

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes Thursday, April 6, 2023

Present: (Z – zoom)

Finance Committee

Roll Call 11 in attendance

Dennis Crowley (Chair)

Douglas Shea (Vice Chair)

Josette Burke (Clerk)

Brian Bain

Kathleen Foley Greulich

Audrey Grace

Steve Hendricks

Jean Kenney

Mark Trudell

Lisa Van der Linden

Scott Wassel

Absent: Leigh Ann Luetzen, Lawrence Pitman, Adrienne Rogers, Mark Sullivan

Additional attendees:

Jim Johnson, Patrick Shield, Lisa Sinkus, Richard Kelleher, Timothy Bailey, Jim Crowley, John O’Leary, Philip Czachorowski, Sarah Khatib, Judith Conroy

The meeting was called to order by Dennis Crowley at 7:00pm.

Meeting minutes of recorded meetings include time stamps from the video for viewing actual content.

The video can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcfrBLLdfFk>

Approval of minutes is based from the printed word and not the video

Article 2 – Non-Union Personnel (1:23)

Town Administrator Jim Johnson introduced Article 2, which gives the non-union personnel a COLA of 2.75%. GovHR USA recently did a review of the Town’s salary and wages, which was presented before and approved by the Select Board late last year. Article 2 also adds the positions of Deputy Assessor and Inspector of Weights and Measures.

(4:32) Motion by Douglas Shea and seconded by Brian Bain for **Favorable Action** on Article 2 in the amounts of **\$124,500**.

The motion passed 11-0-0.

Article 4 – FY24 Budget (5:19)

Jim Johnson stated that there have been no changes to the Article since the Finance Committee last discussed the FY24 Budget. Douglas Shea commented that since they are still using the lower Local Aid numbers for this budget, this means they will soon have a lot of extra money in Free Cash, which he wants to see put to good use eventually.

(9:06) Motion by Mark Trudell and seconded by Douglas Shea for **Favorable Action** on Article 4.

The motion passed 11-0-0.

Article 11 – Police Union Contract (11:11)

Jim Johnson explained the terms of the new Police Union Contract. In exchange for the 2% cost of living adjustment, the Town received the stipulation that officers who lose their certification automatically cease to be employees of Town, which will save Walpole money in costly hearing processes. Education incentives are also now gradually phased in for newly hired officers.

Dennis Crowley reiterated that all of these contracts have been properly negotiated and ratified by the Select Board, and the Finance Committee's job is simply to give Favorable Action or not.

Josette Burke asked if the loss of certification rule applies to all officers or if more senior staff are grandfathered in. Police Chief Richard Kelleher stated that this applies equally to all officers regardless of tenure.

(21:54) Motion by Douglas Shea and seconded by Brian Bain for **Favorable Action** on Article 11 in the amount of **\$97,744** from Taxation.

The motion passed 11-0-0.

Article 12 – Firefighters Union Contract (22:36)

Jim Johnson explained the terms of the new Firefighters Union Contract. A new training step was implemented for newly hired recruits, and a new health insurance guideline was added to cover staff who develop cancer while working for the Town.

Mark Trudell asked if stipends are prorated the first year, and Fire Chief Timothy Bailey stated that they are. Lisa Van der Linden suggested slightly changing the language in one sentence to make it gender neutral.

Douglas Shea asked why, all else being equal, seniority is based alphabetically on last name. Chief Bailey stated that this has never actually occurred and does not seem to be an issue.

(27:53) Motion by Mark Trudell and seconded by Brian Bain for **Favorable Action** on Article 12 in the amount of **\$104,720** from Taxation.

The motion passed 11-0-0.

Article 13 – DPW Contract (28:18)

Jim Johnson recommended No Action on Article 13 because the Department of Public Works Contract has not yet reached an agreement.

(28:36) Motion by Mark Trudell and seconded by Kathleen Foley Greulich for **No Action** on Article 13. The motion passed 11-0-0.

Article 14 – Clerical Union Contract (28:53)

Jim Johnson explained the terms of the new Clerical Union Contract. They negotiated a split COLA of 1.5% starting July 1 and 1.75% starting January 1 for a net increase of roughly 2.6%. The Town received management rights over job descriptions and steps. In addition, the Assistant Town Clerk position will be removed from the Union and become contract like most other deputy department heads.

