

Town of Freetown Finance Committee

Minutes of Meeting Held on Wednesday, October 4, 2023
Zoom and at the Freetown Council on Aging Multipurpose Senior Center,
227 Chace Road, East Freetown

Present: Chairman Margaret M. French, Robert H. Alderson, Kara Lees, Kent Wilkins, Katie L. Calheta (remotely), Emily A. Dors (remotely)

Absent: George L. Grunwald

The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm. Ms. Calheta and Ms. Dors are appearing remotely, with the rest of the Committee in person; as this meeting is utilizing remote participation, all votes will be taken by roll call. The meeting was recorded by Recordings Clerk Timm McIntosh.

Acceptance of Minutes of Meeting on September 25, 2023

Motion to approve, made by Mr. Alderson, seconded by Mr. Wilkins, passes five votes to none after a roll call vote, with Ms. Dors abstaining.

Discuss and vote on recommendations on remainder of warrant articles for October 23, 2023 Special Town Meeting

▪ **Article regarding amending Article 3, Section 3.5 of the Town's general by-laws**

Ms. French says this will appear as Article 8 on the final version of the warrant. Ms. Dors says she has no issues with this article. Mr. Alderson says a time frame of a year makes more sense, not the 30 days named in the article. Ms. French says it is not less than 30 days, it is up to the permit granting authority's discretion. Mr. Alderson would prefer something in writing, noting that sometimes things happen and people fall on hard times and need a permit of some sort, and there should be a leeway. Ms. Dors doesn't believe the timeframe really applies to the Finance Committee, changing that should be something that is brought up at Town Meeting.

Ms. French repeats that the article allows for some leeway, as it speaks to good faith efforts by the taxpayer, and it allows the permit granting authority the ability to deny or grant. Mr. Alderson says that is arbitrary. Ms. Calheta agrees with Mr. Alderson, and thinks everything should be clearly defined. She questions what process would be used to determine whether or not the permit is granted. Mr. Alderson thinks the article needs work, that someone needs to do a much better job with it, citing the need for clarification and upgrades to definitions within the article. Ms. Calheta asks if the Finance Committee can take no position; Ms. French believes it to be a financial article, so it is the Finance Committee's job to take a position. She says if the Finance Committee votes to not recommend, she can defend it using Mr. Alderson's reasoning if the Committee chooses.

Ms. French reads out the article, noting the Tax Collector will be annually submitting a list of anyone who owes money. Mr. Alderson asks if that is general tax payers or businesses; Ms. French reads from the article that it is all people and corporations. Mr. Alderson says that list is already done, asking what is new in this article. He notes he is more confused now that the article has been read aloud. He reiterates his belief that 30 days is too short, noting that no matter the timeframe, the Town will collect the tax with interest. He asks when the articles will be approved; Ms. French says the articles have already been approved, the warrant is being finalized tomorrow morning and posted by the end of the week. Mr. Alderson would like to speak to the Board of Selectmen on this article; Ms. French says the Committee can, but a vote is needed tonight.

Motion to take no position on the article, made by Mr. Alderson and seconded by Mr. Wilkins, passes unanimously after a roll call vote.

▪ **Article regarding an increase in funding in the Council on Aging personnel budget**

Ms. French says this will be Article 15 on the final warrant. She says a letter from the COA Director was distributed to the Finance Committee, which most of the Committee has seen. Mr. Wilkins says he hasn't seen the letter, but he spoke to the COA staff and learned that they simply need more staff hours, adding that he also confirmed they are open half-days on Fridays. Mr. Alderson says he read the letter and understands that, and believes this is a byproduct of the pods. Mr. Wilkins doesn't think it's directly related, just a part-time employee

being moved to full-time status. Mr. Alderson says the Council on Aging is not creating more seniors and isn't adding any more services with this funding. Ms. Dors thinks this is a reasonable request from the COA if they cannot keep up with the existing programs or expand the programs they want to expand, and that it is consistent with their previous requests. Mr. Alderson says this only makes sense for part-time workers wanting to go full time. Ms. French believes when the pods are installed, the COA will be busier.

Mr. Alderson asks if this passes and the part-time worker goes full-time, would the COA then be seeking a replacement part-time worker. Ms. French says she does not believe they will be asking that right now, but does not know about the Fiscal Year 2025 budget. Ms. Lees asks if the money in this article covers all fringe benefits; Ms. French says yes, the \$10,000 would be all-inclusive. Mr. Alderson asks if this would be a permanent addition to the COA budget; Ms. French says she believes it will. Ms. Lees notes that Massachusetts has an aging population, and she supports this article.

Motion to recommend the article, made by Mr. Alderson and seconded by Mr. Wilkins, passes unanimously after a roll call vote.

