

Finance Committee Notes
May 25, 2022
Town Offices
6:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 6:01.

Present: Joyce Muka, Glenn Caffrey, Ginger Robinson, Nate Messer (6:05), Bill Glabach (left at 7:33) (SB).

Absent: Erica Jensen (SB)

Guests: Liz Kidder (6:01-7:30)

We decided to wait on the minutes from our meeting on May 18 until Nate arrived but in the end, left them for our next meeting on June 1. Nate did notice that his name had been left off the list of those present.

Ginger noted that "constable" line item had been added to the police budget for \$300. We wondered if \$300 was sufficient and also how many constables we have. According to the website, Joyce said that we currently have two. We know that they are paid for being present during voting, and we also know that they post the warrants. We decided to leave it at \$300.

As for the rest of the police budget, Ginger reported that the blank line items will go away. The total amount will remain, but Bernardston will be responsible for how the money is distributed; Leyden will not be involved in line items or which police officers will come to Leyden. Angelica told Ginger that the fewer line items we have, the better.

Liz talked about fire needs though we do not have too much specific information yet. She said that Stephen Foley from the Collins Center is coming next week re: EMS and he wants to look at the equipment. She mentioned that part of the discussion is about the need for a quick attack vehicle. Michèle mentioned an article in the paper where a neighboring town is looking to purchase such a vehicle at a cost of \$410,000. Liz said that these vehicles are customized; their water tanks, for example, vary in size. This kind of vehicle will not be in this year's budget.

We know that the Fire Department needs four air packs @ \$8,000 = \$32,000 and a water pump for the truck @ \$8,000 beyond their budget.

For the Special Town Meeting, Ginger presented an idea for using free cash which has a current balance of \$212,735. We could put \$45,000 in the Fire Department/EMS for equipment; \$50,000 into the Highway Stabilization Fund to continue building towards the loader which they will need in about two years. This loader was quoted at \$150,000 before inflation took off. Nate noted that Bill Brooks said recently that he was able to get a good quote on a loader, but it was only good for about eight hours! Ginger also suggested that we put \$25,000 into the Fire Stabilization Fund. Bill wondered if we shouldn't put more into the Fire Stabilization Fund. We also wondered how many fire fighters we actually have and we are only sure of three: Brian, Nick and Will. There could be Cody from Bernardston. No one was certain of others. We noted that we do not know how the Fire Department will be configured after the Collins Center feasibility study is completed, but we assume it will be different. Whatever the arrangement, Leyden will still need safety equipment. Bill noted that a "Fire Chief" needs a one-year notice for a loss of job versus an "Officer in Charge" who does not.

Liz told us that EMS needs: shirts @ \$100 - \$250; gear bags @ \$270 and various equipment such as goggles, gloves, etc. for which we could set aside a few thousand dollars for start-up. Stephen Foley always looks to economizing and is trying to determine the feasibility of converting the Tahoe into an ambulance vehicle of some sort. Merging EMS with Fire needs a vote by the Select Board. Bill said he would look into that.

Bill cautioned that this money from Free Cash has to be spend in this fiscal year or put on a special article at Town Meeting, but Joyce believes that Angelica can carry it over. Bill also wonders if the \$50,000 for the Highway Stabilization Fund isn't a bit light. With what we are considering moving from Free Cash, that would leave \$92,753 in Free Cash.

There was a discussion about the fire pond budget which is at \$5,000. Brian has said that their will be no new fire ponds unless someone volunteers; they are supposed to uncover one per year.

The Highway and Fire in the General Fund have \$104,000 as a current balance and that they will be added to the General Fund to a total of \$196,753. [We have since learned that the accurate number is actually \$180,976. (June 1, 2022.)]

Ginger noted that there is no EMD in the budget. Liz provided a hand-out on the training required for this person and noted how extensive it is. The handout recommended a small stipend. In addition to the training there would be approximately ten meetings per year. The history is that this position began because of Vermont Yankee, but there is no more money coming from that direction. This person

(either a Director or a Deputy Director) would coordinate with other towns in a possible emergency. She noted that the FRCOG oversees the four western counties. Liz noted that Leyden does have two good buildings for emergency shelter. The Collins Center will do a thorough inventory of what Leyden has. Leyden could be a substation for redundancy; if Leyden is out, Bernardston would take over, and if Bernardston is out, Leyden would take over. We do not know, however, if Bernardston is interested in taking on another town and mentioned that they are recognized for the competence. Liz did not have a strong recommendation for an amount of a stipend. Bill suggest \$1,000 for a stipend. We liked Liz's idea of \$1,000 for expenses. Some of these meetings would be a good drive away, Agawam being the one mentioned. Bill wondered if we should inquire with Bernardston to see what they do. Joyce suggested that it would be a good idea to have line items. If more money is needed, we can move money around. There is already membership money (\$150) for Regional Emergency Planning Committee (REPC) included in the budget and should be moved to EMD section, a new section. The training money is gone from the Police budget.

