

Finance Committee Notes
March 23, 2022
Town Offices
6:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 6:03.

Present: Joyce Muka, Nate Messer, Ginger Robinson, Michèle Higgins, Bill Glabach, Erica Jensen.

Absent: ø

Guests: Bill Brooks, Glenn Caffrey

Nate made a motion to accept the minutes from the meeting on March 23. Michèle seconded. Ginger approved. Joyce abstained. The minutes were approved.

Erica reported that while there will be an as yet undetermined amount in capital expenditure for the Franklin Tech budget for next year, Leyden will have no students at the school and that our overall cost should go down. We will not know until June what Leyden's share will be. Bill G. noted that when we do end up having students at the school again, it will seem like big increase to our assessment.

Erica also reported that the Public Safety Advisory Committee's grant application in conjunction with Bernardston for \$187,000 has been approved by the State. She stated that the information would become public tomorrow (March 24) but that we should not discuss the matter until after the public announcement. It can be noted in these minutes because the minutes will not be public until after the announcement. She noted that Mike Edwards from the Collins Centers has already begun working with Bernardston. Michèle noted that the date which would be our next meeting will conflict with the next meeting date of that committee; they meet every first and third Wednesday while we meet every other week.

Much of the rest of the meeting dealt with the Highway Department.

We asked Bill how many hours part-timers work. Bill told us that part-timers work, in essence, almost full time. They work six weeks on mud grading, six weeks on restocking winter supplies, two months of mowing. They are not necessarily all the same people, however. He has put in for 800 hours which is somewhat more than he has needed but does not want to be caught short in hours especially during the winter. The winter budget is depleted, he added. Paul Zimmerman will come back at the already established wage of \$24.00 per hour. He will be here for April and leave for the summer. Bill will be looking for a person to mow for the summer. Ed Johnson will no

longer be doing the mowing. Right now, Bill has AJ, Dave and himself, but he will be looking for another part-timer. Erica mentioned that the Select Board did vote to pay Dave at \$27.00 per hour. They also voted to pay \$24.00 per hour to part time hires in January 2022.

Bill B. said that a person from MassSave came to inspect at the Highway building and the former Police Station from an energy standpoint and said that there's not much that can be done to make the buildings more energy efficient and that the \$2400 budget request for propane is accurate. He said that it is a real source of anxiety for him; he keeps the thermostat set at 45°. One bill that came in was for \$600. He believes that there will be bidding through the FRCOG in the future which should help some with the cost. The building is wood with maybe a concrete frost wall on two sides.

The winter maintenance is exhausted now. He hopes that winter is over! The maintenance account is low.

Ginger noted that salaries are now separated in the budget. The amount for training that was put in last year will come out in the new budget because it won't be needed. For FY21, the salary budget was \$141,645 with \$31,170 included for training. AJ will be working 40 hours per week, overtime eligible, at \$57,000. Summer salaries for twenty-eight weeks (non-winter) come in at \$2,062. For FY23, the salary request will be for \$147,311 unless Bill can have an extra person for his "dream team." In that case, he would add an additional \$6,921 to his request. As an average, that person would work one 10-hour day per week to provide coverage for him to do such things as the paperwork or meet with vendors.

Bill B. said that his salary is right at \$70,000 and has put in for 3% raise but not for AJ because he is only just now starting. He is also asking for a 3% increase (72¢ an hour) for the part time workers. Ginger said that we are trying to get away from increases based on percentages. Erica wanted to understand if this is for an increase for June for those who began in January which brought up a discussion of how long people who received increases in January would go without a raise if they weren't receiving a raise for the new fiscal year. Bill B. said he was open to adjustments and compromise.

Ginger said that we want to keep raises on a schedule and that we want the taxpayers to see what they're paying for. Nate pointed out that a year and a-half is a long time to go without a raise. If it were a 3% raise, part time pay would go to \$24.72 an hour and Dave's pay rate would go to \$27.81 an hour. The discussion is open regarding AJ. Bill G. reiterated that we want to stay away from percentage increases and that we could maybe look at a merit raise followed by a discussion of salary line and break out of how it's reported in the budget.

Bill B. also talked about the \$1,600 for advertising for the openings and that the Highway Expense Account was almost empty as a result. We talked about using the Finance Reserve fund to replenish the account. We discussed whether the Select Board also had to approve such an action and then decided that it is within the purview of the Finance Committee to approve.

Nate made a motion to accept the following, and Joyce seconded. All approved:

To move \$1,600 from the Reserve Fund to the Highway Expense account
#01-421-5300 to cover the unexpected advertising bill.

