



TOWN OF FREETOWN
Finance Committee
3 North Main Street/P.O. Box 438

Assonet, MA 02702-0438

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Minutes of

MEETING: 5:30 PM Thursday May 13, 2021

Freetown Police Station, 15 Memorial Dr, E. Freetown

Call to order 5:34 PM

Present – Gary Martin - chair, Katie Calheta, Margaret French, Emily-Anne Dors, Kent Wilkins, Christine Shea-Dupras.

Absent – Bob Alderson

Guest –Town Accountant Kimberly Fales Transfers

Transfers

Motion by Kent, seconded by Emily-Anne to approve the transfer of \$780 from Town Accountant In-state Travel to Town Accountant Wages – Assistant Accountant.
Approved unanimously. Yes: Gary, Katie, Margaret, Emily-Anne, Kent, Christine.

Motion by Margaret, seconded by Kent, to approve the transfer of \$5400 from Health Inspector Wages to Building Clerical. Approved unanimously. Yes: Gary, Katie, Margaret, Emily-Anne, Kent, Christine.

Motion by Christine, seconded by Katie, to approve the transfer of \$1000 from Highway Department Acct. 001.4.420.5110.9030.30.00 to Highway Department Acct. 001.4.420.5110.9030.31.00. Approved unanimously. Yes: Gary, Katie, Margaret, Emily-Anne, Kent, Christine.

Motion by Emily-Anne, seconded by Kent, to approve the transfer of \$500 from Highway Department Acct. 001.4.420.5110.9030.30.00 to Highway Department Acct. 001.4.420.5110.9030.31.00. Approved unanimously. Yes: Gary, Katie, Margaret, Emily-Anne, Kent, Christine.

Motion by Christine, seconded by Kent, to approve the transfer of \$2732.51 from Town Clerk- Personnel to Town Clerk-Overtime. Approved unanimously. Yes: Gary, Katie, Margaret, Emily- Anne, Kent, Christine.

Special Town Meeting

The Warrant for the Special Town Meeting on June 7, 2021 was discussed. Kim explained that Article 1 was necessary in order to pay water/sewer bills from Fall River from prior fiscal years that were misplaced after not having been sent by Fall River in a timely fashion. Kim provided the missing dollar amount, \$1500, for Article 4, regarding cemetery tree maintenance. Finally, Kim said that if Articles 2 and 4 were to be approved, there would be \$38,781 to put into Capital Stabilization in Article 5. If either were to fail, the amount in Article 5 would be increased accordingly.

Motion by Kent, seconded by Margaret, to recommend Articles 1, 2, 4, and 5, and to make no recommendation on Article 3 because it is not financial. Approved unanimously. Yes: Gary, Katie, Margaret, Emily-Anne, Kent, Christine.

Annual Town Meeting

The Warrant for the Annual Town Meeting on June 7, 2021 was discussed. Kent asked about salary requests in Article 2. Departments were asked to level fund. Some did and some didn't. There were questions about Article 7, since the petitioners provided no explanation of the need for a bucket truck. Kim said that the Highway Surveyor intends to speak about it at the Town Meeting and opposes the purchase of a bucket truck. The Finance Committee decided not to recommend it because the petitioners provided no explanation of why it was needed, but expressed some openness to hearing their justification at the Town Meeting. There was discussion of Article 9, on installing a street light. Kim says we have the fixture and the bulb and the town doesn't do the installation, so there would be no financial impact. Article 12 would have a cost for the additional stipends, but not in the upcoming fiscal year. Article 17 is a zoning change, so it is not financial. Kim indicated that Articles 10, 11, and 13 would have little impact on revenue.

Motion by Katie, seconded by Christine, to not recommend Article 7. Approved unanimously. Yes: Gary, Katie, Margaret, Emily-Anne, Kent, Christine.

Motion by Christine, seconded by Kent, to make no recommendation on Article 9 because it is not financial. Approved unanimously. Yes: Gary, Katie, Margaret, Emily-Anne, Kent, Christine.

Motion by Christine, seconded by Katie, to make no recommendation on Article 12 because it is not financial. Approved unanimously. Yes: Gary, Katie, Margaret, Emily-Anne, Kent, Christine.

Motion by Christine, seconded by Emily-Anne, to make no recommendation on Article 17 because it is not financial. Approved unanimously. Yes: Gary, Katie, Margaret, Emily-Anne, Kent, Christine.

Motion by Kent, seconded by Katie, to recommend all Articles except 7, 9, 12, and 17. Approved unanimously. Yes: Gary, Katie, Margaret, Emily-Anne, Kent, Christine.

Omnibus Budget Fiscal Year 2022

Gary read through the list of budget departments/categories and compiled a list of those about which committee members had questions or concerns. We then discussed those in order and asked Kim about them. We reached consensus through discussion on each, whether to recommend the requested amount or to recommend a different amount, and then voted to approve our recommendations as a complete package.

