**Oakham, MA. Finance Committee (FinCom) Meeting**

**3/31/2021 DRAFT of Meeting Minutes**

FinCom Chair Paul Rochette called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm. Members Steve Dollinger, Clare Hendra and Alan Flagg were in attendance. Oakham BOS members Lucy Tesnau, Don Haapakoski, and Brad Taylor attend along with the Town Accountant Tom Wilson and Fire Chief Tim Howe.

Clare Hendra distributes a spreadsheet to all that provides Local Revenue Details from 2011 up to the 2021 estimate. After a brief discussion, the Town Accountant and Clare agree they are on the same page for the FY2022 estimate. FinCom Chair advises the primary agenda item is a review of the Fire Department budget and as Chief Howe has another commitment, we start with the Fire Dept budget.

Chief Howe has prepared a detailed budget request that includes a budget narrative and several capital improvement projects which are reviewed by the FinCom. The Chief comments the town has a great Fire crew, he is budgeting to build and strengthen it. There is currently no succession planning for the Chief.

Salary/wages are discussed as the budget sheets did not reflect increases approved during the November 2020 Special Town Meeting.

The department currently has nine fully trained firemen/women and would like to increase this number but has not been able to attract new members. The Chief explains lack of fire staff is a national problem and is most challenging for small towns. Due to most of the part time members having full time jobs outside of the town only two to three are normally available during the workweek. However, the mutual aid between towns works very well and we have particularly good coverage from the surrounding towns. We also provide them with coverage when needed. The Fire Department does not have any administrative help, the Chief does that work. The general workload is discussed. There were 217 responses in 2020 and about 5 real fires in town.

Reviewed the request to increase the Vehicle Repairs budget by $3,000 to maintain the aging fleet. Reviewed the request to increase equipment testing, new equipment costs and firefighting supplies needed per the Chief. One significant driver of these costs is compliance with NFPA requirements. FinCom views these request as reasonable and will make a final decision once the entire town budget is reviewed.

Physicals and testing for each new employee are expensive and the department is also required to perform physicals on existing members every few years. After discussion FinCom Chair makes a motion recommending $3,000 be budgeted for annual physicals (approved). A new line-item will be added to the budget by the Town Accountant. Discussion help on budgeting physicals… for two new hires per year.

Discussion on budgeting to replace two sets of firefighting clothing per year as regulations require replacement every 10 years. Suggestion is to budget in a staggered fashion going forward.

It is agreed new tires need to be budgeted for one of the trucks with a new set priced at around $5,500.

The Chief has applied for a grant for a new multipurpose engine/tanker. Current tanker is from 1987, is outdated as a single purpose piece of equipment. Ballpark cost for a multipurpose tanker is around $380,000.

Discussion on need to replace the Fire Chiefs assigned car. Due to various mechanical problems with the assigned vehicle, he is currently using his personal vehicle. A new truck is estimated at $46,000. A discussion ensues on using the Ambulance Reserve funds ($53,000) to purchase a vehicle. This will be further explored, discussed by BOS and FinCom and if viable could be an Article at the ATM.

FinCom Chair recommends we budget for a town audit in the FY2022 budget. BOS Chair agrees audit is important. Town Accountant asks to be on the schedule for the next meeting to discuss software conversions. FinCom Chair to set up meetings with the Police Dept, Town Treasurer and School Committee to discuss FY2022 budgets in the coming weeks.

Meeting adjourned at 7:50pm.