Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting of Thursday, March 12, 2015. The meeting convened at 7:06 p.m. in the Selectmen’s Meeting Room in Town Hall.

Present: Ms. Meredith Anderson, Chairman; Mr. J.P. Waller, Secretary; Ms. Cheryl Adams, Mr. Steve Currier, Mr. Peter Fredericksen; Mr. Maurice McCarthy. Ms. Jeri Scrceni, Vice Chairman, arrived at 7:43 p.m.

Absent were: Ms. Jennifer Clark-Croes and Mr. Anthony Kinahan.

Also present at this time were Town Administrator David Gagne and Treasurer/Collector John Duggan.

Treasurer/Collector John Duggan presented budgets 1450 Treasurer/Collector, 7100 Debt-Principal, 7510 Debt-Interest, and 7520 Short Term Interest. Mr. Duggan discussed contractual increases in budget 1450 Treasurer/Collector. He said a major goal of his is to establish a centralized personnel office for the Town. Mr. Duggan discussed expenses for the postage machine and implementing Flex Spending Accounts and Dependent Care Accounts. He said that the funds saved by implementing bi-weekly pay evened out the cost of offering these two types of accounts to employees. Mr. Duggan said that receivables have been better since the economy has improved. He said that the auction of land last year brought in funds as well.

Discussion continued regarding the bond market and the cost of going out for bonds. Mr. Duggan said Bond Anticipation Notes are inexpensive in comparison.

There was discussion regarding the Town’s improved bond rating from A to AA.

At 7:14 p.m., Mr. Ed Sarro, Network Administrator entered the room.

Mr. Duggan said he is interested in beginning cross training the Assistant Treasurer and so he increased funds for the annual school at UMass Amherst.

Ms. Anderson said that all the salary increases were contractual. Mr. Gagne said that the clerical union increases are over a two-year period.

Ms. Anderson asked if Mr. Duggan was able to offer the taxpayers all of the services they expect with this budget. Mr. Duggan said he was and that much of their services are coordinated online. He said people seem to appreciate the convenience of paying tax bills online.

There was discussion regarding the fees collected by outside vendors when taxpayers pay with credit cards and debit cards online. Mr. Duggan said those fees are not collected by the Town. He said that the Town has to pay the fees charged when taxpayers use debit or credit cards to pay fees in the Town Clerk’s Office. Mr. Duggan said he is working with the Water Department to get the water bills payable online as well.

Ms. Anderson asked if Mr. Duggan was trying to provide any new services. Mr. Duggan said no, but that he anticipated changes to the health insurance plans due to federal changes.
it would be. Ms. Anderson asked if there were other service providers for a better price. Mr. Sarro said the company is Windstream and they were chosen through a bid process.

Discussion continued regarding the various departments that contribute to the cost of Network Administration. Mr. Sarro said that the school pays 55%, the Town pays 20%, the Fire Department pays 10%, the Police Department pays 10% and the Water Department pays 5%.

Mr. Fredericksen said it was a $24,000 increase per year for all the contracts. Ms. Anderson asked about eventually switching companies and the potential loss of the fiber optic line. Mr. Sarro said that they would pull a fiber line from the pole. Mr. McCarthy asked if the network would slow down if this did not go through. Mr. Sarro said yes and that it would get worse than what the Town already experiences.

Discussion continued regarding how the network is shared amongst departments. Mr. Sarro said it made sense to have one of everything and expand it instead of buying three separate systems. Mr. Fredericksen asked if these upgrades would make the Town equipment state of the art. Mr. Sarro said yes.

Discussion continued regarding the long-term costs. Mr. Sarro said that the use of the internet is only going to increase. He said Town services are becoming more and more web based.

At 8:01 p.m., Mr. Sarro left the room.

There was brief discussion regarding the high increases in all of the budgets that have been presented.

At 8:02 p.m., Ms. Sarah Smith, School Business Manager, Dr. Patty Oakley, Superintendent of Schools, Ms. Sue Sullivan, School Committee Chairman, and Ms. Anne Iannitelli, of the School Committee, entered the room.

Ms. Sue Sullivan, School Committee Chairman, presented budget 3000 Education. She said the total school budget is $13,028,885 of which the school is funding $1,864,194. She said that portion is funded through School Choice money at $1,205,621, grants at $346,257, and revolving accounts at $312,316. She said this year’s request is an increase of $525,819 over FY15.