210 Police. After discussing the Chief's summary at the May 4, 2021 joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee of the request and justifications for it, we agreed to recommend the department request.

215 Communications. We agreed that the request for another full-time dispatcher at \$41,000 was justified and agreed to recommend the department request.

241 Building. The Building Commissioner requested a \$5000 increase in his salary, contrary to guidance from the Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator to level fund positions not subject to contractual increases. The BOS intends to give uniform percentage increases to such employees for the fall Town Meeting. We recommend decreasing the Building Personnel budget request by \$5000.

304 Bristol Plymouth Vocational School Assessment. We asked Kim for some clarification on this. The number of students won't be known until October, so this is just a guess. The assessment per student is high because it includes funding for a major capital project at the school. We agreed to recommend the estimated amount.

420 Highways and Streets. We reviewed the details of the two new positions, noting that one is restoring a position that was temporarily eliminated last year. We agreed to recommend the department request.

423 Snow and Ice Removal. We discussed the pros and cons of increasing the budgeted amount from \$100,000 to \$150,000. Neither amount comes close to the true cost in most years. There is some small, rarely applicable advantage to keeping the amount artificially low, but in practice, having a larger budget allows for stockpiling enough salt to handle several storms and paying plow drivers without having to go to the Board of Selectmen for approval to overspend the budget. We agreed to recommend raising the budget to \$150,000.

433 Trash Collection and Disposal. The Board of Selectmen, by a 2-1 vote, awarded a new 3- year contract to Borges Brothers, whose bid was \$232,425 higher than that of Republic Services. Though we take no position on which company would better serve the town, we don't believe that the difference between the two companies is worth paying an extra quarter of a million dollars for. The difference in the first year is \$67,275. In addition, Republic's fee per ton of recyclables is known; Borges would require us to contract with a 3rd party at an unknown cost that would probably be higher. We decided

to recommend \$622,125. This is a reduction of \$47,000 from the requested amount, but \$20,275 above what would be required to fund awarding the contract to Republic. Our hope is that the Board of Selectmen will negotiate with Borges, hoping to get them down to an amount that is more competitive with Republic. If such an effort is successful, the premium we would be paying for using a local vendor with potentially better service would not be exorbitant. If it is unsuccessful, the contract could be awarded to Republic.

434 Transfer Station. We reviewed the requested changes in staffing and hours and agreed to recommend the department request.

510 Health Inspection Services. Kim suggested reviewing the \$4305 added for the clerk position. The department wants to make the clerk full time, possibly at a higher rate, and possibly change the position. The department is in flux and without a full-time Health Agent. The \$4000 request for filing equipment is no longer needed because of a recent file system that was added. There was discussion about the request for \$15,000 for property improvements at the town beach, boat ramp, and parks. We feel that it properly should be in the budget of Public Building and Property Maintenance. We agreed to recommend removing the \$4305 and the \$4000, and moving the \$15,000 to Public Building and Property Maintenance.

541 Council on Aging. There were questions regarding hiring someone to train a new clerk. Many on the Committee felt that training a new employee is part of the duties of the continuing employees and that a four-month training period was excessive. In any case, the rest of the budget request has plenty of money to cover this already. The salary for the Senior Clerk, earning \$20.10/hr plus retirement incentives, is budgeted for the full year, though she is retiring mid-year. The replacement would be earning \$17.00/hr. In addition, the request of van drivers is over \$5000 higher than is typically spent. We recommend reducing the department request by \$4228.80.

931 Capital Equipment. Kent proposes switching from leasing to buying police cars. The consensus was that this should be discussed before the budget process gets started next year. There was some discussion about the lease of a new ambulance. We recommend all of the requests.

932 Capital Building & Other Property Improvements. We reviewed the items requested and recommend them all.

Summary of the Finance Committee's changes to the department requests:

192 Public Building & Property Maintenance: Increase 40-Expenses Total by \$15,000 from \$294,000 to \$309,999.

241 Building: Reduce 30-Personnel Total by \$5000 from \$122,820 to \$117,820.

433 Trash Collection and Disposal: Reduce 40-Expenses Total by \$47,000 from \$669,125 to \$622,125.

510 Health Inspection Services: Reduce 30-Personnel Total by \$4305 from \$121,559.65 to \$117,254.65. Reduce 40-Expenses Total by \$19,000 from \$30,945 to \$11,945.

541 Council on Aging: Reduce 30-Personnel Total by \$4428.80 from \$149,575.80 to \$145,147.00.

Motion by Katie, seconded by Kent to recommend the Omnibus Budget as proposed by the departments with changes as presented above. Approved unanimously. Yes: Gary, Katie, Margaret, Emily-Anne, Kent, Christine.

Adjournment

Motion by Margaret, seconded by Christine, to adjourn at 8:00 pm. Approved unanimously. Yes: Gary, Katie, Margaret, Emily-Anne, Kent, Christine.

Minutes prepared by Gary Martin