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FINANCE COMMITTEE
Minutes
Zoom 840 3896 9229

Date: January 25, 2023

Time: 6:30 p.m.

Present: Wells, Pratt, Cooper, O'Connell

Absent: Cooney, Kuphal

Meeting called to order at 6:34 p.m.

Judith O'Connor was present at the meeting

Jennifer Barrett, Finance Director, was present at the meeting

Sean Hendricks, Town Manager was present at the meeting

Jen O'Connell: Has Judy been appointed to the Committee yet?

Sean Hendricks: Not yet. Hopefully by the end of the week. I need to send another message to Jim to have her appointed then she can get sworn in.

Motioned by Wells, seconded by Cooper to accept the minutes of January 18, 2023 as written.

Wells, yes; Pratt, yes; Cooper, yes; O'Connell, yes

Jen O'Connell: I just want to let you know that I asked Sean and Jennifer to have the DPW come in on Monday. I assumed that he would be busy plowing today. We will be going through the general budget. I also heard from the Town Clerk and she would like to be present when we discuss her budget.

Jennifer Barrett: She should be on in about 15 minutes.

Town Planner

Jen O'Connell: We do have a Town Planner, correct?

Sean Hendricks: Yes, we do. We do not have an assistant.

Jen O'Connell: Is the salary correct?

Jennifer Barrett: We are currently advertising for an assistant. This amount should cover both salaries.

Jen O'Connell: Is this at market rate?

Sean Hendricks: The Planner, Connor, is at market rate. He has a lot of expertise and we are hoping to find someone that has experience in both planning and conservation. We may have to hire a part time conservation agent if we cannot find someone that has both.

Jen O'Connell: Is it harder to find someone with conservation experience?

Sean Hendricks: Most of the people that have conservation experience, subcontract their work for more money. I would like to find someone with experience even if they work part time in another municipality. They could work in both.

Jen O'Connell: Would the Conservation Commission want this person to attend their meetings?

Sean Hendricks: They could.

Jen O'Connell: Professional Development is up?

Jennifer Barrett: We are getting to the end of the codification of the zoning by-laws. This would get us to the end of the year.

Sean Hendricks: We are hoping to bring the zoning by-laws to the Fall Town Meeting. An informal review has been going on for a couple of years. This is supposed to be done every 10 years. This was delayed due to COVID.

Charles Cooper: The Planning Board is compensated. Is this due to a by-law?

Sean Hendricks: Yes, it is.

Charles Cooper: The expenses are up. Does this include the Downtown Community Project?

Jennifer Barrett: This is all of the planning expenses. The Downtown Community Project is funded by donations.

Jayne Davolio, Town Clerk, was in to discuss her budget at 6:48 p.m.

Jen O'Connell: Your budget is virtually level funded. Are we changing the technology in the Clerk's office? Is there a plan to enter the older documents into your mainframe?

Jayne Davolio: We are making strides right now. The plan is to maybe have an Honor Society student help with that in the next school year.

Jen O'Connell: You have 5 people in your office, correct?

Jayne Davolio: There is me, two full time people and two part time people.

William Pratt: Who is the Certified Mass Municipal Clerk?

Jayne Davolio: That is me. When I received my certification, the Town Meeting approved the MGL.

Jen O'Connell: So this is a stipend. Is this included in the retirement calculation?

Jayne Davolio: I am not sure. Jennifer would know better.

Jennifer Barrett: Normally a stipend is not included in the calculation. This, however, is included.

Jen O'Connell: Are all of your people in the union?

Sean Hendricks: They are. The two part timers are part of the union because they were grandfathered in.

Jen O'Connell: Are you seeing an uptick or decrease of in-person traffic?

Jayne Davolio: We never see a decrease in in-person traffic. We do the transfer station stickers, marriage licenses, birth certificates etc. There is never a lack of people coming to the window.

William Pratt: In reference to the transfer station stickers, we should have the ability to cross check with the excise tax bills, rather than the person coming in with their registration.

Sean Hendricks: There is no savings of time or money to do this.

William Pratt: The automation is there. Excise tax is tied to the RMV.

Sean Hendricks: It is something that we could look into. We would still have to manually check.

Jennifer Barrett: The Deputy's system is connected to the RMV, not the Tax Collector's office.

Russell Wells: How is the stipend amount determined?

Jayne Davolio: The \$1,000 is the stipend for MGL. I also receive stipends for Municipal Hearing Officer and Parking Clerk.

Russell Wells: So this stipend amount is for more than one responsibility?

Jayne Davolio: Yes, it is.

Russell Wells: What percentage of information can citizens get on line from your office?

Jayne Davolio: I would say between 25-35%. We are moving towards more technology. I do try to keep my budget as level as possible.

Jen O'Connell: How many elections do you have next year?

