM Warrant, Thursday April 23rd, and Thu, Apr 29, 2009 – Finalize any remaining issues if necessary

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:22 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynne Henderson