

Finance Committee

Meeting minutes – April 30, 2009

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

Absent: Chris DeSimone

Guest: Selectman Joseph Hallisey

Also present: Town Accountant Theresa Walsh

Ms. Gaspar called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm.

Discussion: Diane Gaspar started the meeting with discussion with Selectmen Joseph Hallisey and asked if he had any insights about how the Town Meeting might be going. Joseph Hallisey felt that he did not have any insights. He felt that the override was certainly having rumblings among the town, and the Memorial Day Events was also being rumbled about. Many of the citizens felt that they were being trapped by the override. Some people felt that for an average of \$200 that the override isn't a big deal, but others feel it is. Joseph Hallisey felt that the town is pretty split 50/50 on the whole situation. When Diane Gaspar asked Joseph Hallisey if he was hearing of any other proposal, formally or informally, to deal with the situation, he responded that he had not heard of anything.

Stephanie Cronin arrived at 7:05 pm.

Diane Gaspar moved the discussion with Joseph Hallisey to the library and what he was hearing. Joseph Hallisey responded that 90% of the citizens did not want it closed. Jeanne LeBlanc pointed out that she was hearing that many people felt there was another way. Burke Bero noted that he had heard that someone at the book club was being told by someone who works at the town hall that there is money for the library and that this is all going to work out. Jeanne LeBlanc is hearing that people think this is just a scare tactic. Joseph Hallisey agreed that the biggest problem is all of the wild rumors. He has even heard that if the override goes through, that the library would still close. Chris DeSimone pointed out that if that was true, then why would the town bother with the override? Jeanne LeBlanc noted that there is a flyer being sent around with the correct information.

Jeanne LeBlanc questioned what the legal limit to how long someone can talk at the town meeting. Theresa Walsh answered that it is up to the moderator.

Diane Gaspar asked Joe Hallisey if he thought the town meeting was going to end up being a floor fight. Joe Hallisey responded that he thought it was going to be a blood bath.

Chris Johnson asked if the selectmen were going to do a summary. Diane Gaspar responded that she was going to do the summary. Stephanie Cronin questioned if the selectmen were going to backup the FinCom. Joe Hallisey responded the he would be.

Diane Gaspar brought the discussion to the 1.9 million shortfall; it was 1.3 million and the 600k error brought it to 1.9 million. Joseph Hallisey pointed out that many people do not understand how we got here. Chris DeSimone noted how for many years we had a big bank account. Stephanie Cronin noted how FinCom always said this is a good idea to things, but we can't afford them. She said out that the town always voted for them anyways. Jeanne LeBlanc agreed and commented that people did not want to pay for things; they just wanted it to come out of the bank account. Joe Hallisey commented that the presentation of the budget is good and easy to follow.

The discussion went to people complaining about seeing town workers "standing around" on town time and such. Jeanne LeBlanc commented that people should not be voting against the override because of pet peeves. Burke Bero pointed out that everyone has down time while working.

Joseph Hallisey commented that some people believe that if the override does not pass, the money will suddenly appear for the Library, Council of Aging, and Community Center.

Diane Gaspar asked Joseph Hallisey if he has heard any comments about the town just taking the money for the Library, Council of Aging, and Community Center out of savings. Joseph Hallisey noted that he has not heard anything to that nature.

Burke Bero asked Joseph Hallisey if he thinks a vote for the override at the town meeting will be voted for. Joseph Hallisey felt that the vote for the override to be voted on would go through at the town meeting. Burke Bero commented that if that did happen, then there would have to be lots of education after that to support the override. He noted that is the only way to combat the wild rumors. There was discussion about how the education could be done in a tame process – one or two FinCom committee members informally addressing small groups of people gets the correct word out about the override. Joseph Hallisey noted that it is also helpful to follow-up with a group with an e-mail. Burke Bero also noted that when the override was successfully passed for the school a few years ago, someone sat at the dump every Saturday. Not a favorite place to sit, but it got a lot of people educated.

Stephanie Cronin pointed out for the record that the Memorial Day Event is a donation.

Chris Johnson brought up that someone will question at the town meeting how much money we have in the bank. Diane Gaspar commented that it needs to be pointed out that the money needs to be kept for emergencies. Chris Johnson added that the budget is so tight that there is no extra room, there is nothing left.

Joseph Hallisey left at 7:25 pm.

