

Approved: 3/9/21

TOWN OF WINCHENDON



WINCHENDON TOWN CLERK
RCUD MAR 10 2021 AM 11:00

Finance Committee

Telephone (978)-297-5419

Regular Meeting/Public Hearing

Finance Committee Minutes

January 25, 2021

Held Remotely via Zoom

Finance Committee:

Present: Chairman Thomas J. Kane Jr., Maureen Ward, Keith Kent, Chuck Corts, Douglas Delay, Philip Levine, David Alexander.

Board of Selectmen:

Present: Chairman Michael Barbaro, Vice-Chair Rick Ward, Amy Salter, Audrey LaBrie, Barbara Anderson

School Committee:

Present: Chairwoman Roanne Demanche, Vice-Chair Larry Murphy, Felicia Nurmsen, Karen Kast

List of Documents Presented at Meeting:

- Introduction to Remote Meeting (filed)
- Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §20 (filed)
- Memo from the Town Manager dated 1/21/21 regarding Budget Information (attached)
- Monty Tech Report for 2020 from Representative Dr. Maureen Ward (attached)
- FY21 Six-Month Budget Review (attached)
- Capital Planning Committee FY'22 Recommendations (attached)
- Presentation of Five-Year Financial Forecast (attached)
- Draft FY'22 Budget Presentation (attached)
- Amended Special and Annual Town Meeting Draft Schedule (attached)

6:30PM: Roann DeManche, Chair of the School Committee, called the Tri-Board meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

DeManche confirmed members present and persons anticipating to speak by calling their name and asking for a response in the affirmative: Salter, yes, Ward, yes, LaBrie, yes, and Anderson, yes. Staff members present and responding in the affirmative were Keith Hickey, Town Manager, Joanne Goguen, Town Accountant, Linda Daigle, Executive Assistant, and Taylor Tower, Administrative Assistant. Tom Kane called the Finance Committee meeting to order and confirmed members present: Kane, yes, Dr. Maureen Ward,

yes, David Alexander, yes, Charles Corts, yes, Keith Kent, yes, Doug Delay, yes and Phil Levine, yes. DeManche confirmed School Committee members present Felicia Nurmsen, yes, and Larry Murphy, yes. Staff members present and responding in the affirmative were Joan Landers, Superintendent and Carolyn Hendricks, Administrative Assistant.

Karen Kast and Michael Barbaro joined at 6:33 p.m.

All rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Barbaro called the Board of Selectmen Meeting to order and called attendance again. He also introduced Mr. Stephen Delaney, Interim Town Manager.

DeManche read the "Introduction for Remotely Conducted Open Meetings" which noted Governor Baker's Executive order of March 12, 2020 and outlined the guidelines and ground rules for the meeting this evening.

DeManche advised all participants that the meeting was being recorded and cautioned screen sharing. When asked if anyone besides the Town was video or audio recording the meeting, Nurmsen replied that she uses a translation service.

1. BOARDS/COMMISSIONS/COMMITTEES/DEPARTMENT:

JOINT MEETING WITH BOARD OF SELECTMEN, FINANCE COMMITTEE AND SCHOOL COMMITTEE:

- 1.1. Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School Report by Representative Moe Ward – Dr. Ward read her annual report, copies of which are available at the Town Manager's Office. She recognized the students, and noted that Alison Miller was the valedictorian of the 2020 graduation. She is now enrolled in the University of New Haven's 3+1 program, which will result in a Bachelor's degree in dental hygiene and a Master's degree in healthcare administration. Alison credits the internship opportunities through Monty Tech for giving her a career path. Dr. Ward read aloud a list of Winchendon students enrolled at Monty Tech that received a plethora of scholarships and awards. She finished her presentation by saying that the details of the report can be found on the town website or the website for Monty Tech.
- 1.2. School Committee Process to Fill Superintendent of Schools Upcoming Vacancy – Demanche reminded the committee members that School Superintendent, Joan Landers, is retiring at the beginning of March and said she will be sorely missed. The School Committee had voted back in December to appoint the current Principal Thad King as Assistant Superintendent to assist Ms. Landers with many operations in the office due to COVID issues. Demanche also said that they have not been able to replace the Business Manager. She said that Mr. King will serve as Interim School Superintendent from the date of Ms. Lander's retirement through June 30th. In regards to the interview process, DeManche informed those listening that the initial stages will consist of the formation of an interview committee comprised by staff, parents, a school committee member and possibly a member of the Special Education program. The Superintendent Search Committee will review the most recent job description and update as necessary, post the position publically, and then begin the interview process. Barbaro asked DeManche if the committee had contacted the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) to see if they could assist; DeManche answered that she is familiar with them and will certainly engage with their association. LaBrie asked if with Mr. King holding the Interim School Superintendent position for the rest of the fiscal year, Meghan Weeks will fill in as the Interim Principal for the remainder of the year. DeManche said yes and they will also post for that position as well for the next school year. Dr. Ward thanked Landers for her time here, telling her she will be missed.

