

FINANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES

February 18, 2010

Regular meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Thursday, February 18, 2010 at 7:30 p.m. in the Finance Committee Room, Town Hall, with the following members present were: T. Jalkut, J. Muti, C. Lane, M. Boragine, D. Burke, L. Donovan, R. Knobel, S. Connell, M. Hickey, T. Bowen, P. Stasiukevicius, and J. Stadler. Also in attendance was Town Administrator M. Boynton and Finance Director, M. Good.

7:30 p.m. – Quorum being present, the meeting was called to order by the Chairman T. Jalkut.

Snow & Ice Deficit

DPW Director R. O'Brien is requesting permission to overspend the Snow and Ice Budget as authorized by MGL, Section 31D. Previous storm of February 16, has put the Snow and Ice Budget in deficit. As of February 10, 2010 balance in this line item was \$5,098. As required, Board of Selectmen granted approval at their meeting of January 26, 2010 to overspend the Snow and Ice Budget.

MOTION MADE by T. Bowen, Seconded by S. Connell to grant permission for the DPW Director to overspend the FY2010 Snow and Ice Budget as authorized by MGL Section 31 D, Motion Approved, Unanimous (12-0-0)

Town Clerk, Ron Fucile

Mr. Fucile spoke to the cost of the two recent elections December 8, 2009 and January 19, 2010. As mandated by the state, Town of Walpole will receive \$5,540 for the extra three hours for the extended polling hours. They have not received the additional extra cost of the elections. He has requested \$30,735, and he, hopes that they will be reimbursed the full amount. He expects to receive confirmation on this shortly.

Article 28 – Mr. Fucile explained that he is requesting under this article that the Town adopt Chapter 41, Section 110 of the MGL that requires that Saturday be given the same legal standing as a holiday or a Sunday and not be counted in calculations. Mr. Fucile explained that every year he is required to set the dates and times for local elections and everything that leads up to it. This clarifies how the time is calculated. He is requesting that the FinCom support this. Per Town Counsel, Joyce Frank, collective bargaining issues are exempt. Town of Walpole is somewhat unique in that we hold elections on Saturday. This does not affect other departments.

MOTION MADE by T. Bowen, Seconded by P. Stasiukevicius for Favorable Action on Article 28, Motion Approved, Unanimous (12-0-0) (12 voting)

Police Chief Stillman-

Chief Stillman spoke to not having issues on his budget, he has met with the Town Administrator. Two years ago he was looking for additional staff, but due to the turnaround in the economy he realizes that this is not feasible. He has cut back on staffing and making do. He understands everyone else is in the same position, but it does affect some of the operations. He has been holding some community and neighborhood meetings trying to reach out to the community. They have been working with the schools, seniors, etc. This past fall, officers went through a four hour training course at the high school, getting to know the schools, layouts and practice setting up in different situations. Police have met with parents of middle school students talking to them about drugs, also conducts information on the internet for parents, and conducted lock down drills at the schools. Radios have been put in place in the school for communications. They have met with downtown merchants on parking, and they are in favor of doing something other than installation of meters. They are looking to help with the enforcement of parking with the Senior Work Off Program. Seniors would work one day a week, three or four hours per day.

He explained that he would like to get back to where they were previously in staffing. Officers are very busy. He needs to look at the position of school resource officer.

Quinn Bill - He does not want to see the Town go back to a department of just high school graduates, the issues that the deal with are of high importance. Officers gave up things in order to receive the Quinn Bill. State has eliminated the payment of their 50% share. They have an agreement with the Town to revisit in May, hopefully by that time, the Mashpee case will be settled on the Quinn Bill. Question is what to do, the money has to be put in the FY11 budget. If the officers don't receive this money, it makes it very difficult for them to receive this reduction in pay. He does not know what the Town's bargaining position will be. 75% of the department is affected by the Quinn Bill.

Under the Capital Budget, his #1 request is the replacement of guns and transaction equipment for \$20,000. Officers train with guns three times a year, State's recommendation is five times a year. Costs occur with overtime.

Public Safety Facility –Chief will come back to discuss this at a later date. Robbins Road site stands out as an ideal site, 55 acres of town owned land, facility will only use 3 acres, allowing for plenty of room for expansion. It is a very buildable site, other sites have been looked at and don't work as well. He feels the last time it was defeated was due to costs and some site issues. Some people just don't want to pay for it, the Town needs to step up and do the right thing.

Article 3 – 3% Cost of Living Adjustment

Discussion ensued with the FinCom as to why we are giving 3% raises along with step increases to non-union personnel which average out to 5%. What is the argument for doing this when people have financial problems, social security being frozen, etc. We are asking people that aren't public employees to pay more. In hindsight, the contracts were bad. Residents can't be sympathetic to given raises if they have nothing.

Town Administrator spoke to the unions receiving this amount and he feels everyone should be treated the same. He does not want to single out one group. Health insurance costs will be dealt with in the next round of negotiations. There is a feeling against government employees, when times get tough, they take a hit, when things are good in the private sector, bonuses are given out. This does not work the same for town employees. The 3% cost of living amounts to \$128,000 for approximately 90 employees. If the cost of living adjustment is taken away, employees would still be eligible for step increases. He has already allocated the \$128,000 in the budget, and if taken away, he won't have it for next year, and what would the Finance Committee recommend doing with the \$128,000.

Finance Director M. Good spoke to department's losing staff, burden is fallen on department heads, departments are doing more with less, work has not changed. Level of service can only be provided on what the taxpayer is willing to pay for and what they want for services. What the Town provides affects the property values

Committee questioned whose job it is to prioritize, as the town's revenues are fixed.

The School Department made the decision to give increases then has to lay people off due to lack of funding.

Committee members spoke to the general public feels that times are changing and what use to take place is a lot different than what is going to take place going forward. We are unable to do anything with the union contracts until they expire. It does not seem realistic that going forward there will be automatic step increases. Many people in the private sector have not had raises, some have received a cut in pay, Town cannot continue to do business the way we used to. Money is just not there. Discussion leads up to telling the unions, that things are not going to be the same, it is setting up for future negotiations. It is a message that has to be sent. No one is being critical of the work that the employees are doing. Private sector company have lay offs, employees didn't do anything to deserve it, there is no job security in the private sector. Town is going to need changes in the insurance, economy is not getting better in the next couple of years, tough decisions need to be made. It would show an example to the unions that the non-unions didn't get it. Cannot do furloughs, anything that changes benefits, time off, etc. would have to be negotiated.

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Town Administrator spoke to understanding the frustration that the committee feels and the easiest thing to do is to deal with non-union. Can't short change one segment of the employees that works for the Town. Cost of living costs \$128,000, if moved the non union to rate saver plan, it would save \$169,000. If the retirees are moved to rate savers, it would save an additional \$221,000. Non-union don't have an advocate to fight for them. If we are making changes, it should be for all employees. He is aware that things have to be fixed.

This discussion is a good start, everyone has been open with one another, everyone dealing in good faith.

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MOTION MADE by R. Knobel, Seconded by S. Connell to approve the February 11, 2010 Minutes (8-0-3) (M. Hickey, J. Stadtler, J. Muti abstained) (11 voting)

9:30 p.m. – Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Clare P. Abril
Clerk