

Oakham, MA. Finance Committee (FC) Meeting
11/17/20 Meeting Minutes - Joint meeting with BOS.

BOS Chair Brad Taylor calls the board to order at 10:10am. FinCom Chair Paul Rochette opens FinCom meeting at 10:11am. FinCom members Clare Hendra, Alan Flagg are in attendance.

FinCom Chair distributes a revised FY2022 budget calendar which is then discussed. BOS has already requested proposed budgets from department heads and many have been returned as of 11/16/20. Some deadlines need to change due to input needed from others such as the School budget and the governor's budget. BOS member Lucy Tesnau recommends changing the January 30th items to an earlier date. Changes agreed to and made. Key planning step is to stay ahead of dates in the calendar as those are the deadlines. Discussion on the benefit of holding a public hearing prior to the ATM. General agreement it would be a good addition to the planning process to allow citizens to review and ask questions prior to the ATM. BOS Chair makes the point that Covid protocols will need to be met if we hold this meeting. Decision on public meeting to be made around end of 1st quarter.

FinCom member Clare Hendra reviews expectations for the school budgets. Pathfinder is a no change budget once the Pathfinder school votes on their budget Oakham's obligation is known and will not change. Students attending Smith and Bay Path graduate this year so the expenses will end unless new students apply. Clare advised if we don't have to pay Northampton we may save \$16,000 there plus the \$14,000 held for student transport that is not being spent as students are driving themselves. Quabbin school budget must be final by 4/23/21 and that date is now built into the budget calendar. Clare will continue to attend School Committee budget planning meetings as time permits.

We next discuss revenue expectations. BOS chair expects additional revenue of \$30,200 from Solar plants and says he also expects a few more dollars to trickle in from various sources. Brad Taylor advised the town recently got a check from the state for an additional \$10,000 but not sure why. This may be a watershed benefit, Clare to investigate. Town Accountant will prepare preliminary revenue forecast and budget books for the FY2022 budget.

Discussed the final aspects of the Calendar and Lucy Tesnau says the BOS plans to issue the Warrant calling the ATM the 3rd week of June. Discuss timeline for FinCom to review and edit and/or draft Articles. Need to allow time for articles to go to outside counsel for review. This may include some back and forth with outside attorneys. Lucy recommends we will need to allow 3 weeks for article review, we will also need a week for the printer. BOS and FinCom appear to have agreement on the budget calendar roles and responsibilities so we review budget requests. FinCom Chair says next steps are to assemble revenue forecast, update the wages that are increasing and then meet to discuss.

Police budget: Wages will be going up vs what has been submitted by the Chief as the town approved wage increases at the STM. The rest of the Police budget for FY2022 is level funded. We discuss that the Department's Admin wage is combined with the officer's wages in the budget. FinCom recommendation is we need to set up a new account for police admin salary, BOS agrees. Police dept does not have any Capital requests. General discussion on the new cruiser approved at the STM to be purchased and the good work being done by the Police dept.

BOS Chair explains how the wage increases approved at the STM will be implemented. A 2.5% retroactive increase will be paid for the period between ATM and STM and then an additional 2.5% will

be effective after STM. The \$28k that was the base for the STM included stipends, but the town did not vote for a stipend increase. So total value of the increases will be under \$28k. FY2022 wages will reflect a 5% over FY2021. Chris will be in the \$28k along with Ashley.

Fire Dept budget: Proposed FY2022 budget includes wage increases of \$5,000+ and expense increases of \$11,000. Fire Dept has two recommended capital projects going forward one for Turnout gear, \$36,000 and \$4,500 for tire replacement on tanker truck.

BOS budget: Proposed FY2022 budget reflects an increase in wages with expenses level funded. Town Hall, Municipal Bldg and Street Lights budget are all level funded.

Discussion on prior purchase of Highway dept small dump truck. FinCom chair asks if we are paying CDL wage rate for drivers or are we paying non-CDL rates. BOS believes we are paying the lower non CDL rate but will confirm.

FinCom asks if the BOS issued any directives to the departments. BOS responds they requested all departments do the best they can to level fund.

FinCom asks if any planned upcoming capital needs, Lucy Tesnau responds the Fire Dept is looking ahead for many years but she is not anticipating much of a capital need in the near term.

FinCom asks what steps are being taken to upgrade towns accounting software systems as it does not seem to be in the budget at this time. This is an internal control issue as we currently have two systems that do not "communicate" with each other resulting in duplicating manual entries. Don Haapakoski responds he has worked this item and the town applied for a \$50,000 Community compact IT grant. BOS Chair adds the town is working to have better system of records in the town. BOS has been able to address many of these type open items from by holding weekly meetings..... they are investing a lot of time but making good progress.

BOS concerned hourly wages at the Library may be an issue as they may be below market. Suggestion made to investigate hourly wages for libraries in other towns. This leads to discussion on impact of minimum wage going up to \$15.00. Do municipalities fall under this increase, if so, what is impact? Clare asks if we should use the minimum wage in the FY2022 budget for planning purposes and adjust if not required to pay at that rate. BOS to determine if the town is required to pay minimum wage or when we need to start doing so.

BOS Chair explains changes to how earnings by officers are now accounted for when they are on detail. The town was absorbing the admin costs for the Police details now details have a 10% surcharge to keep the town whole.

Discussion on the lack of action and progress by the team set up to review improving internet service for the town. Team is currently on break and issue is not being worked. Remote learning is difficult for some due to lack of internet or slow internet. BOS suggest residents need to write to the state complaining. Question asked what other steps can be taken here. Comment made the town phone contract moved from Verizon to My-Tel at a nice savings.

Discussion on how to fund the Assessors revaluation account going forward. FinCom recommends using prop 2 ½ funding.

Discussion on town hall maintenance and records storage. BOS has considered, painting, vinyl siding, new windows the boiler and other needs. This is complicated by the historical significance of the building and once any renovations start you don't know what else may be found that must then be repaired or replace. FinCom comments if student population continues to decline and we combine elementary school with another town. If that happened can the school be converted to town use. BOS Chair says this should be considered and a team should be developed next year to evaluate options.

Discussion on surplus funds in the Assessors overlay and the ambulance stabilization account.

Discussion on the need for a town Audit. BOS Chair found the last audit incomplete as it only covered one year and was limited in scope. Clare Hendra explains she has learned from other towns and DLS meetings the norm for is an audit every three years. BOS chair makes a point that audits are a way to learn how to improve. BOS and FinCom agree on the need for an audit every 3-5 years. FinCom says we will add to the FY2022 budget and we can always remove if funds are tight.

FinCom adjourned 11:42am, BOS meeting continued.
