



TOWN OF HOPEDALE

78 Hopedale Street - P.O. Box 7
Hopedale, Massachusetts 01747

Tel: 508-634-2203 Fax: 508-634-2200

Finance Committee

March 30, 2022, Meeting Minutes 7:00 pm, via Zoom

Attendees:

Present:

E. Callahan, D. Comastra, C. Hodgens, I. Michelson, C. Strapponi, K. Wilson

Absent:

D. Madigan, P. Maloney

The Finance Committee meeting was opened at 7:03 pm by Chris Hodgens.

Votes:

1. The minutes of March 23, 2022 were presented. All voted in favor with Ken Wilson abstaining due to absence.
2. The minutes of March 24, 2022 were presented. All voted in favor.

Events:

1. FY23 Budget Workbook Review

The Finance Committee took its first look at the workbook shared by Diana Schindler.

- a. Implemented "known quantities": liability insurance premiums, Worcester County Retirement contributions, and health insurance premiums.
- b. Uncontrollable costs: Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB). Currently with the Coalition bargaining, retirees have 10% of the vote on these benefits. Hopedale's benefits are stronger than other communities. The health insurance is bargained at a time inconsistent with all the town's collective bargaining agreements (CBA). Selectwoman Glenda Hazard was present for the meeting and indicated addressing this matter is a high priority. Also mentioned were stipends that are a part of a CBA. Examining an entire compensation package in Hopedale must be considered when comparing to pay and benefits in other communities.
- c. Resulting impacts to the initial budget document include:
 - i. Increasing the FY22 levy capacity by the standard 2.5% equals \$420,186.66 plus new growth estimated at \$200,000 for a total of \$620,186.66.
 - ii. With current requests and known impacts implemented into the spreadsheet the result is \$562,000 over the new levy capacity for FY23.
 - iii. To include capital requests and new hires requested by departments is \$1,372,730.07 over the levy capacity for FY23.

2. Stipends

The Committee discussed bringing back stipends, an impact of ~\$40,000. Diana Schindler indicated that her research on past stipend amounts for the various boards did not have a discernible methodology to them, i.e., number of members, frequency of meetings, elected vs. appointed, etc. Ken Wilson and Ian Michelson volunteered to work with Diana on researching the structure followed by other towns in preparation for a discussion around policy of establishment of stipends going forward.

3. Proposed Human Capital Additions

As noted in a previous meeting, Diana Schindler indicated any new hires should be funded through an intentional override for maximum transparency vs. building into the current budget. It was noted the impact of health insurance, Medicare tax and worker's compensation burdens for new staff additions were not factored into the budget workbook shared this evening. She proposed that the most necessary adds to staff be identified indicating a more urgent need for administrative support in the areas of Zoning, Planning and Building. She shared her perspective that although a direct correlation is not apparent, having effective support in this area could contribute to avoidance of litigation.

4. Future Department Meetings

The Finance Committee will continue meeting with department heads to offer an opportunity to discuss their budget proposals in detail. Diana suggested having the Highway and Parks Departments meet on the same evening. The Committee is interested in having a detailed discussion with the Board of Health as the Town's contract for trash and recycling services is up for renewal this year. The option of implementing a fee in relation to trash and recycling was raised. Diana Schindler indicated the vendor is proposing changing the process by providing bins to participating residents for consistency and opportunity to expedite the routes. More will be discussed at an upcoming meeting.

5. Debt Retirement/Debt Service

The Committee discussed the need for policy when debt service is retired as the outstanding amount is paid down (recognize as revenue or build capacity for future capital purchases). This will be discussed more in a future meeting. It was noted there are some capital items included in the Police Department budget and should be re-examined.

6. Assigned Tasks

- a. The Committee will review the workbook shared tonight for formula validation
- b. Ian Michelson and Ken Wilson will work with Diana Schindler on stipend policy
- c. Chris Hodgins will work with Diana Schindler on the evolution of the workbook and determine appropriate nomenclature for clarity of revisions

The Chair called the meeting to Adjournment at 8:38pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth S. Callahan

Recording Secretary
Hopedale Finance Committee