Ms. Sullivan discussed the increases that the School Committee must fund. She said $175,768 is for special education increases resulting from five new out-of-district placements, which is federally mandated. Ms. Sullivan said $58,470 was budgeted for separation benefits for retiring staff which is a contractual obligation. She said that $371,881 for step and track changes which is also a contractual obligation. Ms. Sullivan said that there is $126,278 increase for net maintenance costs for the new Middle/Senior high school. She said that the cost of full-day kindergarten with free tuition was $20,254.

Ms. Adams asked for clarification regarding the out-of-district placements. Dr. Patty Oakley, Superintendent of Schools, said that there are students that have such severe needs that the schools are unable to serve them so they are placed in a facility that can best address these needs.
Dr. Oakley said there are 27 students in out of district placements. Mr. McCarthy asked if there was any reimbursement for these costs. Dr. Oakley said there was some from the state but the amount is minimal compared to what is being spent due to a lack of updated language in the state statute. Ms. Sarah Smith, School Business Manager, said that the funds are received at the end of the year and are used for the following fiscal year. Dr. Oakley said that five students moved from out of Town and that they were already in placements. She said that they convened a meeting to reevaluate those placements.

There was discussion of changing these mandates at the state level. Dr. Oakley said that there are a few bills being debated now in the House of Representatives to change the formula to determine how much the school systems would actually be responsible for and to take the mental health aspect out of the funding formula for schools. Dr. Oakley noted that SPED expenses consist of 26% of the budget and the population is only about 15% of the student body. She said the cost of providing these services is going up.

Discussion continued regarding mid-year move ins and the 40B apartments that could impact an increase in student services.

Dr. Oakley noted other increases in the budget. She said there was an added preschool instructional assistant due to the needs of the students.

Discussion continued regarding offering the all-day kindergarten for free. Dr. Oakley said that it was becoming a case of haves and have-nots. She said that School Choice funding will help fund this program and limit the amount of money the Town would have to contribute.

There was lengthy discussion regarding the impact of School Choice. Dr. Oakley said that there are not that many kids that leave the school systems once placed.

Discussion continued regarding the utility increases in the budget due to the new Middle/Senior high school.

The Committee noted decreases for transportation. Dr. Oakley stated that they would no longer have mid-day buses for kindergarten. Ms. Anderson noted that the cost of transportation is decreased because there was no longer a need to bus kids for athletics.

Ms. Smith said that the engineer estimated the cost of electricity for the new school as a requirement for the MSBA reimbursement process.

Ms. Anderson asked if the School Committee was expecting the increase for network services. Ms. Smith said that the school needs a bigger broadband so they knew that an increased cost was coming.

Dr. Oakley noted that the decrease in population just worked out that the kindergarten will still have room for School Choice students. She said that since more kids are enrolled in a full-day of school, the state funding increases.
Discussion continued regarding the grant funding for the school. Ms. Smith said that some of the grants were lessened. Mr. Currier asked if services decreased since those grants decreased. Dr. Oakley said that they still ran the programs. She said she imposes budget freezes to control costs.

Mr. McCarthy said that the increase overall was 4.9%. He asked if that was normal. Ms. Smith said it normally is about 3% but the SPED increases impacted the overall budget increase.

At 8:38 p.m., Town Clerk Nancy Morrison entered the room.

There was discussion regarding the increase in maintenance costs due to the new school. Ms. Smith said that she will be putting out a request for quotes for solar energy. Dr. Oakley said that the roof is tilted to the south for optimal solar energy. She said solar panels were not included as part of the project because it would interfere with the reimbursement of the project.

Ms. Anderson said that the budget can only be raised by a maximum of 2.5% in total and that the school is requesting an increase that would be that entire amount. Dr. Oakley said that local aid money, lottery funding and Chapter 70 funding all goes in the same pot and it is distributed as needed for the various departments. She said that West Bridgewater has worked together like that for a long time.

There was discussion regarding the salary increases for the teacher’s union. Dr. Oakley said that the increase was a 2% but that there are track changes and steps in addition to that.

At 8:43 p.m., Mr. Gagne, Dr. Oakley, Ms. Sullivan, and Ms. Smith left the room.