New Business: Diane Gaspar moved the discussion to Reserve Fund Transfers. The Fire Department Reserve Fund Transfer of \$125 is made up of reimbursement of chief for expenses of \$62 and meetings for May and June \$60; reason is large increase in code subscriptions and District 6 membership. The committee looked at different items in the Fire Department budget and found that most went over budget. For example, Professional Tech budget is \$1500 and has spent \$3059, Printer supplies budget is \$300 and has spent \$831. The gasoline (diesel fuel) budget is \$1,200 overbudget. After some discussion and examining the budget, it was agreed that due to the gasoline costs, there was not enough money in the fire budget to cover these expenses – it should come out of the reserve funds.

On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, the Reserve Fund Transfer for \$2,500 (2210-

54000 Supplies) as written on 4/27/2009 was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6-0.

Theresa Walsh noted that the balance in reserve funds before the Reserve Fund Transfer was \$101,982.

The committee then discussed the Reserve Fund Transfer of \$125 (22100-5700) as written on 4/27/2009. Theresa Walsh noted that the memberships are for the professions, and the codes subscriptions are to keep up with code changes. Jeanne LeBlanc noted that it would be helpful for the reason descriptions to be more forthcoming.

On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, the Reserve Fund Transfer for \$125 (2210-57000 Supplies) as written on 4/27/2009 was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 4-2.

Diane Gaspar moved the discussion to discuss the override and how the selectmen had lumped the Library, Council of Aging and Community Center into one override. Some committee members thought the Community Center was pennies on the override. Jeanne LeBlanc thought it was possible the Community Center could be self-run. George Zacharakis pointed out that if the three were separated, there could be seniors, or others, voting for just one. Stephanie Cronin thought the override had a better chance of getting passed if all three were lumped together. Diane Gaspar commented that maybe having the choice to vote on individual overrides might be better. Burke Bero pointed out that it would then be Library fighting against Council of Aging. There was agreement at that point.

Diane Gaspar then brought up that Nashoba School District Judith Klimkiewicz had sent her an email that she would forward to the rest of the committee members. This email discusses the schools free cash and budget issues. The email goes into explanation about the school not having the \$600k free cash that everyone thinks they have. This email also went to Townsend. Chelmsford voted down their budget. If two other towns vote down their budget, their budget fails. The committee discussed that only Chelmsford as voted and that they felt Nashoba School District has their act together on their budget.

There was some discussion about North Middlesex School District and some history of how Pepperell has gotten stuck with large bills.

Jeanne LeBlanc noted that FinCom does not micromanage any departments, including schools. North Middlesex School District just level funded for FY2010. FinCom does not micromanage departments because they are not experts. They work with departments to come up with good budgets. Diane Gaspar pointed out that North Middlesex School District gives FinCom a number. She also pointed out that there is a difference between level-funded and level of service when a question was raised.

Diane Gaspar reviewed her Finance Committee report that she submitted to the selectmen.

Jeanne LeBlanc raised the question for the library support group whether it was possible to get Article 6 (Override) moved to before the two school Articles.

Diane Gaspar noted that the Town Meeting was expected to go at least two nights, possibly three. Theresa Walsh noted that if it went beyond two nights, it would have to be continued into the following week since nothing was reserved for a third night.

Diane Gaspar led the discussion to if the override is not passed, then the Library would need a budget to button down – minimal heat, someone to check on the building weekly, and so on. Burke Bero noted that the Senior Center would need the same. Diane Gaspar pointed out that the Senior Center is a newer building. The Library is a very old building and needs special attention to certain building parts such as the plaster, never mind the artifacts inside. Stephanie Cronin asked if the Building Inspector has been through any of the buildings at risk.

As a final discussion, Diane Gaspar noted that we are practically out of money and people still do not want to pay for things. Stephanie Cronin noted that after you take the emotional piece out, you get the final point – there is no money left, if you vote no, these buildings/departments close. Chris Johnson that maybe talking about next year will help. Diane Gaspar noted that we are already \$800k in the hole for next fiscal year.

Diane Gaspar wanted to make a big thank you to Theresa Walsh for all the support she has done for the Finance Committee. Everyone in the committee agreed. Thank you Terry!!!

Acceptance of Minutes: On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, the minutes from February 26 meeting, with amendments, was approved by a vote 4-0-2 abstained. On a motion from Burke Bero, seconded by Jeanne Leblanc, the minutes from April 16 meeting, with amendments, was approved by a vote 6-0.

Other Boards/Commission Meetings: Town Meeting – May 4th & 5th 7:30 pm

Upcoming Meetings: None scheduled at this time

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynne Henderson