

TOWN OF WEBSTER FINANCE COMMITTEE

Michael Finamore, Chairman
Sarah Sansom, Vice Chairman

Town Hall, 350 Main Street, Webster, Massachusetts 01570

MINUTES May 5, 2016

Present: Jim Bazinet, Joe Beresik, Neil Dixon, Mike Finamore, Earl Gabor, Stanley Lenky, Carol Marchand and Sarah Sansom

Absent: Julie Dell'Anna

A Public Hearing was called to order at 7:00 PM on Thursday, May 5, 2016 in the Board of Selectmen's meeting room in the Town Hall by Chairman Mike Finamore. There were a few citizens from the Town present: Chris Everett, Lee Ann Majercik and Bob Whitelaw. Mr. Beresik asked that the minutes reflect that Interim Town Administrator Pamela Leduc was not present at the Public Hearing to present information and/or answer questions.

Budget

On April 7 a proposed FY17 balanced budget was presented to the Finance Committee, but no detail provided. It was noted that none of the Annual Town meeting warrant articles where funds needed to be transferred, had a dollar amount included. Article 5 to raise and appropriate and transfer "a sum sufficient" to operate the South Worcester County Communications Center (SWCCC) had no dollar amount included and no dispatchers were included in the budget. It was noted in FY16 there was detail provided, but none is available this year. In reviewing the budget, 177 Code Enforcement, in FY16 \$52,915 was listed as the salary of the Assistant Town Planner, and in FY17 there are no dollars in that line item, but \$70,269 is listed for the Director of Planning & Economic Development, and \$10,400 for the Conservation Agent. These positions were created by Interim T/A Pamela Leduc which means when the new Town Administrator is hired, he/she will have to live with the budget and positions created.

Under 510 Health Department, again the Health Agent's salary is \$68,262 where there was no position/salary in FY16, a position Ms. Leduc created in the last quarter of the fiscal year. In 122 Board of Selectmen, it is noted the Executive Secretary's salary is \$53,203 but Ms. Leduc has included a \$2,000 stipend for that position. There was a question about the solar farm and dollars received and where they go, and it is believed they go to the General Fund. The previous T/A put these monies into a special reserve account, should anything unexpected hit the budget.

Mr. Whitelaw said he was very disappointed and concerned that nothing has been provided to the voters prior to the town meeting. Chairman Finamore agreed and expressed concern that the Interim T/A, Pamela Leduc, was not available to provide these answers and questioned how the Board of Selectmen allowed her to operate as she has, providing increases to certain town employees and even creating new positions, as she has no contract. Mr. Dixon, as a new member to the Finance Committee, expressed his disappointment and concern, not only as a new member, but as a taxpayer, that no dollar amounts were provided, making it difficult to vote on these articles. In light of all the discussion and concern regarding the lack of information with regard to budget and warrant articles.

Motion was made by Ms. Sansom and seconded, that an e-mail be sent to Interim T/A Leduc asking that dollar amounts for both Special and Town Meeting warrant articles, be provided to the Finance Committee as soon as possible, to allow time for the Finance Committee to review the warrant articles prior to Monday's meeting. Vote was Unanimous.

The subject of beach fees was brought up and the fact it had been approved six years ago, not to charge town residents, senior citizens and veterans, but there is now question about that changing. With regard to Article 18 in the Special Town Meeting warrant, concerning the funding of repairs and repaving BHS grounds, including sidewalks, driveways and entrances, again there was no dollar amount provided. It was stated the cost could be \$25,000 but that was not included in the article. As has been stated in the past, the School Committee does not have to present a budget at town meeting. There was also a question about Article 9 in the Annual Town Meeting warrant regarding the purchase of technology devices for Bartlett High School and Webster Middle School, again with no dollar amount attached. It was said to be approximately \$147,000 but that not confirmed. Mr. Gabor said if they lease the equipment the cost will be lower. If the override does not pass, they will buy the equipment. It was noted that in 2015-16 approximately 50.6% of students in Webster were identified as "high needs" vs. the state average of 43.5%. The percentage of economically disadvantaged students is 46.1% vs. the state average of 27.4%. Mr. Everett stated he was a graduate of SHS and at that time, special education teachers took the students "under their wing" but it doesn't seem to be the case now.

There was also discussion regarding the hiring of two new policemen, with Chairman Finamore noting that if the patrolmen gave up the Quinn Bill (\$25,000) the town would be able to hire two new officers if the override does not pass. He stated he will push Interim T/A Leduc to move the Annual Town Meeting out to June 6.

Ms. Sansom asked if there was anything in the present charter with regard to the Town Administrator creating the budget and the Finance Committee only be allowed to ask questions. Chairman Finamore said according to state law, the Finance Committee can present a budget, but having dual budgets would not be a solution, but create more of a problem. He noted that there is a Charter Review Committee who have just begun to meet so hopefully many questions will be answered. Mr. Dixon said it was his belief that it is the responsibility of the Finance Committee to get the information out to the residents, and without any "personal agendas."

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Finance Committee will be held on Monday, May 9, 2016 at 5:00 PM in the conference room next to the auditorium at BHS prior to the Town meeting. There being no further business, meeting adjourned at 9:00PM.

Christine Jackel, Secretary

Michael Finamore, Chairman – Accepted

