

Finance Committee Notes
May 18, 2022
Town Offices
5:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 5:11.

Present: Ginger Robinson, Joyce Muka, Nate Messer, Glenn Caffery, Michèle Higgins, Erica Jensen (SB).

Absent: Bill Glabach (SB)

Guests: Roxanne Zimmerman (5:38-5:50) Kathy DeMatteo (5:55 - end).

Nate made a motion to accept the minutes from May 11. Glenn asked to amend a sentence in the third paragraph from the end from " ...Joyce to calculate the hourly wage for Michele" to "the requested hourly wage." Michèle noticed a period missing from the line with the time. Joyce seconded with the amendments. All approved as amended.

We began the meeting by trying to make sense of the General Ledger. Negative numbers are good; they indicate a positive balance except in the instance of the "cash balance" which is a positive number. We don't understand some of the notations, however. We may have to call Angelica for explanations; she apparently has said that she will not come for meetings.

We began to look at the budget figures which Michele G. has begun for us; she has said that she is confident in these numbers. The first item is the moderator's salary of \$150 and \$30 for expenses. Nate noted that everything will be going up this year. Joyce noted that this salary was \$60 in FY 2021. We will ask Kathy about this.

Roxanne came. She has left \$1200 in the Tax Collector's budget for technical help just in case she needs it. She explained that Vadar no longer does in-person training, and they no longer have anyone available at night. She has taken two days off from her day job to try to learn what she needs to know. Vadar training is hard for her; the person on the virtual training moves along very quickly, and this system is different from the system used in Greenfield which in itself is a difficult system. She noted that there is a possibility that she can work with other tax collectors who are already familiar with Vadar who could help her learn. There is a time element involved, as well. The bills have to go out in a timely manner to keep the Town running, so she has to learn quickly and soon. She said that the cost for backing up to the cloud is \$2,370. Ginger believes that licenses can be paid from the grant and maybe for storage and updates. Erica will

assess backing up on a hard drive like the assessors do. Ginger asked how many hours per week she works. She said officially ten but does bills at lunch during her day job or at home. The paper size required by Vadar now is 8 x 14 which is not a standard size, but they would charge to change the system to the standard 8 1/2 x 11. Also, there needs to be a bridge between Patriot which the assessors use and Vadar so that information can flow smoothly. When fully operational, Vadar will help with automatic tasks such as letters, but she pointed to a steep learning curve. At 5:50, Roxanne left.

Joyce recommended that we increase the reserve fund to maybe \$20,000 because we have no way of knowing whether we are budgeting enough for diesel, propane, utilities, etc.

Back to Broadband which is not yet self-sufficient but will be. We think we should raise and appropriate the \$63,000 again. The State did certify the Broadband account at \$270,070, but it is unclear where the sum is located. Susan said that she does not see it on her side. When Deb Wagner spoke to Joyce, Erica and Jack, she said that because the Town borrowed money, it should come to the Enterprise Fund at recap time. The money will offset what the Town needs to raise part of what we raise and appropriate. The MLP budget is an indirect cost added on the Town floor. The Town pays but the money will be coming from the Enterprise Fund. The \$63,000 comes from the Town.

Kathy urged us to have a very clear understanding of this issue to avoid confusion at Town Meeting, and there still is a lot of confusion on our part. It seems we are no more clear than we were last year. \$25,000 goes monthly to Whip City, and \$12,500 goes back to the Town which does not equal the \$276,866.07 needed to be self-sufficient.

The loan stands at \$853,000. We believe that Susan is going to do another one-year bond on the advice of her financial counsellor. We might have a better chance next year of paying more as the Fund inches toward self-sufficiency. If the retained earnings reached \$200,000, some money could go into a stabilization fund. Erica pointed out that CAF money can go to Broadband and can eventually build a buffer for emergencies which can be transferred to stabilization. It is still unclear how the Enterprise Fund will pay down the debt and is why we still need that \$63,000. The \$63,000 from 2018 has not been spent, and it seems that we have two years to take it back. It is clear that it cannot be used to pay for construction.

We asked Kathy about the \$30 in the expense account for the Moderator. She said that it is for dues though she has always paid out of pocket; she has never asked for reimbursement.

There was renewed discussion about putting \$27,000 in for diesel and \$20,000 in the Reserve Fund. Erica noted that Bill would not support that idea for historical reasons, but Joyce pointed out that the current Finance Committee understands that this would be for covering probable shortfalls in the coming year.

We began a discussion about Michele Giarusso's request which would bring her salary to \$57,200 from \$48,000; it is a 40 hour per week, paid time off and holidays position. We talked about the wage and salary survey which puts her at a level VI while we have talked about her really being a level V because she does not supervise. We looked again at the Highway Superintendent's salary, but his salary has overtime built into it. Nate noted that if we use the level V for the Municipal Assistant, she would be at the top of that scale whereas if we put her on the level VI scale, she would be in the middle.

We recognize that this increase, which Joyce calculated is a 19% increase, will be a hard sell at Town Meeting, but we feel strongly that the current wage for this position is too low. She manages a good number of grants. Kathy pointed out that at the MVP meeting, there will all kinds of grants available next spring, and she will have to write and manage any that Leyden would obtain. She pointed out that Michele is not a clerk and referenced a petition that is circulating against Michele.

Glenn mentioned again the suggestion that the office needs to have an assistant because some of the work is clerical in nature, and the Municipal Assistant should be freed from that. Erica reiterated that another reason to have a second person in the office is to learn what Michele does, so that there would be two people who have knowledge of what to do. We all stressed that it is the position and not the person. Nate stated that it is the job knowledge. Erica pointed out that Glenn and Nate have a good grasp on the argument to be able to present this at Town Meeting.

Nate and Erica both mentioned that perhaps the wage and salary should be redone because is it nearly already out of date.

Erica said that she believes that there will be money coming in from the State to address wage inequity, but the definition of wage inequity is unknown.

Ginger asked Erica to include the Finance Committee on the Select Board meeting agenda on the 23rd.

Nate made a motion to adjourn at 6:54. Joyce seconded. All were in favor.

Our next meeting will be at 6:00 p.m. on May 25.