3/23/22

Signed:

Ginger Robinson

Nate Messer

Michèle Higgins

Nate asked where the rest of the money is spent: on fuel, gravel which costs \$10,000 per 1,000 feet, on pavement. Bill B. is expecting that the cost for motor oil will increase by 50% though they do have some in stock at the moment. Erica wanted to clarify that there is a 5% increase from vendors. Bill B. said that Highway Dept. saves \$400 per day when they haul their own material but that there will be a 5% increase for material. Untreated salt costs \$2400 per load and is good to only 20° above. They would like to try mixing treated with untreated salt, but there is an issue with storage space. He does not know what the price for treated salt is. They are deficit spending now. Bill G. and Joyce both explained that a town cannot budget less one year and be allowed to deficit spend more in subsequent years. Additionally, we can never predict the weather from one winter to the next. Bill B. told us that the sand from street sweeping cannot be sold or reused out of town and that some home owners ask for it for their driveways or yards.

Gasoline comes from the miscellaneous account and is for 5 gallon cans or the Ford F350. Diesel comes from a separate account that is shared with the Police Department.

The highway maintenance fund still has \$78,000 in it and is used in the spring for dirt road maintenance, crack sealing street sweeping (the Town rents a street sweeper for \$10,000) and line painting.

The Highway Dept. building needs a new roof very soon. Bill B. thinks that a metal roof would be dangerous in the winter with sliding snow and ice but if there were a way to prevent that, he would not be opposed. Erica wondered if we appropriated

money for this. We think we might be able to use free cash or stabilization money. We need to bid out for this, and Erica will confirm with Michele G. that she has begun the process. Ginger noted that it would be helpful if we had a number before Town Meeting.

Nate suggested that we need to develop a 20-year plan. Bill B. asked if leftover money from one year can go into such a fund. Joyce said extra money goes into free cash which, once certified, can go into stabilization. We could note which department had x-amount left in any given year. For instance, it could be that Highway could have enough left to pay for a roof. The figure that Bill B. has suggested is \$24,000, but we believe that is too conservative. We also noted that the Finance Committee does not have information on our stabilization accounts from the Accountant. We asked Erica to ask Angelica to provide bi-weekly reports which would include stabilization numbers; Joyce noted that she is supposed to by statute.

In other long range plans, the Highway Dept. needs a new loader. The current one is a 2005 and has 7,800 hours on it with an expected life expectancy of 10,000 hours. He stressed that this is the single most important piece of equipment that they have and that it might last another two years. It is used every day. A new one costs somewhere between \$150,00 to \$175,000. Highway would like to be able to purchase a previously owned loader in good shape that predates the new emission standards. The newest ones are less reliable due to the delicate sensors which are installed. A stopgap measure could be used which would be to rebuild the engine, but that would not solve the issue of wear and tear on the body of the loader. This option would also have to include a rental while the loader would be under repair. This is probably not a good option.

Bill G. thinks that perhaps a new roof could be funded from free cash but that we must put money aside every year for such expenses as a loader. We do have \$212,000 in free cash that we could use for the roof and put some aside for the loader.

Bill B. wondered what our decision is on the salaries. We reminded him that we are listening tonight and not making any decisions.

Erica asked Bill B. if he could provide an estimate of how much it might cost to repair an unmaintained road such as Hunt Hill. The Town is not responsible for maintaining the road unless there is a Town vote, a statute exists that says that a town has to maintain a road only to the last occupied house. There currently is no house on the part of the road in question, but there could be. Bill said that it is a circular argument: if there is a house, it needs a number yet there is no road. He also said that there is a lot of

ledge, and drainage and the amount of gravel that would be necessary would be very expensive. He thinks that the job would require at least \$60,000 plus labor. He also said that winter maintenance on that road would be difficult at best. There is a 90° turn where a plow could go down but not come back unless the road went all the way through to W.S.Black Rd.

Michèle spoke about the COA request of \$4,000. She said that the COA only ever asks for \$4,000 from the Town. They receive \$6,000 from the State which is spent before using Town money. Some years, Town money is returned. The COA tries to spend all of its State money, however, because the State docks them the following year for whatever they do not spend. She said that they use the money for meals, programs, supplies. This year, as well as last year, they did not use all of their Town money due to Covid. Programs are only just now starting to be revived, and they are likely to begin using the Town account.

Michèle mentioned to Erica that there is a problem with one of the budget pages that the Finance Committee has which shows the Pavilion line item at \$30,000 when Town Meeting last year voted to put in an extra \$10,000. Erica will look into that. Also, there is a line item for the repair of the curtain on stage at Town Hall carrying a balance of over \$2,300. The curtain repair was completed quite some time ago, and Erica will look into that, as well.

The next meeting will be on April 6 at 5:00 in order to avoid overlap with the Public Safety Advisory Committee meeting.

Joyce made a motion to adjourn at 8:12. Michèle seconded. The vote was unanimous.