March 11 Finance Committee Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 6 p.m.

In attendance were Committee members: D. Drugmand, L. Levernoch, D. Megas, S. Thomas and Town Administrator Sean Curran.

D. Drugmand and M. Megas (second) proposed an amendment to the minutes of the February 12 meeting to include the fact that online permitting would assist the assessors in capturing new growth. This motion was passed unanimously.

Highway Department Garage Heating Repair Financing

The heating repairs for the Highway Department Garage have been completed and an invoice has been received. The committee discussed various funding sources before recessing briefly to meet with the Select Board concerning this matter.

K. Lew’s opinion was that even though ARPA money had been set aside for this repair, a better option would be to use funds from Highway Department accounts (specifically the Operational Account) so that ARPA money would be available for other unanticipated costs which might arise. Highway Superintendent Tom Johnson cautioned that funds in the Operational Account are running low and may not be adequate to cover the cost of the heating system repairs along with other expenses which may arise before the end of the fiscal year. After some discussion, it was decided to use funds from the Highway Department Operational Account. If there is a short fall in this account at the end of this fiscal year, the use of ARPA funds will be revisited.

Review of Updated Budget Spreadsheet

A review of the updated budget spreadsheet revealed an anticipated increase of 4.6% in the town’s operating budget from the previous fiscal year. However, the Committee hopes to limit the increase to 3%. In order to achieve this goal, costs will need to be cut by $36,709. This will be a difficult task as essential costs, over which the town has little to no control (utilities, insurance and emergency services to name a few), continue to rise.

The Finance Committee discussed several options for trimming the FY25 budget. However, these were preliminary as the Committee had account balances only through the end of December. Figures through the third quarter should be available in early April and would present a clearer picture of whether departments are on track to spend all of the funds allotted to them for FY24. Additionally, FY25 costs associated with vocational education are unknown at present as tuition won’t be set until April and new students won’t receive notification of acceptance until May.

There are many reasons to be concerned; however, there is at least one positive development. Although the School Committee had not formally approved its FY25 budget, it looks as if our portion of CBRSD operating expenses could decrease by as much as $9,000. The Committee is scheduled to hold a vote on the budget later this week.

Financial Policies Update

At its last meeting, the Select Board discussed several updated financial policies which the Finance Committee had submitted for their review. All were approved except for the credit card usage policy.

M. Megas suggested that the Department Heads should be involved from the start in regard to credit card usage. She proposed that the Department Heads submit a completed Credit Card Use Form to the Town Accountant. The person using the card would present the receipt to the accountant as soon as possible. D. Ellis agreed with these suggestions. M. Megas was asked to amend the draft to reflect this. It was hoped that the Select Board would take a vote on the amended policy during their meeting tonight.

Upcoming Meeting Schedule

 The next meeting of the Finance Committee will be held on March 25 at 6pm. The Committee anticipates meeting with the Select Board to continue budget talks. If necessary, a meeting will be held on April 8 at 6pm. A final meeting with the Select Board regarding the budget will occur on April 22.

D. Drugmand made a motion to adjourn; seconded by M. Megas. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 8:48 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Levernoch, Clerk