March 21, 2019
Town of West Bridgewater
Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting

The meeting convened at 6:39 P.M. in the Selectmen’s Meeting Room in the West Bridgewater Town Hall.

Committee Members Present: Chairman Ms. Meredith Anderson, Vice Chairman Ms. Jeri Scerenci, Ms. Janice Fox, Ms. Cheryl Adams, Mr. Maurice McCarthy, Ms. Melissa Byrnes, Mr. Scott Weatherbee

Also present was Town Administrator David Gagne.

Chairman Anderson advised that the first item on the agenda was to approve the meeting minutes of February 21, 2019. Ms. Adams made a motion to approve the minutes for the February 21, 2019 Finance Committee Meeting, Mr. Weatherbee seconded this motion, and the committee voted unanimously in favor of this motion.

Chairman Anderson advised that the next item on the agenda was to accept for review the meeting minutes of March 7, 2019. Mr. McCarthy made a motion to accept for review the minutes for the March 7, 2019 Finance Committee Meeting, Ms. Byrnes seconded this motion, and the committee voted unanimously in favor of this motion.

Town Clerk Annie Iannitelli entered the meeting to first present budget 1610 (Town Clerk).

Ms. Iannitelli discussed the changes in the budget and noted that the 3% increase in the Elected Official Line Item was based on what other department heads are making. She advised that the change in the clerical salary was due to her assistant receiving her step raises which was based on a union contract.

Ms. Iannitelli also stated that there was an increase in Office Supplies due to a new Program that both the Town Clerks and Selectman’s Office were using. She explained that the program tracks Oaths, Ethics Tests, Open Meeting Law and Financial Reports.

Chairman Anderson asked if anyone had questions on this budget.

Ms. Iannitelli presented budget 1630 (Election/Registration).

Ms. Iannitelli advised that the overall budget has gone down as there will be one less election this year. She stated that it will increase next year as there will be three elections.

Chairman Anderson asked if anyone had questions on this budget.

Ms. Scerenci asked what the difference between Office Supplies and Other Supplies was. Ms. Iannitelli stated that the Other Supplies was primarily for food given to those who work the elections.
Ms. Iannitelli presented budget 6920 (Veterans/Memorial Day Parade).

Ms. Iannitelli stated that the budget went up by $1,000.00, as the parade is in West Bridgewater this year.

Chairman Anderson asked if anyone had any questions regarding this budget.

Ms. Iannitelli exited the meeting.

Building Inspector Michael White entered the meeting to first present budget 2410 (Building Inspector).

Chairman Anderson asked Mr. White to discuss the changes in the budget.

Mr. White stated that the line item for Appointed Official shows an increase of a 3.5% that was used as a place holder. He stated that the increase will actually be 3.25% as he met his goals.

Mr. White stated the increase in Clerical Salary was Contractual and he advised that they are looking to hire a part time clerk for approximately 16 hours per week. Chairman Anderson asked how the department came up with 16 hours, and Mr. White advised that they decided on that number to avoid benefits.

Mr. White discussed how at this time the Plumbing, Electrical and Gas Permits are all applied for at the Town Clerk’s Office. He stated that he believes all the applications should be done at the Building Departments Office, as that’s where all the files can be found.

Mr. White stated that the increase in Vehicle Repair is due to the town mechanic stating that general maintenance needed ton his town vehicle which included tires.

The committee continued to discuss the budget.

Chairman Anderson asked if anyone had additional questions on the budget.

Mr. White presented budgets 2420 (Gas/Plumbing)

Mr. White discussed the changes in this budget which included a 2.5% increase in the Appointed Official Line Item.

Chairman Anderson asked if anyone had questions on this budget.

Mr. White presented budget 2450 (Electrical Inspector).

Mr. White discussed the changes in this budget which included a 2.5% increase in the Appointed Official Line Item.

Mr. McCarthy asked how our permit fees compare to other towns. Mr. White stated that based on his assessment our fees looked to be low.

Chairman Anderson asked if anyone had further questions on this budget.
Mr. White presented budget 1940 (Town Hall)

Mr. White discussed the changes in this budget which included a $1,000.00 increase for the Janitorial Services which was contractual. He also stated that he added $2,700.00 to the budget as he would like to get the boilers serviced in the Fall. Mr. White also noted that the increase in the elevator line item was a contractual increase.

Chairman Anderson asked if anyone had questions on this budget.

The committee thanked Mr. White and he exited the meeting.

Superintendent Dr. Patricia Oakley as well as members of the School Committee entered the meeting to discuss budget 3000 (Education).

