

Finance Committee Minutes

April 19th 2018

This meeting was to be a joint meeting with the Select Board. Ms. White called the select board to order however Ms. Shalaby was not present and Mr. Yohalem was ill at home so that board did not have a quorum. Mr. Yohalem did however join the discussion via the telephone. Mr. Carson called the Finance Committee Meeting to order at 6:00PM. Present were Mr. Mark Carson, Mrs. Sandy Walker, Mr. Steven Klein, Mrs. Marilyn Fracasso, and Mrs. Prudence Spaulding. Mrs. Mari Enoch the Town Administrator was present.

The Minutes for April 10th 2018 were accepted as read, Mrs. Walker 1st, Mr. Klein 2nd passed unanimously.

General Town Financial Information.

Prior to reviewing the draft of the FY 19 Warrant Ms. Enoch reviewed the overview of the Financial plan for the town. Some of the figures suggested that if the budget is passed as now designed the possible tax rate increase would be about 5 cents per thousand. With an average residential house valued at \$390,619 the yearly increase in their taxes would be about \$19.53. This budget is approximately \$44,631 below the levy limit. Now it must be remembered that the levy limit will be increased even though it is not entirely spent. Ms. Enoch did add that the building permits were down this year and that there would be no way to assess what the state revenue would be next year. The school assessment for Operating and Transportation costs was \$163,065 lower and this was the money that would be placed in Stabilization. There is at present \$731,574 in Free Cash. The articles on the warrant ,if passed proposed using some of the Free Cash on Tree Work \$10,000, Road Work \$260,000; and blacktopping the Town Highway Garage parking lot for \$75,000. Other large capital items on the warrant include Stabilization \$150,000, making the Library Door ADA accessible; purchasing a washer for \$4,000 to clean the fireman's clothes of carcinogens after worn during fires; Broadband, \$20,000 to provide for consultation and legal fees; and \$8,000 to cover costs that might occur with the land adjoining the Unpachene Bridge construction. If the grader is approved the money to cover it will be borrowed with a ten year note to cover its costs. To approve the purchase of the grader, the vote at the town meeting pass by two-thirds of those present registered voters and the vote at the ballot box must be a simple majority.

Review of the Warrant

Prudence Spaulding
April 21st 2018

Article 10- affixing the salaries of various elected Town Officers

Tree Warden, the Finance Committee had voted to increase this position from \$1000 to \$1250 after meeting with the Tree Warden who presented costs to cover the position during the year.

School Committee Representatives had been increased from \$1,500 to \$1,650. Ms. Enoch stated that this item in the past had never been placed under the "salary schedule" and thus had never had social security etc. removed from the amount the individual School Committee person received. As a salary, now this amount would qualify for removal for social security and taxes etc. and the remaining amount after deductions would result in what each member had received before. Mrs. Walker stated that she had concerns about what volunteer positions were paid and what were not. Those volunteers serving on the Planning Board, the Conservation Board and the Finance Committee receives no payment for their services. This situation refers back to how the town pays stipends and how that payment is established. Committee members agreed to study this situation for the future.

Article 11 General Government.

(10) Website Mrs. Walker stated that she hoped to add \$10,000 to update the website. She stated that there were many folks in the town who were interested in keeping up with the activities in the town but the website was not proving a good source for current information. Mr. Klein stated that there should have been a study to produce a specific amount for such an increase. Ms. Enoch that Mrs. Walker's request would have had to be a separate article on the warrant. Ms. White stated that she would hope that the website would be improved this year and perhaps an article on the warrant next year with specific information would suffice.

Article 14 Highway and Cemetery Expenses

(1) Roads and Bridges, Mrs. Walker questioned whether the superintendent's salary had been included in the Highway's Salaries totals with the % COLA as it is a position covered by a contract. Ms. White stated that this position had been increased by the standard COLA.

Article 18 School Assessments

The Finance Committee had recommended the payment for only the Roof and Boiler Bond payment part of the school budget. The basis of this recommendation was that the school enrollment was rapidly declining and it appeared that the school district had made no effort to reduce their staff or to contact Berkshire Hills to see if there was some way that the two districts could work effectively together. Mr. Klein asked if Berkshire Hills was willing to take part in such talks. Added to this the school in its capital budget was including another "marshmallow bus" etc. The school has stated that their A&D account was lower than they

liked it to be so if there was any money saved if the Egremont School did not become active and the teacher's negotiations were lower than listed, this extra money would be put in the A&D account rather than turned back to the towns. Mr. Yohalem(from the phone) spent some time discussing the Egremont School situation, and was questioned about the fact that the school district had discussed moving the 6th grade out of the elementary school building into the Mt Everett building, but had never done it. In conclusion Mr. Klein stated that the committee members probably didn't have the skill or knowledge to get the school district to save money etc. But apparently it has been established that it costs \$24,585 to teach a child in SBRSD! The Town of New Marlborough is pleased that their assessment has been lowered this year, but Ms. White stated that each town was petitioning the state to allow the enrollment be based on a rolling number so that the various towns could better plan what their assessments would be. Mr. Yohalem asked that the Finance Committee revisit their recommendation as to whether they would or would not recommend the school budgets. Mr. Carson stated that there were folks absent at this present meeting that should have the opportunity to be present when a revote took place.

