

Finance Committee Minutes
June 1, 2022
Town Offices
6:00 p.m.

Meeting called to order 6:03pm

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

Absent: none

Guests: Beth Kuzdeba, Board of Health, Ken Medvetz

CHAIR COMMENTS:

Ginger previewed votes committee will need to take later in the meeting: town accountant Angelica Desroches suggested new wording for warrant articles with “special fund” language.

Ginger let us know that the bottom line of next year’s budget is still kind of high—we’ll be trying to reduce it.

Ginger shared the good news that the stabilization balance is much higher than we thought: \$180, 000.

Ginger suggested that we change the funding for the \$6,000 for the Recreation Committee from budget request to instead be transferred in the Special Town Meeting from Free Cash to a Special Fund. This will reduce by the same amount the transfer to General Stabilization. This is to keep the tax rate down.

Erica asked for clarification on Special Fund and Joyce clarified and expressed deference to this approach the Town Accountant wants to take. Special Fund carries over until the project is completed/ended, at which point the accountant closes it out and moves the remaining balance to General Fund.

BOARD OF HEALTH BUDGET (Beth Kuzdeba)

Beth reminded us that stipends increased last year and opined that they are fair; no request for an increase.

Expenses however are going up.

Board of Health has been paying for tick testing, which provides a discount and reduces the rate residents pay. Otherwise testing would cost over \$50.

Board of Health bought 20 tests in February, to get new board through the next year. But already used the ones left over from last year and seven of the 20 from this year. Will probably have to purchase more of them. BOH pays \$15/test. This buying of tests in advanced is what gives us a reduced rate. So, \$300 of the budget went to the purchase of 20.

Additionally related to ticks, BOH bought 24 tick removal keys for \$135, all of which have been distributed.

\$55/year for membership in the Massachusetts Health Board Association. This is already in the \$3,000 budget request.

Seminar coming up \$90/member, using most of the \$92 left in budget. Association would like all BOH members to go. Beth will go this year; others in future years.

Mosquito dunks, costing from approximately \$181 for 200 of them in bulk. Should last a long time. They don't expire, can break them in half if treating a small area. June to October is the mosquito season. These are needed this current fiscal year.

Beth is working with the Highway Superintendent to determine quantity needed for roadside use. For the highway department to use dunks, the state considers it a "treatment," requiring a pesticide license Kurt at FRCOG has just gotten one, so we'll work under him.

Nate asked about whether breeding areas far from homes needed treatment, and the conclusion was yes, due to the distance mosquitoes travel themselves, and the host animals that are part of the disease life cycle, which can travel much farther.

Residents can buy them for themselves in packs of 20, for example on Amazon.

There was discussion of how and when to account for these critical and time sensitive expenditures, whether to overspend from this year's budget or pay out of an increased budget next year (say, adding \$200 to the \$1000 budget request). It was determined that overspending this year would be most appropriate (transparent and reflective of when the expenses occurred). Bill, Ginger, and Joyce all voiced support for showing overspending in this year's budget and keeping next year's budget at the original request of \$1000.

Beth will go ahead and buy the dunks now.

Ginger asked Beth again if she is OK with the stipend level, noting that there is a lot of professional development. Beth indicated that members don't expect to be compensated for all their time; it is largely a volunteer position.

BUDGET, STM, ATM, AND RELATED

Fire and EMS.

Fire Chief Brian Pelletier provided call information to Ginger prior to the meeting: 25 calls per year, each call about 2 hours pay, \$22 per responder, generally 2 responders per call. \$2200 total.

Ginger talked with Ann Zavaruha and Brian about EMS. More than \$45,000 is needed. Need more stuff. Med bags, air packs, water tank. Ginger raised the question of whether more was needed in fire stabilization vs general stabilization. She said the state generally recommends 2-4% of operating budget in stabilization.

Erica clarified that we need five, not four, air packs to be compliant. She confirmed this today. Air tanks expire in the next month and a half. Med bags are needed for first responders coming online, for quick

response, especially important given Leyden has a large senior population. And Erica stated that we cannot send fire fighters into burning buildings with expired oxygen tanks. Erica told us that Michele G. said she'd try to work on grants in this area.