Bill Flynn, Chairman of the School Committee advised that they were going to show a presentation of the budget. He noted that they would be focusing on Special Education and English Language Learning which are the two most challenging items for the schools. Mr. Flynn stated that every district in the state is facing challenges in these areas.

Donna Hulme, Vice Chairman of the School Committee began the presentation by discussing Special Education. She began by explaining that by law districts are responsible for providing a free and appropriate education for all Special Education students. She stated that an Individual Education Plan (IEP) dictates the appropriate placements for each student and these services may not be local to the public schools. She advised that outside placements are the most costly.

Ms. Hulme went on to give examples of how the costs for students with out of district placements can be very unpredictable. She advised that 2.55% of the budget increase is due to anticipated out of district placements.

Ms. Hulme advised that the in house services have not gone up, and stated that is due to Mr. Mikolazyk’s work on building in house services in town instead of outside agencies. She stated that this is much more cost effective.

Ms. Hulme stated that tuition and transportation is what’s really hurting the budget, and the school has no control over these.

Ms. Fox asked about the program that has 5 students and whether there was the possibility of bringing that in house or whether it would be too much to handle. Mr. Mikolazyk advised that in the past year and half they brought back 3 students from collaboratives which was a cost savings and they are continuing to work on building in house services.

Chairman Anderson asked the committee to confirm that the increase in the budget for SPED was 2.55% of the overall budget. Ms. Hulme confirmed this, and advised that it is something the school has no control over.

Jim Holden began discussing how English Language Learners is one of the biggest cost factors in trying to run the school. He advised how West Bridgewater is gaining more students who don’t speak English, and the Massachusetts Statute requires all students not fluent in English to have an ESL Teacher.
Mr. Holden went on to discuss how expensive the ESL Services are, and Dr. Oakley discussed the process of placing students with an ESL Teacher, and what the ESL Teachers are required to do.

Mr. Holden advised that they would like to add a .5 teacher to be able to appropriately service all students over 4 schools.

Mr. Holden asked if anyone had questions.

Mr. Weatherbee asked if they believed that a .5 teacher would be enough? Dr. Oakley explained that they added a 0.5 teacher to be cognizant of the budget, however they will need a 2.0 soon.

Susan Sullivan, Secretary of the School Committee began discussing the Funding - Chapter 70. She mentioned that Chapter 70 Funds 25% of the school budget and the remaining 75% is funded by the town, school choice funds, grants and revolving accounts.

Ms. Sullivan stated that the Chapter 70 funding formula has not changed since 1993 and is a very insufficient and inequitable way to fund schools. Ms. Sullivan stated that West Bridgewater has been under funded by Chapter 70 for many years, and noted that other towns get a higher percentage of Chapter 70.

Ms. Fox asked if there has been any movement on the Chapter 70 Formula. Ms. Sullivan stated that the Fiscal Year 20 Proposed chapter 70 Aid in the Governors Budget for West Bridgewater shows an increase of $345,612 over Fiscal Year 19, which is significant. Ms. Sullivan suggested that the Finance Committee write a letter to support the governors proposal for the Town of West Bridgewater.

Ms. Fox asked if there was a change in the formula that provided that significant increase. Dr. Oakley stated there is momentum right now though the Promise Act by the Governor which would help West Bridgewater significantly. She stated that there is also a similar proposal from the Foundation Budget Review Commission.

Ms. Sullivan asked the committee if they had any questions.

Mr. Flynn stated that the town has asked the School to level service the budget. He stated that would be an increase of 5.4% to the budget. Mr. Flynn advised that what they are asking for is an increase of 4.57%. He stated that 2.55% of that comes from SPED and Out of District Placements and that amount cannot be touched. He advised the the remainder of the budget would be going up 2%.

Dr. Oakley advised that the state has allowed for towns to start a SPED stabilization fund that you can put a cap on. This would allow the School Department to go to the Selectman to request funds rather than having to go to town meeting.
Ms. Adams asked how long the town is responsible to provide services to SPED students, and Dr. Oakley advised until the age of 22.

Mr. Flynn noted that in addition to the services for SPED that it’s also worth noting how well the other students in school are doing. He stated that most students do very well and attend top colleges. Dr. Oakley noted that the problem is that over time the money for regular education will be shrinking which is a problem.

The Finance Committee commented on how great the presentation was from the School Committee.

Chairman Anderson asked if anyone had further questions for the School Committee.

The Finance Committee thanked the School Committee and they exited the meeting.

Chairman Anderson asked if there was any other business the committee wanted to bring before the board.

Ms. Screnci made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Adams seconded this motion, and the committee voted unanimously in favor of this motion.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50PM

Respectfully submitted,

Kristin Leahy, Secretary