The Committee discussed the Finance Committee secretarial position. Ms. Anderson stated that she and Mr. Waller determined as a subcommittee to have Ms. Mallory Aronstein to continue as the secretary for the Committee. She said that as Ms. Aronstein was unable to attend the meetings, that she would record meeting minutes off of a taped video. Mr. Currier asked about the cost. Ms. Anderson said it would be an increase. She said Ms. Aronstein’s rate is $25 an hour. Mr. Waller said that his rate was $15 per hour.

Discussion continued regarding using the video instead of attending live meetings. Ms. Anderson said that there would be a decrease because Ms. Aronstein wouldn’t be paid for attending meetings.

At 8:50 p.m., Mr. Gagne entered the room.

Discussion continued regarding following procedure of posting the position and soliciting applications. Ms. Anderson stated that it would take a long time to find someone and by then the budget would be completed. She said that the time savings makes up for the increase in hourly rate. Ms. Serenci agreed. Mr. Waller stated that it would be a cost savings of having someone not spending their time in the room.

Mr. Gagne said that the position is non-contractual, non-union. He said posting the position is the normal process but it would be a month before someone was hired to do the job and the
Committee’s budget would be almost over.

Ms. Screnici MOVED to appoint Ms. Aronstein as the secretary for the balance of the year and post the secretarial position for the new year. Seconded by Mr. Waller and so voted unanimously. Adams, yes; Anderson, yes; Croes, absent; Currier, yes; Frederickson, yes; Kinahan, absent; McCarthy, yes; Screnici, yes; Waller, yes.

The Committee reviewed the request for a transfer of funds from the Finance Committee Reserve for the Veterans Agent. Mr. Gagne said that there has been an increase in the number of veterans receiving benefits. He said it is a state requirement to pay these benefits.

Mr. Currier MOVED to approve the request for transfer of funds in the amount of $15,000 for budget 5430 Veterans Agent. Seconded by Ms. Screnici and so voted unanimously. Adams, yes; Anderson, yes; Croes, absent; Currier, yes; Frederickson, yes; Kinahan, absent; McCarthy, yes; Screnici, yes; Waller, yes.

There was discussion regarding being reimbursed for this expenditure by the State. Mr. Gagne said that it would go to the General Fund.

Mr. Currier MOVED to accept for review the minutes of March 5, 2015. Seconded by Mr. McCarthy and so voted unanimously. Adams, yes; Anderson, yes; Croes, absent; Currier, yes; Frederickson, yes; Kinahan, absent; McCarthy, yes; Screnici, yes; Waller, yes.

At 8:56 p.m., Ms. Adams and Ms. Screnici left the room as they were not feeling well.

Town Clerk Nancy Morrison and Assistant Town Clerk Anne Iannitelli presented budgets 1610 Town Clerk, 1630 Elections/Registration and 6920 Veterans/Memorial Day. Mrs. Morrison said that the clerical salary has increased due to contract negotiations. She said that longevity went down but she increased dues and meetings because the fees increased and incoming Town Clerk Anne Iannitelli will have to attend more conferences and meetings.

Discussion continued regarding the Town Clerk’s salary and how it is set at Town Meeting. Mrs. Morrison said the next person hired to fulfill Ms. Iannitelli’s current position would be hired at a lower salary than is currently allotted. She said that just in case Ms. Iannitelli did not win the election, she fully funded her current salary line.

Ms. Anderson asked how that position would be filled. Ms. Iannitelli said that it is a union position and therefore must be posted. Ms. Anderson asked how Ms. Iannitelli will get along being short-staffed in between hiring someone and the election. Mrs. Morrison stated that a senior tax work-off person will be there to help.

Mr. Currier said that the budget had a modest increase overall.

The Committee reviewed budget 1603 Elections/Registration. Mrs. Morrison stated that the budget decreased as there are only two elections this year. Mr. McCarthy asked who the appointed officials in this budget were. Mrs. Morrison said it was for the Board of Registrars.
The Committee then reviewed budget 6920 Veterans/Memorial Day. Mrs. Morrison said that this was a $1500 budget that was used to purchase flags for the cemeteries. Mrs. Morrison said that this budget will go up the following fiscal year because it will be the Town’s turn to host the Tri-Town Parade.

There were no further questions.

Discussion continued regarding town meeting setting the salary.

At 9:10 p.m., Nancy and Annie left the room.

