

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes Monday, March 7, 2022

Present:

Finance Committee

Roll Call 14 in attendance:

Mark Trudell	Kathleen Foley Greulich
Dennis Crowley	Lucy Romanowiz
Josette Burke	Jean Kenney
Allyson Hamilton	Douglas Shea
Brian Bain	Mark Sullivan
Steve Hendricks	Lisa Van der Linden
Susan Lawson	Lawrence Pittman

Absent: Jeff Fisher

Additional attendees:

Jim Johnson, Patrick Shield, Jodi Cuneo, Lisa Sinkus, Tamarah Green, Landis Hershey, Scott Gustafson, Rick Mattson, John Hasenjaeger, Bill Abbot

The meeting was called to order by Mark Trudell at 7:00pm.

Walpole Media Corp FY 23 Budget Article

Walpole Media Corp Executive Director Tamarah Green presented the FY 2023 budget for Walpole Media Corp. Over the past year Walpole Media doubled its number of programs and continues to provide services including coverage of municipal meetings and town sports. Tamarah Green stated that a portion of the budget increase is due to an increase in employee benefits and insurance. Walpole Media's revenue has not decreased as much as other towns' because not as many residents seem to be cancelling their cable subscriptions. Mr. Shea asked about viewership demographics, and Ms. Green stated that typically students and parents watch broadcasted sports games and older adults tune into town hall meetings.

Motion by Dennis Crowley and seconded by Susan Lawson for **favorable action on the Walpole Media Corp FY 23 Budget.**

The motion passed 13-0-1 (Jean Kenney abstained).

Stormwater Control Bylaw Amendment Article

Conservation Agent Landis Hershey presented the article on behalf of the Conservation Commission. This amendment would revise the Regulations, Enforcements, and Exemptions portions of the town's Stormwater Control Bylaw to comply more closely with EPA guidelines. Other minor changes were to clarify language and reduce ambiguity. Mr. Pittman asked if these changes will make it any less advantageous for companies to conduct business in Walpole, and Landis Hershey didn't think it would affect Walpole's competitiveness very much. She also stated that Walpole may be penalized with large fines from the EPA if they do not make the necessary changes.

Motion by Dennis Crowley and seconded by Susan Lawson for **favorable action on the Stormwater Control Bylaw Amendment Article.**

The motion passed 14-0-0.

Water and Sewer Budgets / Articles

Water Superintendent Scott Gustafson presented the budgets on behalf of the department. He stated that the most significant expense increase was for the chemicals they use at the water treatment plants. The department has not spent as much in the past year on Water Conservation Education Programs as in previous years, though water usage is still down. Much of the town's water conservation efforts have manifested in incentivizing usage of up-to-date appliances like washing machines and toilets that use less water than older models. Jim Johnson explained the tiered price rate system that Walpole uses to charge residents for water usage. Lisa Van der Linden expressed the opinion that the department should be more conservative when dipping into Water Retained Earnings to balance the budget. Kathleen Foley Greulich recommend reorganizing the tiers so that residents are more balanced across rate groups. The Committee discussed what rates could most benefit Walpole consumers while also allowing for the Water Department perform its functions. Allyson Hamilton asked about future capital projects, and Scott Gustafson stated that 40% of the main cast-iron water main would be need to be replaced over the next few years, as well as another phase of the replacement of the SCADA water measuring system. Dennis Crowley asked if Walpole is able to sell excess water to other towns, and Bill Abbott warned that if we start doing that, it will be difficult to stop in the event that Walpole starts using more water and needs that water back. Rick Mattson also stated that regulations and distribution costs would make that idea less feasible. Susan Lawson and Josette Burke felt that if water price rates are to increase, the Town needs to be honest and open about why and how. Mark Trudell asked if the Water Department is eligible for any COVID relief funds, and Jim Johnson stated that they are considered part of the Town so they are eligible to be allotted money from Walpole's ARPA funds.

Mark Trudell opted to defer voting on the Water and Sewer Articles until a later meeting to give the Finance Committee more time to consider.

Adjournment

Motion by Susan Lawson and seconded by Kathleen Foley Greulich to adjourn.

The motion passed 13-0-0.

The Finance Committee adjourned at 9:00pm.