

3/20/2024 -- Oakham, MA Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

FinCom meeting called to order at 6:02 pm. Corey Packard and Alan Flagg are in attendance, Steve Dollinger is remote. Lucy Tesnau from the BOS is present. There are no public inquiries this evening.

Chair reviews recent events that impact the budget starting with a summary of revenue and expenses. Mr. Dollinger attended both the Quabbin and Pathfinder budget presentations. The combined education budget increase is \$167,830. Schools are challenged by zero-funded or underfunded requirements placed on them by the State. Mr. Dollinger most concerned with QRSD capital expenses. The education increase plus the requested Town budget increase of \$132,961 prior to final salary recommendations is \$300,791 vs. the revenue forecast \$125,811.

Mr. Dollinger asks should we budget for the QRSD at the start of the budget process by taking prior year plus a percentage increase. The chair responds he has always worked to fund the Town first using raise and appropriate funds and then we pay the school from any remaining raise and appropriate plus free cash. The Town is our first priority plus there is a State process to address education budget conflict between the town and schools.

We review known changes to the FY25 Town budget. The BOS and members of the FinCom met on 3/11 to review budgets for the Town Clerk, Treasurers, Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), and Conservation Commission. The Treasurer's budget has an additional \$40,000 for short-term interest on the fire truck. FinCom Chair had asked the Treasurer if we could have an Article at the ATM to make this interest payment. Treasurer responded she will investigate. The BOS Chair then stated that he believes we may have enough in the funds borrowed to purchase the Fire Truck to make the payment. The Treasurer has several increases which are required to pay for things like group insurance and Worcester retirement. She did put in a request for a wage increase. Lucy T says she is in salary but needs more hours. There is a significant increase in payroll services. Overall expenses are up 10%. The temporary Town Clerk next presented her budget. She is also recommending an increase in the Town Clerk salary. It has been in the \$9,000 range for the past few years. Town Clerk stated she is temporary, and the Town will need to pay in the \$15,000 range to hire a new Town Clerk. Concern is expressed for the total expense increase, and it is recognized the BOS has yet to make final budget recommendations. The ZBA and Conservation budgets are level funded with limited discussion.

The Chair advised that a meeting was held by the Town Managers and/or Finance Committee members from Barre, Hardwick, Hubbardston. The Oakham BOS Admin Assistant attended. New Braintree did not participate. The purpose of the meeting was to unite the towns in opposition to the proposed school budget increase. FinCom Chair took the position that he does not believe the Oakham FinCom should participate in this group. We agree the QRSD is facing many challenges with underfunded and zero-funded requirements from the state. We will focus on the needs of Oakham's residents followed by our ability to support the school.

The Principal Assessor has resigned stating unhappiness with the work environment in the Town Hall and wages. Finding a replacement will be a challenge for the Town and will have budgetary impacts.

The last scheduled joint meeting between the BOS and FinCom is on 3/25 to review Council on Aging (COA), Board of Assessors (BOA), and Historical Society budgets. We then need to schedule joint sessions between the FinCom and BOS to work the budget but the BOS first needs to work salary.

Additional meetings may be necessary with some departments, but none are planned at this time. BOS looking at a June 10th, 2024 Annual Town Meeting (ATM).

We next review the FY24 actual to budget spend prepared by Corey Packard. A few new items were added to the spreadsheet including Legal budget, Moderator budget and the Pathfinder budget. Corey explained he highlighted items with issues such as the Ambulance account. All three members confirm they reviewed the data prior to the meeting so we go through the data quickly. The chair will send a summary of our findings to the BOS for their review/action. On a pro-rata basis some line items will not make it to the end of the fiscal year without some adjustments being made such as the Police Dept. by the BOS.

Chair asks if any additional new or old business the members want to discuss. None.

General discussion on the challenges we face in the FY2025 budget.

Motion made to approve the minutes from 3/6/24 FinCom meeting, unanimous approval. Next meeting will be Wed, 4/3/24 at 6pm.

Meeting adjourned at 7:01pm.