Mr. Gagne presented budget 1220 Board of Selectmen. He stated that the Selectmen’s salaries are the same but that the appointed officials line is increasing due to contractual obligations. He stated that Ms. Jacqueline Flaherty will observe her 20 year work anniversary. Mr. Gagne said that tuition reimbursement has decreased. Mrs. Anderson asked if it was not budgeted for, could it still be used during the fiscal year. Mr. Gagne said it is a contractual benefit. Mr. Gagne said that the dues and meetings line has increased due to the Selectmen expressing interest in attending the annual trade show put on by the Massachusetts Municipal Association. He said that the Equipment Replacement line increased as the Board of Selectmen is interested in purchasing a small copier for boards and commissions that meet after hours.

Mr. Currier suggested that the machine purchased not use ink but rather use toner as that will be a cost savings.

Discussion continued regarding the benefits of attending the MMA trade shows. Some Committee members expressed interest in adding funds to the Finance Committee budget to be able to send some members.

Mr. Gagne presented budget 1290 Administrator. He said that he decreased transition assistance but increased dues and meetings as he still has a couple of courses for his procurement certification. Mr. Gagne discussed his stipend. He said he does not receive a town-paid car or cell phone so this stipend covers those types of costs.

Mr. Gagne presented budget 1310 Finance Committee. Mr. Gagne said that he increased advertising to account for posting for the secretarial position. Mr. Currier recommended adding money to the dues and meetings line in order for Committee members to attend the MMA annual conference. Mr. Gagne said that it would be about $1800 for all members to attend.

Mr. Currier MOVED to add $1800 to the Dues and Meetings line in budget 1310 Finance Committee. Seconded by Mr. McCarthy and so voted unanimously. Adams, absent; Anderson, yes; Croes, absent; Currier, yes; Fredericksen, yes; Kinahan, absent; McCarthy, yes; Scireni, absent; Waller, yes.

Mr. Gagne presented budget 1320 Finance Committee Reserve. He said that it is level funded at $67,000. He noted that the Reserve Fund is for unforeseen and extraordinary expenses.
Discussion continued regarding the Municipal Building Needs Committee reserve.

Mr. Gagne presented budget 8200 State/County Assessments and Charges. He said that these figures are local aid assessments. Mr. Gagne noted a slight increase in Chapter 70 funds. He said that charges to the Town decreased and local aid increased, which translates to a 2% increase in state funding over last year.

The Committee then discussed the salary increases for the Council on Aging staff members. Ms. Anderson said that Ms. Mary Graf, Elder Services Director, sent over the information the Committee requested regarding the Community Outreach Counselor.

Discussion continued regarding the make up of the staff at the Council On Aging.

Ms. Anderson said that she still thought that a 5% merit increase was excessive. Mr. Currier said that the percentage is high but in actual dollars it is a low number. He said these positions are part time and have no benefits.

Mr. Gagne said each budget the Committee is reviewing during this first round is unfiltered. He said there would most likely be changes to the budgets when the Board of Selectmen votes at the end of the budget presentation process.

There was discussion concerning the Capital Budget meetings. Mr. Currier said that he may not be able to make the second meeting. He thought someone else should serve. Mr. Gagne said that the second meeting is only tentatively scheduled. Mr. Currier decided to remain a representative on the Capital Budget Committee.

At 9:49 p.m., Mr. CurrierMOVED to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Mr. McCarthy and so voted unanimously. Adams, absent; Anderson, yes; Croes, absent; Currier, yes; Fredericksen, yes; Kinahan, absent; McCarthy, yes; Serenci, absent; Waller, yes.

Jonathan P. Waller, Secretary

Respectfully submitted by Mallory E. Aronstein.

List of Documents in Agenda Packet - March 12, 2015

- Budgets 1450 Treasurer/Collector; 7100 Debt Principal; 7510 Debt-Interest; 7520 Short Term Interest; 1550 Data Processing; 3000 Education; 1610 Town Clerk; 1630 Elections/Registration; 6920 Veterans/Memorial Day; 1220 Board of Selectmen; 1290 Administrator; 1310 Finance Committee; 1320 Finance Committee Reserve; 8200 State/County Assessments and Charges.
- Request for transfer of funds for Veterans Agent
- Minutes of March 5, 2015
- Email from Ms. Mary Graf, Elder Services Director concerning the Community Outreach Worker
- Job Description for the Community Outreach Worker