- **Article regarding authorization of the Board of Assessors to enter into two PILOT Agreements**

Ms. French explains this article originally authorized the Board of Assessors to enter into a PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) agreement with one solar project, off Dr. Braley Road, but a second project, off Nick Drive has been added. She says she was just alerted this morning. She notes the Committee previously recommended the article.

Motion to recommend the article with 2 PILOT agreements, made by Mr. Alderson and seconded by Ms. Lees, passes unanimously after a roll call vote.

- **Articles regarding the funding of the Stabilization Fund and the Capital Stabilization Fund**

Ms. French says she's learned there is a hitch with the fire station project which the Finance Committee may want to consider before making a recommendation on Capital Stabilization. The project's budget is now \$1.2M more than anticipated. Mr. Alderson asks if there's been a meeting of the Fire Station Building Committee that he missed; Ms. French does not believe there was. Mr. Alderson notes Town Administrator Deborah Pettey insisted the previous project number was a hard ceiling, asking how it's now gone up \$1.2M. Ms. French says she does not know the specifics, but knows cuts have been made and it's still \$1.2M higher. Mr. Alderson says material costs are going down, so it's not related to that.

Ms. French says the Town earned \$400,000-500,000 in interest from the stabilization funds in the last year, which is a sizeable chunk of the \$3.2M free cash figure. If everything on the warrant passes, \$1.2M in free cash would be remaining. As written, the warrant has \$1M going to Capital Stabilization and \$200,000 to Stabilization.

Mr. Alderson remains surprised at the new Fire Station number, which he estimates is now a \$4.1M project. He describes the increase as shocking. Ms. Lees asks when the original \$2.9M figure was decided; Ms. French says last year. Mr. Alderson speaks to the need for an owner's project manager and union workers causing costs to blow up, but that \$2.9M was the number. Ms. French reminds the Committee that the Fire Station is not before the Committee at this time, she brought it up because it may change the thinking on Capital Stabilization. Mr. Alderson thinks the Town should wait until June for Capital Stabilization, putting \$200,000 in Stabilization, and leaving the remaining \$1M in free cash.

Motion to recommend funding the Stabilization Fund at \$100,000, made by Mr. Alderson and seconded by Mr. Wilkins, passes unanimously after a roll call vote.

Motion to recommend not funding the Capital Stabilization fund, made by Ms. Lees and seconded by Mr. Alderson, passed unanimously after a roll call vote.

Determine Finance Committee Representative to the By-Law Review Committee

When asked about the meeting schedule, Mr. McIntosh informs the Committee that the By-Law Review Committee meets on the third Thursday of each month at 4:30. Ms. Dors says she would be available at that time.

Motion to appoint Emily Anne Dors to the By-Law Review Committee, made by Mr. Alderson and seconded by Mr. Wilkins, passes unanimously after a roll call vote.

Before adjourning, Mr. Alderson wants to discuss the insurance figures received from Town Administration. The fleet schedule he's received lists 74 pieces being insured, including a 1974 boat trailer for the fire department, with a 1970 motor insured separately. He also notes that mileage taken into account is one thing, but it does not taken into account hard working hours on some of these vehicles, fire equipment specifically. On the motor, he does not understand why it is separate, and given it's age, it should just be scrap at this point. He also questions the need for a ladder truck the Town received from Dartmouth, though he isn't sure it is in service any longer, considering the tallest building in town is only two stories. Ms. French says it is her understanding that the Administration office goes through the list annually with the department heads, ensuring everything is accurate and still in use. Mr. Alderson believed it is good to check lists like this out from time to time, because there can be oddities.

Mr. Alderson asks Ms. French to speak to someone about the ambiguity Article 8; Ms. French will do that and report back to Mr. Alderson. Mr. Alderson says he will talk to Mrs. Souza in the Administration office about the motor and his insurance concerns.

At 6:40pm, motion to adjourn, made by Mr. Alderson and seconded by Mr. Wilkins, passes unanimously after a roll call vote.

Respectfully submitted by:



Timothy McIntosh, Recordings Clerk

List of Documents Used by the Finance Committee for this meeting

- Draft minutes of meeting on September 25, 2023
- Letter from Council on Aging Director Rebecca Frias, dated September 28, 2023
- Fiscal Year 2024 Special Property Coverage list for Town of Freetown, compiled by MIIA Property and Casualty Group, Inc.
- Town of Freetown Auto Fleet Schedule, compiled by MIIA Property and Casualty Group, Inc.
- Schedule of Locations for Town of Freetown, compiled by MIIA Property and Casualty Group, Inc.
- List of lease agreements