Barbaro reminded everyone that this is Mr. Hickey's last meeting with the Town before he moves on, and thanked him for his five years of service with Winchendon. He explained that we are now fiscally sound and very transparent, and told Mr. Hickey that he had gone above and beyond. He will be missed. There was a round of applause for Mr. Hickey. Nurmsen echoed Barbaro's sentiments, wishing Hickey luck in all his future endeavors. Murphy thanked Hickey for getting the Town back on good financial footing with a quick turnaround. Hickey expressed appreciation for the kind words but wished to thank the committee members present for their hard work and tough decisions to help the Town grow and improve.

- 1.3. FY21 Six Month Budget Review – Town Accountant, Joanne Goguen noted a few highlights to bring to everyone's attention. On the expense side, the Worker's Compensation invoice came in greater than expected. She explained that the way the account is set up, a transfer will be done at the end of the year to account for the difference. The School In-Town Transportation account has seen a \$76,020 savings for the months of September and October due to the hybrid learning plan. Depending on how COVID continues, we could see further savings in that account. The Town was able to use CARES funding for the Unemployment Insurance, creating further savings. Under revenue, Goguen noted that there is a decrease in Alcohol Licenses due to the Board of Selectmen voting to reduce their fees in an effort to combat their COVID damages. She noted that she has not collected any Cable License Fees, and they are normally expected in May. The SPED Medicare Reimbursement is higher than expected because in December, we received three-quarters worth from September 2019, March 2020 and January 2020. \$32,355 has been received so far and \$40,000 was budgeted. Goguen expects for 2021 we will be over budget on SPED Reimbursement. Under tax foreclosure, she said the Town has \$42,000 from the foreclosure auction sale of 21 Hale Street. Our PILOT revenue is not in yet because we have not received the payment from the Winchendon Housing Authority yet; she expects to receive it shortly. Meals tax is better than anticipated, with \$46,000 received so far out of the \$60,000 budgeted. Ambulance revenue is down compared to budget, only at 41.6%. She is not sure why that is the case, as ambulances are working just as much, if not more, due to COVID. Building fees are up, with many new homes being put up in Town. There is lots of renovation being done due to people being home more.

On the enterprise side, water and sewer liens were added to the tax bills due February 1st, she anticipates seeing revenue then. She informed those listening that the CARES fund received from the Government was in the amount of almost \$962,000. This grant came with many stipulations. If it was FEMA eligible, the Town was required to apply for FEMA reimbursement and could get up to 75% refunded. \$953,000 has been spent, \$439,865 of which is not eligible for reimbursement. This amount was mostly spent on remote learning for the schools. \$605,000 was submitted to FEMA for reimbursement, with \$347,730 spent on food delivery, PPE and physical barriers. \$301,000 was spent on additional staff for EMTs, \$77,000 was spent on three room decontamination sprayers, PPE safety equipment and a washer and dryer for the Fire Department. The Town had to pay quarantine expenses when a few firefighters were exposed to COVID and had to quarantine at a hotel. 51% of the COVID CARES funding was spent on the School and 49% on the Town.

Dr. Ward asked if the additional EMT was mandated due to COVID, and asked for an answer on why ambulance revenues are down. Hickey said that off-duty firefighters have been coming in to decontaminate ambulances to get them back in service quicker. He said the Town utilizes a billing service for the ambulance; they bill the patients as soon as the information is received from the Fire Department. He noted that the Fire Department does provide that information to the billing service in a timely manner. He will investigate further by checking with Fire Chief Tom Smith to see if he can provide any further insight or information.

Capital Improvement Program (CIP) – Hickey began screen-sharing to review the proposed Capital Improvement Plan, copies of which are available in the Town Manager's Office. The Capital Planning Committee (CPC) is requesting \$250,000 to replace the roof of the Highway Garage. \$21,532 is requested to

