



TOWN OF HOPEDALE

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Finance Committee

January 21st, 2021 Meeting Minutes 7:00 pm, via Zoom Joint FinCom and Selectboard Meeting

Attendees:

Finance Committee

Present:

E. Callahan, D. Comastra, C. Hodgens, D. Madigan, P. Maloney, C. Strapponi

Absent:

D. Piatt

Selectboard:

B. Keyes, L. Arcudi, G. Hazard

Also Present:

Diana Schindler, Town Administrator

Various Town Department Heads

The Selectboard meeting was opened at 7:01 pm by Brian Keyes. Minutes for this portion of the meeting will be produced under separate cover.

The Finance Committee meeting was opened at 7:08 by Chris Hodgens.

Votes:

1. Meeting minutes for January 6, 2021 were presented. A motion was made to accept the minutes; all voted in favor.
2. A motion was made to approve the FY20 Finance Committee Report for the Town's Annual Town Report; all voted in favor.

Events:

1. Diana Schindler spoke to the current budget status:
 - a. An increase in recent applications and receipts for permits are indicators of an upward trend in local building projects and potential increases to tax revenue.
 - b. The Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) will conduct its annual meeting. Governor Baker and Lt. Governor Polito are expected to speak and share expectations for Unrestricted General Government Aid (UGGA).
 - c. A review of indirect costs for the Water & Sewer Department is being conducted.

- d. A heating unit failure occurred in Town Hall this season. Repairs are an unanticipated expense.
 - e. The set-up and use of the Ambulance Fund is being examined. It was initially intended to operate as a Receipts Reserved Fund to cover future costs of purchasing new ambulances; however, it is being utilized as an Enterprise Fund for ongoing expenses. Updates will be provided at a later meeting.
2. Priorities and considerations for the FY22 budget:
 - a. Salaries and Wages
 - i. Brian Keyes requested pay for police officers be a priority for consideration due to high volume of turnover in the department.
 - ii. Carole Mullen spoke to the need to have a salary structure and job description evaluation for unrepresented staff. Diana Schindler indicated a structure has been presented in 2014 and not fully implemented.
 - iii. Health Insurance was discussed as one of the largest budget drivers in town. Meetings with the PEC are ongoing. The option of aligning the health insurance contract and labor contracts to be negotiated in the same year was discussed. Lou Arcudi gave an overview of various factors that impact the cost of health insurance to the town and a change from 80/20 to 75/25 may not deliver the magnitude of change anticipated; he will work on educating the public on this topic in the upcoming months.
 - iv. For purposes of producing a first-pass of budget worksheets Department Heads will be advised to use 1% for salary increases at this time with the understanding that the picture will change as the budget process unfolds through the winter and spring.
 - b. Annual assessment to Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School was also identified as a budget driver and subject of community interest at the July Annual Town Meeting. Patrick Maloney has reached out to the Hopedale representative, Michell Intinarelli, to engage in a discussion. He has also made contact with Senator Ryan Fattman's office and had contact with Keith Christensen, Chief of Staff for Senator Fattman, to discuss the topic at the state level.
 - c. Local Tax Revenue
 - i. A discussion around the diversification of industries to provide tax revenue took place.
 - ii. The updating and potential revision of zoning laws was raised; local codes and bylaw changes are in need of documentation for easy reference to support consideration for locations of business.
 - iii. The implementation of a burnable bulk fee is behind schedule. Diana Schindler anticipates an April 1st date. It is being determined who/which department will conduct the billing and collections.
3. The Finance Committee intends to meet twice per month until the spring Annual Town Meeting. Future meeting dates and times will be determined at each meeting.

The Selectboard adjourned their meeting at 8:21 pm.

The next Finance Committee meeting will take place February 3, 2021 at 6:00 pm.

The Finance Committee Chair called the meeting to Adjournment at 8:46 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth S. Callahan

Recording Secretary
Hopedale Finance Committee