There was a discussion about 1st responders and how much they are paid. We think that their wage was set at a Select Board meeting, and Bill will look for the minutes about that. They do need training money. There is also the issue of ambulance fees. For each ambulance call in towns which have not contracted with an ambulance service, there is (or will be) a \$350 fee charged to the town in addition to the charge for the individual needing the service. The Collins Center is working with Northfield which received a grant to study ambulance services. The Center wants to look at their services to see what might make sense. It is unknown how many calls Leyden has had over time. When asked how many ambulances Colrain has, Liz said, "one, but it is an ambulance, not an ambulance service." Our thinking is that we will need a line item for ambulance for somewhere between \$3,000 - \$5,000, but we don't know anything about the number of ambulance calls that have come during the year.

Glenn was wondering how it works with helicopter rescues. Liz believes that the ambulance picks up the victim and transports him/her to the landing zone.

We think that the EMS salary line looks precise enough at \$3,278 to be sufficient though we think that \$3,500 might be a better number, but we need more information. Michele G. is going to change the EMS line from supplies to expense. We are thinking of increasing the expense line for safety to \$2,000. They need gear bags.

We noted that the Tree Warden's salary is \$10,000 and believe that he has not asked for an increase, and in fact, still has money in his salary budget. We like the idea of raising the Fire Chief's salary to \$5,000 though the position is still underpaid. We need

transition money for the police budget and a contingency fund in the event that we decide that we need more coverage. Extra coverage comes in increments of ten hours at \$300 per increment. We wonder if we should increase the reserve fund or use our training money to pay for the transition in the fiscal year. The Collins Center and Chief Palmeri are collaborating on the transition, Liz said, and noted that the cost of the security system in Bernardston is \$1,500.

Moving on to the warrant articles for the Special Town Meeting, we are ok with moving \$45,000 from free cash to EMS; \$50,000 to Highway; and \$25,000 to fire leaving \$92,753 in General Stabilization.

For the warrant articles for the STM: (out of order)

Article 1: To see if the Town will vote to transfer from Free Cash, \$45,000 or take any vote or votes in relation thereto for fire, EMS and equipment and development. Joyce made a motion to approve. Michèle seconded. All voted in favor.

Article 4: To see if the Town will vote to transfer from Free Cash \$50,000 or take any vote or votes in relation thereto for Highway Stabilization Fund. Nate made a motion to approve. Glenn seconded. All voted in favor.

For Article 2: we designed our own. To see if the Town will vote to transfer from Free Cash \$25,000 or take any vote or votes in relation thereto for Fire Stabilization Fund. Joyce made a motion to approve. Glenn seconded. All voted in favor.

Article 3: There was a great deal of discussion about what this request was about. None of the budget numbers that we had from any charts had numbers that matched the \$5,000 given in the warrant article. We kept trying to make sense of it and realized that we have time to receive clarification before voting on it. We will wait until our next meeting, and Ginger will ask about this.

Article 5: To see if the Town will vote to transfer \$92,753 from Free Cash to the General Stabilization account, or take any vote or votes in relation thereto. Nate made a motion to approve. Joyce seconded. All voted in favor.

Article 6: To see if the Town will vote to establish a Special Purpose Stabilization Account for Broadband Enterprise purposes or take any vote or votes in relation thereto.

We added the word "Broadband" to this article as well as to articles 7 and 8 to make it perfectly clear that this is for Broadband and not for any other possible future Enterprise Fund.

Glenn made a motion to approve. Nate seconded. All voted in favor.

Article 7: To see if the Town will vote \$25,000 of Retained Earnings from the Broadband Enterprise Fund to the Broadband Enterprise Special Purpose Stabilization Account or take any vote or votes in relation thereto.

Joyce made a motion to approve. Nate seconded. All voted in favor.

Article 8: To see if the Town will vote \$82,000 of Retained Earnings from the Broadband Enterprise Fund to pay prior year bills or take any vote or votes in relation thereto.

Nate made a motion to approve. Nate seconded. All voted in favor.

We want to put EMS salary \$3,000.

As for the Highway salaries: their salaries were set just in January, but with the economy, we're ok with their request. We noted that if we do not include raises for them, they would go 18 months before a possible raise. Bill's salary is \$72,1000 and AJ's is \$52,7000. The total for the part-timers is \$34,781 including overtime and someone to help Bill with paperwork.

The Municipal Assistant has requested a \$10,000 increase in salary. There was considerable discussion about this. Michèle wondered if this wasn't too much of a raise all at once; Joyce mentioned at the last meeting that it was a 19% increase. We are expecting opposition from this at Town Meeting. Nate, Glenn and Ginger support the amount of requested increase due to the amount of work that she performs and the amount of grant money that she brings in, noting that it is not a secretarial position. They mention the meetings and trainings she attends; the grants that she obtains and the general knowledge that she has. Nate and Glenn will speak in favor of it at Town Meeting. There was also a suggestion that the title of the position should be changed from Municipal Assistant to something like Town Administrator to reflect the responsibility of the position. We recognize that this is not within the purview of the Finance Committee. Supervision of this position is not within the purview of this committee, either, and comes under the Select Board.

Joyce noted an 11% increase in the budget for the Treasurer and an error in the Tax Collector's line item. It reads \$12,370 when it should read \$12,730.

Glenn mentioned that, if elected to the Select Board in the upcoming Town Elections, he would be stepping down. Michèle said that she is thinking of stepping down because she is drowning in work. Ginger asked if it would make a difference if someone else took the notes. Glenn offered to take the notes in the meantime.

Nate made a motion to adjourn at 8:35. Joyce seconded. All approved.

Our next meeting is on June 1 at 6:00 p.m.