fund the lease of a truck for the Cemetery Department. The Road Improvement Maintenance is funded by Chapter 90, and Hickey divulged that he just received notice that the appropriation may increase for the State of Massachusetts, which is great. He noted that the replacement of the 1998 dump truck was deferred last year and the committee hopes to fund the lease of a replacement this year. There was a decision to defer the replacement of the 2001 John Deere Backhoe. The Town is currently paying for a fire-truck leased in 2018, said lease ends in fiscal 22. Hickey anticipates seeing the second tanker pump truck requested next year. The Fire Department is currently leasing an ambulance, approved in fiscal 20. A request was submitted for another ambulance but it has been deferred until the existing lease is paid off to get into a consistent rotation. Dr. Ward noted that the Fire Station Improvement Study item indicates \$75,000 is being taken out of free cash, Hickey indicated that is on the wrong line and is an error. The Fire Station repairs were not funded, and the Town will be doing a study to come up with a specific Fire Station Improvement plan. A proposed ten-year lease on an existing pumper tanker was deferred until the existing one is paid off in fiscal 22. The Fire Department would like to replace their SCBA equipment, costing \$53,934. \$95,000 is requested to replace two Police Department cruisers. The Police are also requesting a license plate reader; an application for funding has been sent to the Robinson Broadhurst Foundation and will be considered later this year. The Library has proposed to upgrade their electrical system and to install a fire suppression system in the building. \$597,000 is the anticipated cost, of which the committee is proposing to fund \$300,000 out of free cash and then borrow \$297,000 over a five-year period.

With regard to the Senior Center, the voters of the Town chose not to fund Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the proposed repair at a cost of \$3.7 million. Since then, the Town has applied for a \$600,000 grant from the Robinson Broadhurst Foundation. The trustees will discuss this at a later date, but they have asked if the Town would be amenable to having this project funded over a two or three-year period. A lot could be done with short-term borrowing. The CPC is seeking to appropriate \$1.7 million for immediate repairs to the Senior Center, funded over a ten-year period and in the amount of \$109,000 annually. Phase 2 would be funded at a later date. The committee also hopes to fund \$40,000 for Local Match for Community Development Block Grants. Police and Public Works are seeking two-way radio systems as the ones currently utilized are out of date and make it tough to communicate in certain areas of Town. This is about a \$460,000 project, funding for which is sought from the Robinson Broadhurst Foundation.

The School Department is requesting \$250,000 to replace the boiler at the Murdock School. The dishwasher at the Memorial Elementary school needs to be replaced and at this point, there are some unexpended funds in the School Department budget for fiscal 21 that could be used. The same goes for needed heat detectors at Memorial, as well. A generator is proposed for Toy Town Elementary in the amount of \$110,000. This building also houses the Superintendent administration.

There are four items in the Water Fund. The first item, the Water Plant Capital Replacement Program, is an item that has been funded over the last couple years, and we need to start working toward completing it. This plant is shared with Ashburnham and we fund \$350,000 a year for those upgrades. The next item is the replacement of water meters in Town, an initiative that has been approved by the Board of Selectmen. This project is estimated to cost \$800,000 and Hickey is proposing to fund that at \$95,000 a year, meaning it will not impact water rate funding. The \$3 million line item to replace the existing water supply line from Ashburnham has been deferred. The existing pipe beneath the river on Mill and River Streets has been funded, with a \$20,000 study proposed in fiscal 22 and the remaining \$120,000 to be funded at a later date once the costs associated with that work are determined. This is an important initiative, as the existing pipe is quite aged and could fail, leaving portions of the town without water for an extended period of time.

In the Wastewater Fund, an ongoing capital item is to replace the leaking wastewater pipe. The DPW has viewed the broken pipe with a camera to find where it needs to be repaired, in an effort to reduce the amount of surface water coming into wastewater, thus reducing the cost of treatment.

- 1.4. Presentation of Five Year Financial Forecast – Hickey began screen-sharing his five-year revenue and expenditure projection for fiscal year 2022. He anticipates a 2.5% increase in revenue/local taxes for fiscal year 2022. Debt exclusion is at \$321,000 which primarily represents the Library and Police. The anticipation for fiscal year 22 state revenue is an increase of 1%. Currently, the only publicized state revenue, Unrestricted General Government Aid, increased 3%. The Department of Revenue has not yet released the Chapter 70 numbers, but Hickey anticipates seeing those next week. He is proposing to use \$100,000 in free cash to offset capital. Special Education is anticipated to increase to \$1 million from \$90,000, Hickey theorized it could be due to the requirements put in place due to COVID. He is proposing to use the second round of Town or School CARES funding to offset this cost, noting that it is anticipated to receive upward of \$1 million. Hickey also proposed offsetting what he anticipates to be a one-time cost on our Special Education Transportation with COVID funds. These increases are strictly caused by COVID requirements. Kane said he would presume that the reason the allocations just about doubled would be that situations where we might have one or two children on a Special Education bus, we can only put one child. He said he assumes that if we anticipate costs will double next year, and we are using the same restrictions this year, we should expect to spend close to \$1 million on Special Education this year. Landers said it will definitely increase due to social distancing requirements. She said there are some situations where families have opted to drive their children to school and they are reimbursed. Kane stated that looking at the report he had received from December, we had only expended \$34,000 of about \$560,000, translating to about 6% of the budget. He said either we are behind on reporting those bills or he is just not seeing where the expense is. Landers replied that some bills had to be adjusted because the school was conducting learning fully remotely, and she is waiting on an adjusted bill. She will use COVID money to supplement as needed and she anticipates receiving firm CARES numbers this week. Hickey informed Kane that they also anticipate savings from the regular Transportation Budget as well.

