

Finance Committee  
March 9, 2022  
6:00 p.m.  
Town Offices

The meeting was called to order at 6:10.

Present: Ginger Robinson, Nate Messer, Michèle Higgins

Absent: Joyce Muka

guests: Bill Glabach, Erica Jensen, Glenn Caffery

Nate made a motion to accept the minutes from the meeting of February 23. Michèle seconded with one correction. The time the meeting was called to order contained a typo. The motion passed with the correction.

Bill reported on the school budget. He believes that the increase for Leyden will be a 2.4% increase and that the School Committee will take a final vote on the budget tomorrow (March 10, 2022). We believe that there are 37 Leyden children at Bernardston Elementary and 10 at Pioneer.

Ginger explained to Glenn (who is considering joining the Finance Committee) just how little impact finance committees have over the school budget and that we have not been as involved as we tried to be a few years ago. We talked about the shortfall in the school's transportation budget which the State originally promised to reimburse at 100% but never has.

We also briefly talked about how small an amount of funding Leyden receives from the State for ch. 90 funds which allow for paving, perhaps, one mile per year and how reliant we need to be on grants.

Erica reported on the work of the Public Safety Advisory Committee.

Mike Edwards (the finance person) from the Collins Center has been providing some guidance free of charge. He stressed that small towns like Leyden will not be able to fund a police department with the new Police Reform Bill. He said that just in the administrative side alone for filing reports, we would need an extra person. There are too many layers of training required in this bill, and part time departments will not survive. (The other contact person from the Collins Center is Steven Foley who has broad firefighting experience.)

As for the Interim agreement with Bernardston for policing, Erica reported that Jane Dutcher, Chair of the Bernardston Finance Committee, has looked at Chief Palmeri's

figures and believes that they are too low. She says that he did not include retirement or health insurance in his figures.

Bill said that he would hope that this could come to Town Meeting for a vote.

The Public Advisory Committee will hold a public hearing before Town Meeting by which time it is expected that Mike Edwards will have dollar amounts. Erica said that this is a work-in-progress that is moving forward and that there is leeway in our budget. She also noted that Bernardston is going back and forth at the Select Board level.

Once the Interim agreement on policing is in place, looking at fire safety/shared services will come next. Erica said that Peter Shedd, who is the Fire Chief in Bernardston, has just been sworn in as a Fire Service Commissioner. He is a big advocate for volunteer fire departments working together and working beyond mutual aid.

The rest of the meeting was devoted to a wide-ranging discussion of Don Jacobs' wage/salary survey, draft job descriptions, and pay bands. Jacobs himself was expected at the meeting but cancelled due to the snowstorm.

For starters, Michèle expressed strong dismay at the poor quality of the job descriptions, citing paragraphs that had been cut and pasted into job descriptions where they did not belong. In one example, in the Clerk to the Assessors' description (a position which we no longer have), it was stated that this person might have the dangerous job of escorting female prisoners. There were several other examples. We noted that he did not have job descriptions for the Assessors but did have descriptions for many levels of fire fighters which we do not have. Other descriptions contained glaring inaccuracies. Michèle noted that Leyden is paying this person to produce job descriptions of a caliber higher than what he has given us to examine and hoped that the Select Board would not approve them yet. By the end of the meeting, she had volunteered to help edit them.

We examined many of the levels and the positions placed in those levels. We wonder why the Municipal Assistant is in category VI when the position does not supervise. We are basically unhappy with Jacobs' levels IV, V and VI and feel that they do not adequately reflect the positions as they currently exist. We do currently have job descriptions and believe we should adapt them, as well as the levels, to our needs. For instance, we feel that the Assistant to the Assessors should not be a level III and that the librarian should not be a level V.

We do agree that the levels correspond to the wage bands and that we can use this information as recommendations and be systematic for the town budget using the

position and not the person. We do not think that it is a good idea for the department heads to write the categories in order to avoid conflicts.

Another issue is part-time employees, and where they fit in the bands although the highway part-time positions have been addressed with raises to \$24 per hour. We cannot justify another increase for Town Meeting.

Adding to Ginger's earlier statement that we need to be systematic, Nate points out that we need standardization. We need to apply the pay bands fairly.

There was a great deal of discussion about the former highway superintendent coming out of retirement and working part time for the town at a higher rate than other part time employees. Erica pointed out that we needed to come to consensus about his rate of pay because there is a warrant coming soon which will need to be signed. Some of the discussion involved: if this can fall in the pay bands - yes, if the budget can afford the higher wage - yes, if the department can function without this person and the experience of this person - no. He is currently earning \$27 an hour. There currently is one full time person: the new superintendent and one part time person who cannot begin for another two weeks because his physical cannot be scheduled sooner. We all agreed that the \$27 is acceptable.

We talked about how the Assistant Assessor's salary comes from the Assessor's budget and that they determine her salary. We talked about how much pay there is within a department and if the Highway Superintendent, for example, sets the salaries in the highway department. Bill answered that the Superintendent recommends to the Select Board. We also wondered about how to adjust the pay bands to reflect levels of experience.

Ginger wants to make sure that we are able to defend our recommendations at Town Meeting.

Bill points out that the pay bands do not include step or percentage increases, and Nate adds that the bands would have to be adjusted on a yearly basis.

Bill also mentions that there is a twist in the budget: the highway departments' new pay rates began six months before Town Meeting. Should and increase come at the one and one-half year mark? This is a problem that we have wrestled with before - giving a raise after only six months on the job is generally not done. Ginger will ask Bill to come to our next meeting.

Ginger will ask Susan Bobe if the part time highway wages come from the highway maintenance budget.

She will also ask the COA to come; Michèle will speak as its representative. She will abstain from any votes about it.

Nate made a motion to adjourn at 7:56. Michèle seconded.

Our next meeting will be on March 23 at 6:00 p.m.