March 17, 2016

Town of West Bridgewater

Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting

Committee Members present: Chairman Meredith Anderson, Vice Chair Jeri Scrceni, Peter Fredericksen, Cheryl Adams, Maurice McCarthy, Anthony Kinahan, and Janice Fox.
Also Present: Mr. David Gagne, Town Administrator

Committee Members absent: Jennifer Clark-Croes, J.P. Waller.

The meeting convened at 6:38 PM in the Selectman’s Meeting Room in the West Bridgewater Town Hall. Ms. Anderson started the meeting with a request to approve the minutes of February 18th which were approved unanimously. Ms. Anderson then requested that the Minutes of March 3rd be submitted for approval to review which was also approved unanimously. The Committee then voted to approve the installation of Ms. Kristen Leahy for the paid position of minute taker for the Fincom.

Mr. Steve Solari town building inspector entered the meeting and presented his budget for number 1940 Town Hall. He noted that electricity and Heat are staying the same and noted that the telephone budget was being reduced by $1,300 based on that past few year’s expenses. Ms. Scrceni questioned why the actual elevator contract inspection in 2015 was greater than the requested amount in 2016. Mr. Solari responded that is was because the inspection had to be done twice in that year and it was not anticipated that would be the case again in 2016.

Mr. Solari then reviewed budget 2410 Building Inspector budget. He explained all line items were staying the same except for contractual salary increases. For Budget 2420 Gas and Plumbing, and budget 2450 Electrical, Mr. Solari is asking for a 2% increase in the appointed official salary. Mr. Kinahan asked how the pay works. Mr. Solari responded that it is a combination of salary plus stipend, and also that the assistant inspector gets a lump sum of $400 / year. Ms. Fox asked if all fees and permits go into the general fund, and Mr. Solari explained that it does. Mr. McCarthy asked if our inspector fees are sufficient. Mr. Solari noted that our fees have remained the same over the last 12 years. Ms. Fox asked how many permits do we issuer per year, and the answer was over 200. Mr. Solarsaid that his department issues a report showing where all of the permits have been issued.

Mr. Ed SarroNetwork Administrator entered the meeting to review budget 1550 Dataprocessing Budget. Mr. Sarro requested a 3% increase in the Data Processing Coordinator position. It was also noted that Data Processing services were increasing by 6.51%. When asked why such a large increase, Mr. Sarro noted that the provider, Hub Tech Services, had not increased in over 2 years and that the new larger school and additional equipment also played a role in the increase. Discussion ensued regarding servicing contracts and the fact that many are being renewed this year. There was further discussion surrounding Windstream and the great speed that the internet has with this service. Ms. Anderson brought forward a request for transfer of funds from the Fin Com Reserve in the amount of $13,035.08 for the purchase and installation of a network switch critical to the school and town network as reimbursement for extraordinary and unforeseen expense. Ms. Scrceni made a motion to approve and Ms. Adams seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.
Entering the meeting to discuss the School budget were Superintendent of Schools Dr. Patricia Oakley, School Committee Chair Ms. Susan Sullivan, School Business Administrator Ms. Sarah Smith, and School Committee member Mr. Jim Holden. Ms. Sullivan began the budget discussion by reviewing the areas of note as outlined in the school committee’s presentation. It was noted that there is separation benefits for 6 retiring teachers this year. Also noted was the transportation budget increase. Dr. Oakley further commented that $25K in that transportation increase was the result of the McKinney-Vento Transportation Law that states that students have the right to stay in the school from which they had to leave for reasons of change in domicile. Dr. Oakley noted that one such case has cost the town $17,500 in transportation costs to keep the child attending our school from a long distance to their new home. Discussion ensued about the $49K increase in the in-district transportation increases. It was noted that this is the final year of this contract and the bump in the cost is contractual. Ms. Smith also noted that there has been an increase in students attending Norfolk Agricultural School for which we must also pay transportation costs.

Further review of the budget noted that all day kindergarten cost $73K of which $22K is an increase to the taxpayer and the remainder comes from School Choice revenue. Ms. Screnci inquired further as to how school choice money is used and Dr. Oakley responded that it must be used for direct instruction. We then discussed the line item for Independence Academy tuition where we pay half and the state pays half of the tuition. Dr. Oakley explained that this is new for our town and we have started sending people there. She explained that the concept is for a positive environment in a sober school. This has been created in response to the opioid crisis that the State has finally responded to. We do not have to transport to this school. The other line item discussed was the Agricultural school where kids can choose to go if they want to. Our cost is $22k per year per student plus transportation cost, and there is no cap on these schools.

