



TOWN OF FREETOWN
Finance Committee
3 North Main Street/P.O. Box 438
Assonet, MA 02702-0438
PHONE: 508-644-2201; FAX: 508-644-3342



Minutes of

MEETING: 5:30 PM Wednesday February 24, 2021

Joint with the Town Meeting Study Group

Virtual Meeting. A recording of this meeting is posted on the town website and the Town of Freetown YouTube Channel

Call to order 5:41 PM

Present – Gary Martin - chair, Katie Calheta, Craig Rosen, Bob Alderson, Kent Wilkins, Christine Shea-Dupras.

Absent – Carol Woldorf.

Mike McCue: Should the role of the Finance Committee be limited to financial matters (By-Laws Article 2.7) or should it encompass all matters before Town Meeting (By-Laws Article 4.3)?

Gary suggests allowing the Finance Committee broad latitude in interpreting what articles have financial impact.

Paul Lubin would like the Finance Committee to make recommendations on every article.

Christine would want the Finance Committee to recommend only on articles affecting the current and next fiscal year. Future financial impacts are not known.

Bob: almost everything has a financial impact and the Finance Committee should make recommendations on everything.

Bob asks who is on the study committee and who are the members.

Mike says it was created at the October 2020 Town Meeting and he lists the members.

Bob asks what the committee's role is.

Mike explains that it is to look at by-laws that impact Town Meeting and suggest changes in the form of articles at Town Meetings.

Bob says the Finance Committee considers every article, but on some articles we make no recommendation if we are not knowledgeable about the issues.

Katie only feels comfortable making recommendations on financial articles.

Christine asks if we recommend on non-financial articles, are we still a finance committee?

Bob says somebody should look at every article.

More confusion ensues about what the by-laws say and there are various attempts to find them, read them, and understand them.

Gary suggests that the by-laws don't contradict each other.

Mike suggests that the Finance Committee discuss this on its own and revisit it at the next joint meeting.

Mike: What should the time frame be for the budget process?

Bob prefers to keep the Feb.1 deadline for budget submissions.

Trevor Matthews and Mike point out that the Feb. 1 deadline dates from when Town Meeting was in March. Now it's in June.

Bob asks who set the dates in 2021.

The announcement came from the Town Administrator, but others may or may not have had a role in selecting the dates.

Mike and Cheryl Estrella point out that starting the process before the Town Election can cause much wasted work if the election changes the make-up of the Finance Committee.

Kent reinforces that point and suggests April 1 for the budget deadline.

Christine describes the process in Foxboro and Wrentham, which involves meeting with every department head over a three-month period.

Bob says that we sometimes did that and sometimes met just with heads of larger departments and ones where we had specific questions.

Mike suggests that the Finance Committee discuss this on its own prior to the next joint meeting.

Mike: Who should prepare the budget: Finance Committee or Town Administrator?

Bob, Gary, Craig, and Katie agree that it should be the Town Administrator. There were no dissenting opinions voiced.

Mike: Should the Finance Committee be 5 or 7 members? Should they be elected or appointed?

Bob: Seven is a good number if we can get 7.

Cheryl: That's the problem.

Kent: When there are vacancies, it's harder to get a quorum. Seven is better to spread the responsibility.

Bob: The public can attend meetings if interested.

Kent: That's not so true with Zoom meetings.

Mike: Different boards and committees have handled this differently.

Mike: Would it be easier to fill the seats if it were appointed?

Bob: Who would appoint?

Mike: The study group agreed that it should not be the selectmen.

Cheryl asks Mike if he forwarded to Gary a study of how the Finance Committees are chosen in other towns and how big it is.

Trevor: Consider hybrid, with vacancies filled by appointment

Trevor: Most towns of similar size have appointed Finance Committees.

Cheryl: The trend is toward appointing.

Mike: Would prefer elected.

Bob: Offer tax credit to encourage people to run.

Kent: Would discriminate against renters.

Bob: Be cautious about changing things.

Mike suggests that the Finance Committee discuss this on its own.

Mike asks when we want to continue the discussion. Gary suggests that the Finance Committee discuss these soon while they are fresh in our minds. We agree to meet on Thursday, March 4. Paul suggests setting a date for the next joint meeting. Mike suggests deciding on that at their next meeting, and shooting for the last two weeks of March.

Motion to adjourn: Bob. Second: Craig. Approved unanimously. Yes: Gary, Christine, Katie, Bob, Craig, Kent.

Meeting adjourned at 6:58 pm.

Minutes prepared by Gary Martin