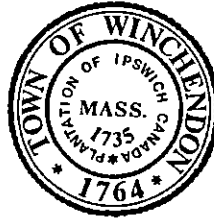


Approved: 3/13/25
DSK

TOWN OF WINCHENDON



Finance Committee

Telephone (978)-297-5419

Regular Meeting/Public Hearing
Finance Committee Minutes
February 20, 2025 6:30 PM
Town Hall 2nd Floor Auditorium

Members Present: Chair Thomas J. Kane Jr., Chuck Corts, Diane Coulter, Doug Delay, Adam Gardner, Mike Giovannucci

Guests: Bill McKinney, Town Manager

Absent: Vice-Chair Dr. Maureen Ward

6:30PM: Chair Thomas Kane Jr. called the Finance Committee meeting to order followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

FY26 Budget Development Discussion: Bill McKinney explained there are three different budget plans they are developing. He has met with the department heads to discuss cuts as costs of non-personnel keep increasing, especially pension, health insurance, and debt. At the tri-board meeting, there was discussion regarding having the election after the town meeting, but that would add another cost to have another election. Instead, they have decided to have several information sessions in the month of April to educate the public and be able to ask questions.

Doug Delay thought it would be helpful to explain to the townspeople how many other communities are also seeking an override, as it's not a problem exclusive to Winchendon. It was anticipated that the budgets should be available to the public after March 11th.

Contracts for school transportation were currently out to bid. T. Kane stated they should do their due diligence to see if there's a way of reducing the number of buses needed, reducing some of the out of town special ed bussing, and looking into a pay as you go model that would bring some reduction to the current cost of transportation.

Mike Giovannucci discussed some ideas that might help the town make some cuts or bring in additional revenue. He asked if the Winchendon School had made any donations, as we plow and maintain their roads. B. McKinney replied that they donated a 15 passenger van to the senior center. Another area the town could look into was increasing taxes on commercial and industrial businesses, or increasing permit fees. B. McKinney explained that the split rate tax system would not benefit the town, it can take some of the tax burden off the residents and increase it for businesses, but it is more for commercial based cities. In regards to government vehicles that employees drive, one way to cut costs would be to reduce the time driving the vehicles when off the clock. For the employees that drive vehicles home every day, but are

only on call a portion of the time, the cost of gas and the wear and tear add up. There was discussion with the Fire Chief in regards to overtime costs. He is also looking into increasing the ambulance cost and other expenses.

T. Kane brought up once free cash was certified and FY24 is closed out, they should look at the actual revenues versus the projected. For example, cannabis revenue was budgeted at \$120K on the presentation, but on the YTD reports it shows \$160K, and on the projections it was showing closer to \$400K. He understood that we want to be conservative in projecting revenues, but some areas may be able to be adjusted to be closer to the actuals.

There was discussion regarding school choice and the increase in the amount of students leaving the Winchendon public school system for school choice. Adam Gardner stated that as a committee, they would benefit from a follow up from the superintendent regarding the connection between the budgets and the reasons students are leaving, and pointing out the areas the higher budgets would help retain students.

Public Input: Yvonne Senecal came forward. She took the issues with the schools very personally as both of her kids graduated from Murdock and did very well. She hates to see the schools struggling, but stated the reality is they have critical failures in the school system. Kids are not getting the basics, so there is no way to build a school system up when there is not a solid foundation. Math and reading scores are incredibly low. She felt there was no willingness to negotiate any kind of cost reduction looking at the school budgets. Yvonne was on the Superintendent search committee, and spent a lot of time and effort to find a good fit, but in the end they made their own decision in keeping the acting as Superintendent. This was the 3rd year they've had to fund a search committee for Superintendent.

Frank Allen came forward. He stated the town should be run like a business, looking at income generation, what they are doing with their finances, etc. Most businesses don't need to replace their bosses every year, with the turnover in Superintendents and Town Managers. He mentioned the kids need to share uniforms now, and felt the PTO should help or the businesses in town should be sponsoring to get the kids their own uniforms. In regards to the school system failure, there was an audit last year that showed 70-80% of middle schoolers failed the MCAS, and 90% of highschoolers failed. Jennifer Allen came forward to state she was for the funding regarding the reparations needed for the schools. There was funding available now, and only required the town to pay a percentage, versus waiting and having to pay 100% in the future.

Budget Review Meeting Schedule: The Town Capital Improvement Program is due March 3rd. Free Cash will not be certified by then. Doug Delay mentioned that any capital improvement items that will go on the warrant will be subject to available funds. A more detailed draft budget will be presented to the BOS by March 10th, and to the Finance Committee on March 10th. The final budget will be developed and presented by the end of March. The public hearing on the budget and warrants will be by the end of April. The BOS will vote on April 21st and the Finance Committee will vote on April 22nd, and will recommend the articles to the BOS on April 23rd.

Member Comments: None.

Adjourn: 7:53PM- C. Corts motioned to adjourn, 2nd by M. Giovannucci..

Corts (Y) Coulter (A) Delay (Y) Gardner (A) Giovannucci (Y) Kane (Y) 6-0

Respectfully submitted:

Brianna Lindahl

Brianna Lindahl, Finance Committee Recording Secretary

Thomas Kane Jr., Chair

Dr. Maureen Ward, Vice-Chair

Charles C. Corts

Diane Coulter

Douglas Delay

Adam Gardner

Mike Giovannucci