Moving on, Hickey said that local receipts were estimated very conservatively. In fiscal 22, Hickey noted a new revenue that he proposed to be recognized and reflected, a 3% impact fee that will be charged to marijuana facilities in town. Between the different facilities in Town, it is anticipated that the Town could receive \$180,000-\$330,000 in estimated revenue. PILOT revenue could bring in roughly \$102,000, and in an effort to offset capital costs, it is proposed to no longer split this revenue with the school. It is estimated that there will be budget savings that will be able to restore the amount of money that was proposed to the school. Kane said there was a committee that was working on revenue sharing ideas and they did not get as far yet as to put an actual policy in place. He objected to seeing the PILOT revenue go solely to the Town rather than split with the school as was practiced in the past. Hickey explained that the Town had to increase Special Education Transportation by \$500,000 and still try to balance the budget. Therefore, it is proposed to keep the PILOT revenue rather than give it to the school since state revenue and budget numbers are still unknown.

Hickey noted that there are typical wage adjustments due to union negotiations. There are increased wages for the Fire Department, as when their contract was renegotiated, it was found that some members were significantly underpaid. Three new members were hired three years ago, and due to a federal grant that funded their salaries, fiscal year 21 was the first year that the Town had to pay the full costs of these positions. Public Works administrative costs dropped significantly, as the proposed DPW Director position has been dropped. An additional Highway Equipment Operator is proposed. With significant budget cuts in 2014, the DPW saw a loss of many important staff positions and there has been an effort to replace these members in a gradual, low-impact manner.

Worker's Compensation Insurance and Retirement costs have increased, which have been acknowledged and absorbed into the budget. Unemployment contribution has dropped significantly, meaning the Town had to absorb a great deal. Hickey explained that he worked with the School Department to examine and try to anticipate what unexpected costs could arise in fiscal year 2022.

Hickey reminded the Board that these numbers are all estimates as state revenues and budgets are still unknown. The budget presentation is usually given in March when the numbers are finalized, but due to Mr. Hickey's imminent departure, the Board asked him to present it before he departed.

Barbaro asked if with the additional savings found in the health insurance fund, that money could be plugged back into the agreement using PILOT funds with the school. Hickey answered that is up to the Board and he understands the concern that Kane expressed earlier, but he thinks there will be an adjustment once the budget is finalized that will allow some items to be reallocated to the school budget.

1.5. FY22 Draft Budget Presentation – This topic was discussed at length in item 1.4.

1.6. Schedule Special and Annual Town Meeting – May 17, 2021 - Approve Amended Town Meeting Schedule, Schedule Dates to Open and Close the Special and Annual Town Meeting Warrants – Hickey presented his proposed schedule, which consists of the presentation of a final balanced budget to the Selectmen and the Finance Committee in March. Town Meeting is slated to be held on Monday, May 17, 2021. It was discussed whether the Board will vote on which articles to support after the Finance Committee public hearing. Barbaro reminded those listening that this is a tentative date, and it is unestablished at this time how COVID will affect this schedule.

LaBrie moved the Board of Selectmen schedule the Special and Annual Town Meeting for Monday, May 17, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. at Murdock Middle High School and to open the Special and Annual Town Meeting Warrants today, January 25, 2021 and to close the warrant on Monday, April 6, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. This motion was seconded by Ward and with a roll call vote of LaBrie, aye, Salter, aye, Anderson, aye, Ward, aye and Barbaro, aye, the motion carried unanimously.

2. **BOS RECESS – Ward motioned for a five-minute recess, seconded by LaBrie. With a roll call vote of Salter, aye, Anderson, aye, LaBrie, aye, Ward, aye, and Barbaro, aye, the Board entered into recess.**

The School Committee adjourned their meeting at 8:13 p.m.

While the Board of Selectmen were in recess, the Finance Committee completed their agenda items.

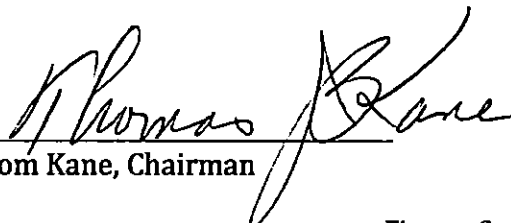
Member Comments: No comments were heard.

Public Input: None was heard.

Dr. Ward motioned to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Alexander. With a unanimous vote of all aye, the meeting adjourned at 8:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Taylor Tower, Recording Secretary


Tom Kane, Chairman

Finance Committee – Tri-Board Meeting Minutes
January 25, 2021