There was some discussion about whether to take money for equipment from fire or general stabilization.

Nate asked what can you use the stabilization fund for. Ginger clarified that we are saving up for specific expected future capital expenses. If we don't use it, it can go back into the general fund. For example, if we don't buy a truck. If we do buy a truck, it will still have to go to town meeting.

Glenn asked if there were any attractive scenario in the future that would not depend on Leyden having these vehicles. Erica explained: if there is an agreement for fire with Bernardston or Colrain, Leyden would be a substation. Insurance rates depend on a local substation. A future regional agreement will include a local substation. So, equipment would not be a waste. Moreover, if we have nothing that they could use, it would be a deficit to reaching an agreement. Having the grant for police equipment and substation improvements, for example, was critical in reaching an attractive interim agreement with Bernardston. If we had vehicles for brush and quick attack, then we are more attractive.

Bill expressed concern that a lot of money going to fire department, and there are not a lot of fire fighters on the books. Ginger said the fire department has been underfunded for a long time. Bill and others voiced agreement.

Erica talked to FRCOG: no ambulance service will currently contract with a town, meaning the out-of-contract \$350/call expense to the down that the ambulance services are proposing would apply to Leyden. Clarified that this is a proposal, not an agreement.

There were 42 (see correction in the next minutes—this was actually for last 2 years) ambulance calls last year (4 in last week). Consultant Steven Pholey got this data from Shelburne Control. The ambulance services' proposal would charge Leyden \$350 each meaning \$14,700 if numbers stayed the same. So a lot of financial uncertainty for the year ahead.

There was discussion, started by [, of where the \$350 per call would come from. Joyce suggested we put one dollar in the budget line item "Ambulance calls." We can then move money in if we need to. Not a warrant article, just a line in the budget, already there. Otherwise, we can't transfer money to a line that doesn't exist. And this is a reason to keep general stabilization high. General agreement was voiced.

Tax rate discussion.

Tax rate projection \$16.43 at the moment, from \$16.14 right now, based on current Cherry Sheet state aid estimates. New properties (New Growth) may add to our valuation, which can bring our tax rate down.

Warrant articles, revoting as needed.

Need to revote some of the warrant articles because of new wording. 1, 4

It was clarified that "special accounts" is same as "special funds."

"Special Fund" allows them to spend funds without coming to town meeting.

Article 1

Revote on Article 1 with new wording printed on June 1 version of handout. We will keep amount at \$45,000.

Michele moved, Nate seconded. Unanimous.

Article 1: To see if the Town will vote to transfer from Free Cash \$45,000.00 to the Fire/Emergency Medical Services Equipment and Development Special Fund account or take any vote or votes in relation thereto.

Article 4

Instead of having money impact tax rate in budget, we will transfer from Free Cash.

Article 4: To see if the Town will vote to transfer from Free Cash \$6,000.00 to the Avery Field Pavilion Demolition and Replacement Special Fund account or take any vote or votes in relation thereto.

Glenn moved, Joyce second. Ginger, Nate, Joyce and Glenn in favor. Michèle abstained.

Article 5:

Article 5: To see if the Town will vote to transfer \$86,753.00 from Free Cash to the General Stabilization account or take any vote or votes in relation thereto.

Joyce move, Michèle second. Approved unanimously.

Article 7 and article 8 has same language as what we had voted.

Operating budget.

Expected revenues? Joyce expects \$99,000 estimated local receipts and \$132,000 cherry sheets

Joyce went on to explain to a couple of us that there are three revenue sources:

1. miscellaneous motor vehicles, excise, interest. Estimated 99k
2. State aid, cherry sheet, still determined
3. Balance is real estate taxes.

\$1,650,000 was billed last year.

Current tax rate is 16.14, and with budget items before the changes made in this meeting the rate would come to 16.43, so we are in the ballpark. With new growth and changes to Cherry Sheet, we are in good shape keeping the tax rate stable when it is calculated in the fall. Joyce said the Cherry Sheet amounts are currently in reconciliation in Boston.

