

March 25 Finance Committee Minutes

Chair D. Drugmand called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.

Attending were committee members: D. Drugmand, L. Levernoch, D. Megas, S. Thomas and Town Administrator Sean Curran.

D. Megas proposed an amendment to the minutes of the March 11 meeting in reference to the credit card use policy to include: whoever uses the credit card must present a receipt to the Town Accountant immediately. Motion seconded by D. Drugmand. This motion was passed unanimously.

D. Drugmand made the motion to accept the minutes as amended, seconded by D. Megas. Motion passed unanimously.

Vocational Education (Voc Ed) Bus Issues

Our voc ed bus failed its recent safety inspection due to a problem with its emergency brake. The bus was brought to our highway garage where staff planned to perform the repair. It proved to be extremely difficult to find the needed part as this vehicle model is no longer being made. Local dealerships had no luck; local junk yards had nothing. After an exhaustive search, a Nebraska junk yard was found to have the part. The junk yard initially sent the wrong part; but followed up by sending the correct one. As a result of this repair, the voc ed maintenance account has a current deficit of \$544.78.

In the interim, it was necessary to rent a vehicle to transport students. Delays in obtaining the part made it necessary to rent the vehicle for a longer period than originally planned and drove the rental cost to \$2017.

Funds will have to be found to cover the maintenance account deficit as well as the cost of vehicle rental. It was suggested that the Smith/Taconic transportation account may have some money available which can be used toward this expense via an interdepartmental transfer. Using reserve account funds might be another option.

Additionally, the inspection official cautioned that because the vehicle is so rusty underneath, it won't pass inspection next year. It's estimated that resolving the rust problem would cost roughly \$10,000 which might allow us to use this vehicle for two more years. Ordinarily, \$3,000 is budgeted for bus maintenance. The question is, does it make sense to put \$10,000 into this vehicle, or would it be better to explore the possibility of purchasing a new bus?

To further complicate the issue, there is a movement to regionalize voc ed transportation. The Town of Dalton has invited representatives from CBRDS member towns to a meeting regarding this topic on April 16. Since there seems to be momentum toward regionalization, would it make more sense to fix the current vehicle, which might get us to this next phase in

voc ed transportation, or purchase a new bus? This will be a budget issue for the next fiscal year.

Review and Discussion of Current Budget Spreadsheet

The Finance Committee discussed budget and summary worksheets which had been updated with expenditure and revenue figures through March 24.

Among the items discussed:

The account for Washington TRACKS newsletter will need additional funds this fiscal year as current figures reveal that 95% of its budget has been spent. This is due to the fact that our previous vendor closed its business in December and the new vendor's rates are higher.

Budget Summary Worksheet – During its March 11 meeting, the Committee reviewed the budget spreadsheet which included expenditures through December 31. Based on a review of this information, the committee made recommendations for preliminary cuts to fiscal year 2025 budget requests. D. Megas inserted these figures into a budget worksheet giving the Committee (and Select Board) a better idea of what these cuts would mean for next year's budget.

Because there are so many unknowns in relation to vocational education at this point in the year, it was decided to leave a 3% increase in these accounts for the time being. Tuition for the 2024-25 school year won't become known until April 1. Additionally, freshmen aren't notified of their acceptance until May 1, which is after the date by which our budget is required to be finalized prior to the Annual Town Meeting. The Town of Washington has two students who are scheduled to enter high school this fall. Currently, we don't know if either student is interested in vocational education.

The Becket Beach account will need to be increased for next year in order to bring the total to \$1600. Becket increased the cost of the passes, but the increase was not passed onto Washington residents.

One scenario held the budget to a 2.5% increase, while another held it to 3%. These recommendations were to be discussed with the Select Board during tonight's meeting.

New Business

Our Accountant told D. Megas that this year's revenues are better than anticipated, which is encouraging news. It doesn't appear that we will need to ask the town to consider an override.

Because our certified free cash for fiscal year 2023 totaled only \$6900, the town is exploring the possibility of requesting a recertification of free cash from the Department of Revenue (DOR). There is no guarantee that DOR will approve this request.

D. Drugmand made a motion to adjourn the meeting so that the Committee could join the Select Board to discuss next year's budget. Motion was seconded by D. Megas and was passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 7:36 p.m.

Next Meeting Date

Next meeting is scheduled for April 8 at 6:30 p.m. at which time the Committee will plan to meet briefly before joining the Select Board for continued budget discussion.

Discussion with Select Board Regarding Budget

During their joint meeting, the Select Board and Finance Committee reviewed the operating budget line-by-line and discussed potential budgetary cuts. It was felt that final recommendations could not be made until we had better information regarding vocational education numbers. Still, this was a valuable exercise as it allowed the group to share their preferences regarding cost cutting. Details of this joint meeting can be found in the minutes of the March 25 Select Board meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Levernoch, Clerk