

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

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m.

Present: Ginger Robinson, Joyce Muka, Nate Messer, Michèle Higgins

Absent: none

Guests: John Higgins, Erica Jensen

Ginger reported that Tom Raffensperger can no longer serve on the Finance Committee. He has given a name of a possible replacement that she will follow up on.

She asked if we had all seen the email from Michele Giarusso that Leyden will receive another \$130,000 from the State for the culvert grant for Coates Rd. which we do not think will require that Leyden add any money to it.

The school budget seems reasonable, but we noted a large increase in the salary line for the superintendent's salary. We mentioned the comparable spending of different towns in different income areas of the State, and how more affluent towns actually spend less of their own budgets towards education costs. We mentioned Weston, for example, whose average single-family home yearly property tax bill is nearly \$23,000 vs. Greenfield's which is not quite \$5,000 per year in particular relation to the comparable amounts that they spend on their school districts. We wondered what it would cost Leyden to leave the PVRSD district and whether it would cost the town less to tuition our students to another district. We noted, of course, that we would have to pay transportation. Leyden would be responsible for a certain amount of retirement and health benefits at PVRSD, for instance. We do not know, either, where Warwick's plan to take its elementary students out of PVRSD is. Ginger will ask Michele G. to look into this.

Erica reported on the Public Safety Advisory Committee's progress. She said that there is a good deal in the works for an interim agreement with the Bernardston Police. Chief Palmeri will speak to the Bernardston Select Board; their chief is enthusiastic about the interim agreement. It would be for an approximate six month period with an option to renew; he does not want monthly interim agreements. Bernardston Police have begun patrolling in Leyden already, but the interim agreement itself would most likely begin

in April or May. It will cost Leyden approximately \$5,500 per month. We do still have money in our budget to support this. Fuel costs are separate, she noted. Ginger will check with Liz for more specifics and any corrections. Erica also said that a representative from DLS would be coming to Leyden tomorrow (Feb. 24) to inquire about the feasibility study grant application. Erica takes this as a good sign. Nate asked if the interim agreement had to go to Town Meeting. The interim agreement does not, but the final agreement does.

Ginger invited John Higgins to present his budget request for the Recreation Committee. Joyce announced that she cannot vote because her daughter-in-law is on that committee, and Michèle said that she cannot vote, either, because John is her husband. He gave a brief history of the funding for the Leyden Recreation Committee. Between 1973 - 1997, Town Meeting voted anywhere from \$1,000 - \$2,500 for the committee. Between 1998 - 2014, however, there were no TM votes at all because there were very active youth leagues which generated income for the Rec Committee. When he began as chair in 2019, their revolving account had \$1750, but it is now down to approximately \$1400. There is a small donation account with \$396 in it. They have had no deposits since Covid began. They cannot sustain their programs with what is in the revolving account as shown in the attachment he provided us. His proposal would be a vote for \$4,000 to sustain their sporting and recreational programming. He said that there might be ARPA reimbursement available, but that is an unknown at this point. The Recreation Committee is planning an "Arts in the Park" program for the summer for one day per week with some funding coming from the Leyden Cultural Council as well as a "Music in the Park," also in conjunction with the Leyden Cultural Council. John is hopeful that the Pavilion project will be completed by June. He also hopes to that the Rec Committee will be able to provide a place for bag lunches with the COA as well as the COA annual Pot Luck. The Pavilion rents for \$75 per day, and that could increase slightly. He said that supplies and material will be coming in late spring, and the Rec Committee will once again be calling for volunteers.

Nate asks about alcohol use at events at the Pavilion. There is a proof-required insurance rider by the renter. If an event is catered (and alcohol provided), that caterer is required to provide proof of insurance.

Erica asks where the money for that table and chairs was to come from and whether he is hoping to have them by the completion of the project. John said that he thought it was coming from the building maintenance, and he does hope to have them by then. (As an aside, she noted that Leyden will only be receiving approximately \$70,000 from the Federal govt and that the Town may not be hiring a consultant to help figure out the spending rules and requirements. Angelica might be the one to do this.) John said that there is still \$32,678 left in the Pavilion project account. The foundation is done. Much of the plumbing is complete, but that has cost more than anticipated. The trusses are

there. Lumber is still expensive though a little less than it had been, and he is expecting an estimate from Hamshaw (formerly Leader) soon. He provided Ginger with an inventory.

We thanked him for a thorough presentation.

We looked at the highway budget request. Erica told us that Dave is now being paid as a part-time worker at the equivalent of the superintendent's salary in a previously agreed-upon arrangement and is also using paid vacation time. In the future, if his services are needed, he will be paid at the \$24 per hour highway laborer wage.

We asked about the new hire and why he left. Erica explained that because he was used to city streets, he was unprepared for Leyden roads.

The budget request from the new Highway superintendent includes a 3% wage increase for himself, and we are uncomfortable with such an increase after what would be only a six-month time span in that position and want to ask him about that. We wonder if he included that because it has been more or less standard practice each year. We also noted a large request for propane (\$2,400) which brought about a discussion of the insulation or lack thereof in the Highway building and what material the building itself is made of. Erica mentioned that there is insulation hanging down from the ceiling and that it appears that there is no insulation in the walls.

Bill Brooks is requesting a 3% wage increase for plow drivers which would bring their hourly wages to about \$24.72 per hour.

The General Highway expense for FY 22 was \$10,500. Advertising came to \$2,500 which is a lot. Ginger suggested that we increase our reserve fund and use that in the future.

We are also struggling with the money that was allocated last year for training a third person that wasn't used because there wasn't a third hire. We would also like to see the salaries listed completely separately from one another. We will have to ask Bill about it when he comes in.

There are also different recollections on the salary agreement in regards to overtime with the Highway Superintendent's salary. One recollection is that his salary included a calculation which included 200 hours of overtime (except in weather emergencies), and the other recollection is that overtime is separate.

Our next meeting if March 9 at 6:00 p.m. at the Town Offices.

Michèle made a motion to adjourn at 7:43. Nate seconded. The vote was unanimous.