Ms. Anderson noted that over the last 2 years there has been a total of $1 million dollar increase in the school budget. Mr. Fredericksen asked what steps are they pursuing to try to reduce costs? Ms. Smith responded that special education was an area where they try to keep kids in house as long as possible thereby reducing costs. Up front it cost more money to do this, but down the road it costs less because we have to pay a yearly cost for sending them out. Due to the fact that there is more space now in the H. S. the rationale is that we have room to keep them in house and fund our own program and save on cost. Mr. Holden added that the primary areas where we are most able to cut costs are the areas of transportation and teacher negotiations. Dr. Oakley cited an example where they did not allow more foreign language into the budget to cut costs.

Ms. Screnci stated that she feels the Police officer in the school should be part of the school’s budget. Ms. Anderson asked, what is the role of the police officer in the school? Dr. Oakley stated that the safety of the building and overseeing security were the primary objectives. She stated that the DARE program was not sufficient by itself and having the officer on site was helpful in reinforcing the ideals of DARE because it strengthens the connections and relationships with law enforcement. Other duties include going to court appearances, child in need of services, dealing with DCF, and residency checks. This position is a priority of the State.

Ms. Fox asked if we were able to share nurses among the schools. Dr. Oakley responded that we cannot, that we are mandated to have a nurse in each school in order to meet our grant requirements. Mr. Fredericksen asked about the transportation budget. Dr. Oakley explained that we are looking for more competitive bidders but that the problem is that we only have 4 buses on our route and it is difficult to get companies to bid on such a small contract. Ms. Screnci asked about STEP and TRACK and
Dr. Oakley explained that those are increases for educational attainment. She stated also that we do not yet know the COLA for the budget.

Ms. Anne Iannitelli Town Clerk entered the meeting to discuss budget 1610 Town Clerk. She noted that there is a 3% increase for the elected official position and also that the clerical position was down 21% due to the fact that there is a new hire in the position. She then discussed budget 1630 Elections and noted that we have 3 elections to budget for this year. She also explained that there is a new mandate for audit of elections and that we have to set aside $8K to cover the cost if we happen to get selected for audit. Discussion ensued regarding early voting that is mandated to be made available for voters. We then discussed budget 6920 Veterans Memorial Day. Ms. Iannitelli noted that W.B is hosting the parade again this year which we do every 3rd year.

Mr. Stephen McCarthy Chairman of the Board of Assessors and Mr. John Donahue Principal Assessor entered the meeting to discuss Budget 1410 Board of Assessors. Mr. McCarthy noted the 85% increase in FTE salary due to the fact that he is proposing that the part time principal assessor be increased to a full time position. Mr. McCarthy explained that the board feels it should be a full time position, that every other surrounding town has a full time assessor. Mr. McCarthy also noted that if we got to a full time assessor then we would reduce our reliance on our consultant Patriot Properties and thereby potentially reduce costs. Mr. Kinahan asked why isn't the cost savings presented in this current budget? Mr. McCarthy responded that the position has not yet been allocated and therefore we do not yet know the costs. Mr. Fredericksen asked if the work is not being done now? Mr. Donahue responded that the work is being done, however we do not know what we may be losing on appeals because there is not enough time to allocate enough attention to them. Mr. Donahue explained that the increase to full time would allow him more time to review and approve the work being done by the contractor. Ms. Anderson asked what has changed to move from 24 to 40 hours? Mr. McCarthy responded that other communities have a full time principal. Mr. Donanue explained that the town used to have a full time principal assessor and that supervision and analysis that full time would enable him to do is necessary for the town. Ms. Screnci requested to see an estimate of what has changed and what Mr. Donahue's full time role would save us as a town. Ms. Adams asked what is the bidding process for the consultant role and Mr. Mccarthy explained the process. Mr. Gagne explained that the town has over $1 billion in property value and that the appeals process cannot possibly get enough attention from a part time principal assessor. Mr. Gagne further explained that while it is difficult to prove a negative number, we are certain that the town would be well served by a full time principal assessor overseeing the appeals process and incumbent savings that increased diligence in this area would have for the town.

There being no further business, Ms. Screnci made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Adams, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:26 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Peter Fredericksen, FinCom Member

[Signature]

J.P. Waller, Clerk