Article 17 Library Project fund

The Finance Committee had voted to support this article which would allow the Library to purchase and install automatic door openers and thus meet the ADA standards.

Article 18 Cultural Activities

(3) Library Salaries, this budget had been passed with the COLA raises on both positions in the library though the added amount for the library aid position had been included in their request. The Finance Committee stated that there was no documentation to support the extra increase. Ms. Enoch stated that the library aide was barely receiving the minimum wage for the salary and it had been felt that the position should have been rewarded with a higher wage. Mrs. Walker stated that not only was added documentation needed but increases should be based upon merit. Since this was not possible Mrs. Spaulding made a motion to accept the new recommended amount for the Library Salaries account [50610.02] of {\$59,079} with Mr. Klein 2nd the motion passed.

Article 19 The purchase of a special washing machine for the Fire Department.

Though the Finance Committee approved this in principle they had questioned whether the water from the washings removing the carcinogenic material would enter and contaminate the water systems, the streams or the aquifers. Mr. Loring had not responded to their questions. Mr. Carson stated that he would contact Mr. Loring, the Fire Chief, and get this question answered. Mrs. Walker had done some research on this but had not found the answer to this.

But she said that some of her research stated that the uniforms had only to be washed once a year! Mr. Carson made a motion to recommend this article with Mrs. Spaulding 2nd and it passed with Mrs. Walker voting against it.

Article 20 and 21 had been approved earlier by the Finance Committee.

Article 22 General Salaries etc.

(10) Building Inspectors Expenses. The Finance Committee although they knew that this account was to be level funded had not received the paper requesting it. There was some discussion about the termination of the present Building Inspector and the introduction of a new one. Ms. White stated that the amount placed in the various accounts for the Building Inspector would be shared and used to make the transfer to a new inspector as effective and smooth as possible. Mr. Klein 1st, Mrs. Spaulding 2nd the motion passed.

(19) Tree Warden's Salary, the Finance Committee had granted this position an increase of \$250 to make it \$1250.

Article 23 Services for the Town.

(7) Transfer Station Salaries [70219.00] Ms. Enoch stated that in the past there had been two positions at the transfer station, the main man and an aid. Both positions had been funded for the three days that the transfer station had been open. However the man who had functioned as the aid had been unable to cover one of the designated days. And when the money had not been used it had been removed from the budget. Now it is felt that there needs to be two men at the transfer station. The uncovered day has been covered by a senior working on the Senior Tax Work-Off Abatement Program. This present budget includes two paid people to work on a regular basis at the transfer station. Within this budget there is also a raise for both the main worker and the position of the aid working there. Mr. Carson made a motion to accept the new figure of \$26,275 with Mr. Klein 2nd the motion passed.

Article 25 Stabilization Fund

The Finance Committee approved the appropriation or transfer of funds for the Stabilization Account., Mrs. Spaulding 1st, Mr. Klein 2nd passed unanimously.

Article 26 General Insurance

When the General Insurance Account [90914.11] had been submitted the amount had been \$78,000. Recently the bill was submitted at \$68,000 so a motion to rescind this amount was made by Mr. Carson 1st, Mrs. Spaulding 2nd and passed unanimously. The new amount {\$68000} was proposed with Mr. Carson 1st, Mrs. Fracasso 2nd passed unanimously.

Prudence Spaulding
April 21st 2018

Article 27 Broadband Account

The amount of \$20,000 was requested to pay for legal fees and consultation fees for Broadband. The recommendation to accept this was made at the April 10th meeting.

Article 28. For the purchase of a grader.

The Finance Committee had discussed the purchase of this item during previous meetings. The Highway Superintendent stated that the present grader was old and it was difficult to get parts for it. There is 45 miles of dirt roads in the town and an operable grader is a necessity. He added that the purchase of a grader has been on the capital list for the past two years. And there would be a 7 year warranty with a new grader. At present there is one man that can operate the grader. Should a new grader be bought the Finance Committee recommended that several men on staff should be taught to operate it. Both Mr. Klein and Mrs. Spaulding stated that if it was purchased there should be long term loan to cover the cost of up to 10 years. If so the cost to the town would be about \$35,000 per year. Mr. Klein made a motion to support this article with Mr. Carson 2nd passed with Mrs. Fracasso voting against it.

Article 29 was approved.

Article 30 requesting to transfer \$75,000 from Free Cash to pay for blacktopping the Highway Garage parking lot. This is NOT recommended by the Finance Committee.

Article 31 requesting the transfer of \$10,000 from Free Cash to the Tree Maintenance Projects Account [60294.01]. This was recommended by the Finance Committee Mr. Carson 1st, Mrs. Spaulding 2nd passed unanimously.

Prior to the end of the meeting the Committee returned to discuss the School Budget, and decided to meet for a vote at 5:30PM on May 1st, before the Town budget Meeting where Mrs. Walker and Ms. Shalaby will present the budget to the townspeople Tuesday, May 1st at 6:00PM.

A motion to adjourn at 7:52PM was made by Mr. Klein, Mr. Carson 2nd passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted

Prudence Spaulding, secretary.

Prudence Spaulding
April 21st 2018