Scott Wassel asked if there is mobility between union positions based on longevity. Jim Johnson stated that all positions are predesignated at the level at which they are funded, and an employee would only move up in rank if a higher position becomes available.

(32:25) Motion by Douglas Shea and seconded by Brian Bain for **Favorable Action** on Article 14 in the amount of **\$22,469** from Taxation.

The motion passed 11-0-0.

Article 15 – Dispatchers Union Contract (32:46)

Jim Johnson explained the terms of the new Dispatchers Union Contract. It includes Juneteenth becoming a holiday, clothing reimbursement, and a 2.25% COLA.

(33:16) Motion by Douglas Shea and seconded by Brian Bain for **Favorable Action** on Article 15 in the amount of **\$25,088** from Taxation.

The motion passed 11-0-0.

Article 16 – Library Union Contract (33:38)

Jim Johnson explained the terms of the new Library Union Contract. The cost of living adjustment is 2.25% and the day after Thanksgiving will become a holiday.

(36:16) Motion by Kathleen Foley Greulich and seconded by Brian Bain for **Favorable Action** on Article 16 in the amount of **\$8,749** from Taxation.

The motion passed 11-0-0.

Article 22 – In-Law Apartment Zoning By-Law Change (36:38)

The Finance Committee resumed discussion of Article 22, which had begun in a previous meeting. The Select Board agreed to keep the process a Special Permit instead of making it 'by right'.

Planning Board member Philip Czachorowski stated that he is in favor of making the In-Law Suite process by right in order to make it easier for the homeowner. He stated that an In-Law is not much different from a regular addition to a house, which would not typically require a Special Permit.

Planning Board member Sarah Khatib agreed that In-Law Suites should be by right because constructing more housing units in Walpole would help solve the affordable housing shortage.

Audrey Grace stated that making the process too difficult may incentivize homeowners to construct additions in secret without going through the proper building inspection protocols.

Planning Board Vice Chair John O'Leary stated that the rationale behind the Special Permit is so that the Zoning Board can act as the granting authority and make sure the In-Law Suite will not become a second dwelling unit that turns the home into multi-family housing in a zoning district that does not allow for it.

Philip Czachorowski argued that even if the process is by right, the Building Commissioner and Engineering Department would still do their jobs and make sure that the project is up to code and complies with the Town's bylaws.

Lisa Van der Linden stated that it shouldn't be too difficult to lay out all the rules for constructing an In-Law Suite and remove the need for Zoning Board oversight.

(58:23) Jim Johnson stated that the Select Board feels that a small change is better than the status quo, so keeping the Special Permit requirement would help get the rest of the article passed at Town Meeting.

Kathleen Foley Greulich stated that the Finance Committee's options are Favorable Action, No Action, or a Substitute Motion. Jim Johnson clarified that they could also refer Article 22 back to committee.

Sarah Khatib stated that the risk of people creating multi-family housing is low because In-Law Suites have to be no more than 33% of the size of the house and less than 1,000 sq. ft.

Building Commissioner Jim Crowley stated that with under the current system, the onus is on the owner to bring the Zoning Board's decision to the Registry of Deeds after the appeal period. If the process becomes by right, the owner would take the Building Department Certificate of Occupancy and file it with the Registry of Deeds instead.

Sarah Khatib stated that, since some are unhappy with the third degree of kinship requirement, Walpole could pass an Accessory Dwelling Unit bylaw, and several towns have them allowed by right.

(1:12:30) Judith Conroy, member of the Zoning Board, stated that the added burden on the applicant to appear before the Zoning Board is not very large, and the Board provides necessary oversight of the project that should not be eliminated.

Kathleen Foley Greulich suggested that the criteria by which the Zoning Board evaluates projects should simply be included in the bylaw without need for a public hearing.

(1:20:20) Motion by Mark Trudell and seconded by Josette Burke to **refer Article 22 back to committee**. The motion passed 10-1-0 (Steve Hendricks voted no).

Dennis Crowley stated that any RTM can submit a version of this article as a substitute motion at Town Meeting if they so choose.

Jim Johnson stated that there will be no meeting on Monday, April 10, and the next Finance Committee meeting will be the Public Hearing on Thursday, April 27. Town Meeting is on May 1.

Adjournment (1:26:42)

Motion by Dennis Crowley and seconded by Brian Bain to adjourn.
The motion passed 11-0-0.

The Finance Committee adjourned at 8:30pm.