Municipal Assistant salary.

Bill asked to discuss municipal assistant raise: 27.88 per hour. Nate said the proposed new salary is in line with the comps from areas towns the size of Leyden. Michèle expressed concern about how the two would receive such a big jump in pay and suggested the position should be reevaluated and title should be updated. She is more than an assistant. Several spoke to the issue that the duties of that job currently do not match the outdated description. This is true of most job descriptions, with the exception of a few in the highway department.

Michèle: not in our purview to change her title.

Erica said the current position is currently more of a town administrator, not a municipal assistant. Agrees with Michèle that the title and description need updating.

Nate also expressed concern about the difficulty is town meeting approval, given the raise percentage. Others pointed out that there have been and currently are other large percentage jumps. Nate pointed to the grant management as an indication of the role's significance.

Ginger suggested that if a role has been historically underpaid, it doesn't mean we should continue to underpay.

We set a high standard for highway, and increased their wages substantially. Agreement was expressed generally that this was a good thing. This position is similarly critical to the town, and we have the same high standards. It was pointed out that coincidentally the proposed salary is that same as for AJ, the highway foreman.

Bill summarized that we are making a correction. Erica said that this job is integral to a small town. Bill said that we have the research that supports this proposed rate, from the Division of Local Services and the work of the consultant Don Jacobs.

Bill continued: We are not out of line. "The treasurer, accountant, others—we've done big jumps in the past. We're getting a "home town discount" now. It'd be terrible to lose her. We committed as the selectboard and finance committee to review positions."

He continued: If Michelle G. were to leave the Municipal Assistant role, we'd not get someone for the same rate. And they'd be from out of town.

Remainder of the budget:

Will return to vote on these items in next meeting in one week, but wanted to get agreement on the levels in anticipation of the Selectboard vote in their upcoming meeting.

Town Clerk requested 10,000, up from \$8,240. A 21% increase. There was some discussion on changes to the duties in the Town Clerk role.

Treasurer. Treasurer was just certified, which brings a \$1000 raise, plus 3% was added to the request. \$18,730.

Town Accountant: \$12,730. Accountant didn't request extra, but this is in line with Treasurer.

Tax collector: 12,730, up from 12,360.

Assessors Assistant asked for less money, but budget will keep the same pay as last year: \$12,000.

Assessors. Ginger reminded us that assessor's job is much less demanding since they hired assessor assistant. Make the chair \$2000 and \$3000 total for 2 members other members. There was discussion at the time of reducing the assessor stipend to pay additional money to the expanded assistant role.

Selectboard stipend? Bill said town updated stipend recently.

Poll workers. Long elections are 12 hours, workers are paid \$12/hr. 4 poll workers at a time. 3 elections this year: town, primary, general. 3 elections=30 hours * 4.5 people * \$14.25/hour = \$2,565. (This is approximate: one of the elections is only 8 hours, but the hourly rate will go up to \$15/hour midway through the year.)

Highway and Fire both need someone to help with paperwork. Ginger asked Brian P. to talk to Bill B. to see if they can share someone to help with paperwork. Erica suggested calling it departmental assistant, under general government. She said Brian estimated there were about 5-8 hours of paperwork.

Ginger proposed removing the word "train" after "Additional Worker" in the Highway budget. That \$34,718 in that item's budget for next year was Bill Brooks' "dream team," which included someone to help out with paperwork.

Maybe that can be the same person who works with Fire, moving some money from the proposed fire chief raise. So, Fire chief \$4,000.

APPROVE MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Minutes from May 18th. Joyce moved to approve minutes as written, Nate seconded. Approved unanimously.

Minutes from May 25th. Glenn suggested change \$140,000 in general fund to \$104,000. All other numbers correct. [Note: these numbers have since been adjusted upwards; these numbers represented our understanding at that meeting.] Joyce moved to approve minutes as adjusted, Michèle seconded. Approved unanimously.

Michèle made motion to adjourn 8:37. Joyce seconded. Approved unanimously.

Next Meeting Wednesday June 8, 6:00 pm.