Jayne Davolio: I have only one election and 2 Town Meetings. There is no Fall Primary or State Election. That is in a separate budget.

Elections and Registrars

Charles Cooper: What are the poll pads? Are these I-pads?

Jayne Davolio: Yes, these are what we use at the elections. We purchased more for use at the Town Meeting in addition to the Elections.

Russell Wells: Have you thought about electronic voting at Town Meeting?

Jayne Davolio: I do not think we need to go that route at this time. We could, in the future, go in with another municipality to partner with them. The cost is not beneficial with the amount of people that attend Town Meeting.

Jayne Davolio concluded her meeting at 7:20 p.m.

Municipal Office Building

Sean Hendricks: I made a call to four different Custodial Contractors to see what they would charge based on square footage of the buildings and the amount of hours spent on the upkeep of these buildings. I was told that the dollar amount for what is needed would be at least twice what we are paying to have our custodians do the work. We are looking at two full time and 2 part time personnel. We have a Head Custodian at 40 hours, a 30 hour position and 2-19 hour positions. The buildings that are involved are the Senior Center, ASA Waters, the Library and the MOB. There is also an offset of \$5,000 from the Friends of the Mansion.

Jen O'Connell: Why is the Professional Services up?

Sean Hendricks: Most of the professional services have gone up.

Russell Wells: How many charge points do we have in Town?

Sean Hendricks: There are either 5 or 6. There is one at the Shaw School, one at the High School, one at the Library, two at the MOB and I think we have one at the DPW.

Committees and Commissions

Charles: Is any of this coming from the Butler Farm?

Sean Hendricks: That would be a separate account.

Jennifer Barrett: The Dog Park has a revolving account. The Farm has no income.

Sean Hendricks: The building will be used if there is an emergency and we cannot use our other buildings.

Building Inspector

Jen O'Connell: Do we have enough people in this department?

Sean Hendricks: It depends on the day. There are times when this department is really stretched. I don't have the data to ask you for an additional person.

Jennifer Barrett: We have doubled the Assistant's hours to help out with the paperwork and so that when the Inspector is out on inspections.

Russell Wells: Is there any secretarial personnel in this office?

Sean Hendricks: There is one. There is one in the Planning office that also helps out.

Plumbing/Gas Inspector

Jennifer Barrett: We are proposing a revolving fund at Town Meeting for both this budget and the Electrical Inspector. This will flow with the tide of inspections.

Sean Hendricks: This will also back up if we need to increase or decrease our fees.

Jennifer Barrett: We left \$1,000 in each of the budgets to cover Town owned buildings.

Emergency Management

Jen O'Connell: There is no longer a salary in this account?

Sean Hendricks: The Town has been paying a specific person for this. It is easy for the Fire Chief or Police Chief to handle this. The Town Manager's budget will absorb the cost of this.

Animal Control

Jen O'Connell: This is level funded?

Sean Hendricks: As long as our Dog Officer doesn't retire, this will remain the same. If he retires we may be forced into a less cost effective amount.

Veterans

Sean Hendricks: We haven't received an actual budget from them. They are working on it.

Cable Access

Jen O'Connell: This has gone up.

Jennifer Barrett: We have 2 new part time people. They cover some of the multiple meetings on nights that Kevin cannot be in three different meetings at one time.

Sean Hendricks: The work hasn't decreased. We are lucky to have someone that works so hard. Anyone that we get in the part time positions only stays a few months, maybe a year.

Jen O'Connell: Are the fees going up with all the new homes?

Sean Hendricks: The fees aren't going up. The customer base is going down. There is less revenue for the companies involved. Whether they raise the fees or not, I do not know. The Cable Fund is very healthy. I am not worried about losing the service.

Russell Wells: The Capital Upgrade has been a pretty consistent \$90,000 a year. Can you talk about that?

Sean Hendricks: Kevin looks at the equipment every year. He has been phasing in little by little every year. He is also looking at whether they are sufficient. Because he stays on top of things, we have been able to keep it stable.

Jennifer Barrett: The monies in the fund have to be appropriated at Town Meeting. Whatever isn't spent goes back in the fund to be re-appropriated in the following year. This is his only way of doing what he needs to do. He has to plan ahead for emergencies.

Jen O'Connell: We will stop at this point. We have Keith coming in on Monday. I still need to get a hold of the School, Sewer Commission and Blackstone Valley Tech.

Sean Hendricks: By the end of the week, you should get a link in your email with the latest document that we are working on. We can make it a living document or have the different updated versions on that link.

William Pratt: I would like to continue with what we have been given previously.

Sean Hendricks: That can be part of the link. You would just have to go to each of the versions.

Jennifer Barrett: We already have 2 versions of the budget. I am currently working on version 3.

Motioned by Pratt, seconded by Wells to adjourn at 8:00 p.m. Wells, yes; Cooper, yes; Pratt, yes; O'Connell, yes