November 17, 2014

Town of West Bridgewater

Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting

The meeting convened at 7:06 P.M. in the Selectmen’s Meeting Room in the West Bridgewater Town Hall.

Committee Members Present: Chairman Meredith Anderson, Ms. Jeri Screnci, Mr. Peter Fredericksen, Ms. Cheryl Adams, Ms. Jennifer Clark-Croes, and Mr. Steve Currier.

Committee Members Absent: Mr. Anthony Kinahan.

Non-Committee Members also present: Mr. David Gagne (Administration) and J.P. Waller (Secretary).

The meeting started with an update from Chairman Meredith Anderson on the appointment of new Finance Committee members. She stated that she is waiting on a reply from the Moderator regarding the appointments.

There was then a discussion about reorganizing the Committee and appointing the open officer positions. There were questions about whether or not members that were up for re-appointment were able to hold officer positions before their reappointments were official. Mr. David Gagne stated that the bylaws are ambiguous about this and recommended the Committee wait on reorganization votes until he spoke with the Moderator. The committee agreed this was a good approach and Mr. Steve Currier made a motion to postpone reorganization votes. Mr. Peter Fredericksen seconded and the Committee voted unanimously in favor of this motion.

There was then a discussion about voting to overspend the Snow and Ice budget. Mr. David Gagne gave an update about this budget and how it works every year with the overspending allowance. He stated that salt prices have gone up 40% this year. Ms. Jennifer Clark-Croes asked why the town doesn’t use sand like other towns in the area. Mr. David Gagne stated that the town uses salt because it reduces the plowing needs by pretreating the roads. He stated that with the expenses already incurred there is only a small amount in remaining in the budget so to be proactive he would like a vote on ability to overspend the snow and ice budget now. He stated there are special deficit spending legislation in place around the snow and ice budget due to the unpredictability of winter. Mr. Peter Fredericksen asked why the Committee had to vote to overspend if this legislation exists; Mr. David Gagne stated this voting was part of the deficit spending process. Chairman Meredith Anderson asked why the Committee doesn’t vote on this first meeting of the fiscal year, Mr. David Gagne stated for historical purposes the town has always voted later. Mr. Peter Fredericksen made a motion to overspend the Snow and Ice budget. Mr. Steve Currier seconded and the Committee voted unanimously in favor of this motion.

There was then a discussion about how the Committee wanted to handle the departmental budget process for the upcoming year. Chairman Meredith Anderson stated that she was concerned, from the Chairman’s position, about having to answer questions about budgets where she was no part of the
subcommittee during the Town meeting. She asked if Committee members would be willing to speak at Town meeting if questions were raised about budgets that members were part of the subcommittee. Ms. Jeri Screnci shared her thoughts about the process and the pros and cons as she saw it based on her past experience in the Committee. Ms. Jennifer Clark-Croes shared that she thought one down side of the subcommittee process is the Town viewers don’t get to see the questions and answer side with the department heads therefore making it less available to the public. Chairman Meredith Anderson asked what the number of committee members in a sub-committee could be, Mr. David Gagne stated it had to be less than 5 otherwise there would be a quorum and open meeting law would apply. Mr. Steve Currier stated that he liked the idea of the subcommittee because you got a more in depth look into the budget and that the department heads seem to praise the approach as well, he suggested a balanced approach to the 2 processes. Chairman Meredith Anderson asked for ideas of how to join the two processes. There was then an open discussion about several different balanced approaches that could be put in place and everyone’s thoughts. The Committee agreed to define a dollar threshold and that department heads have to come in to Committee meeting, but if it is below the threshold the Committee will review and decide if the department head needs to come in for further review. The subcommittees will remain voluntary if Committee members feel especially strong about certain departments. Mr. David Gagne will also ask the department heads to provide simple summaries along with each department budget.

Mr. Steve Currier made a motion to accept for review the June 5th and August 19th meeting minutes, Ms. Jeri Screnci seconded and the Committee voted unanimously in favor of this motion.

The Committee members then passed around and signed the bill to join the Association of Town Finance Committees.

There was then a discussion about the New School Building budget. Chairman Meredith Anderson provided an update about the meetings she has been attending. She updated the Committee on different topics and issues that have come up during these meetings and the progress of the building. She stated that only a small amount of the contingency budget had been spent to date. Mr. David Gagne shared his thoughts about the contingency budget for the New School Building budget and what happens if any funds remain.

Mr. Steve Currier made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Jeri Screnci seconded and the Committee voted unanimously in favor of this motion.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

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J.P. Waller, Secretary
Jeri Sercel, Finance Committee Signatory

Meeting Documents:

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