

Freetown Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes

Monday, April 22, 2021 – 5:30pm
Police Station Community Room
15 Memorial Drive
East Freetown, MA

5:30pm Call to Order

Selectmen Matthews called the meeting to order at 5:34pm. Selectmen Zager, Town Administrator Peter Jankowski, Executive Assistant Lu-Ann Souza, Department Heads, Mike McCue Assistant Assessor, Jessica Thomas Treasurer, Police Chief Carlton Abbott, , C. Nils McKay Planning, Kimberly Fales Town Accountant, Cheryl Estrella Town Clerk, Gary Silvia Fire Chief, Jeff Chandler Building Commissioner, Timm McIntosh, Finance Committee members Gary Martin, Robert Alderson, Katie Calheta, Margaret French, Emily Anne Dors, Christine Dupras, Christine Shea Dupras and Kent Wilkins were also present.

Gary Martin called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 5:34pm.

Selectmen Matthews noted how things will flow for the evening.

Board of Selectmen

Discussion/possible action on the following topics:

1. Discussion with Finance Committee regarding the FY22 Budget

Peter Jankowski let everyone know that the presenter will go to the table at the from the room to do their presentation. The process will be Department Heads will present the highlights of their budgets, Finance Committee and Selectmen will ask questions and Department Head can answer the questions.

Budgets presented:

Moderator – presented by Mike McCue.

Assessors – presented by Mike McCue. Mr. McCue noted there were substantial decreases this year. The Assessor's looking to increase from \$4,192 to \$5,000 a year. The Assistant Assessor line will drop as Mr. McCue works less hours (30/week) than his predecessor. They are looking to add a Senior Clerk position. Consultant line has dropped as Mr. McCue could initially not do

but can do at this time, reducing prices. Phones have reduced from four lines to one hence another drop.

Robert Alderson asked what will the Assessors be doing to warrant the extra amount in their stipend? They will take on following up on surveys sent to new homeowners which is currently not done. This would be done in person which will help get the surveys done.

Selectmen Matthews – when was the last time this stipend was last adjusted. Mr. McCue said not recently and said it was between 3-5 years.

Highway Dept – presented by Mike McCue. Expense budget did not change at all. Personnel side of budget the longevity decreased due to change of personnel, and Mr. McCue's moved to Assessors. Clerical cut in half as clerk. Increase for contractual increase, an employee is reaching another step and the bulk of the increase is for two additional employees to replace truck driver who was let go in FY20, but the Highway Dept needs this position filled. The other is a laborer position as the Highway Dept is understaffed. Mr. Alderson asked why Mr. McCue is still working at the Highway Dept. Mr. McCue noted he is doing 10 hours/week doing Payroll and Bookkeeping for Highway Dept. Mr. Alderson asked is not he is working full time at Town Hall. Mr. McCue noted that he works 30 hours at Town Hall and 10 at Highway with no structural changes planned. Mr. Macomber noted he does procurement, administration, and Chapter 90 paperwork. If Mr. McCue's hours/responsibilities increase in Assessor's office a Clerk would need to be hired for Highway. Mr. Macomber stated that two additional employees would be optimal. Finance Committee asked. How much overtime? Mr. Macomber said it is minimal and comes in around about \$500 a year not including snow and ice. Mr. Jankowski noted they are budgeted \$500 and \$250-\$300. Total \$222,000 for snow and ice this year. Town Accountant, Kimberely Fales noted this was more than spent last year. Mr. Macomber noted we had five plowable events this year.

Kent Wilkins asked how many projects do you have to farm out? Mr. Macomber said we do all small projects in house. He noted that having the extra employees would help defray these costs. He did note outsourcing for larger projects like sidewalks are best to be done by professionals as if we are working on that project nothing else is getting done.

Cemetery – presented by Mike McCue. Part time work in cemetery is a seasonal bylaw employee the Board of Selectmen have discretion on setting pay rate. This position is paying minimum wage in January an increase of \$1 was agreed upon. The person that the increase was made for has left so if the Selectmen want to go back to minimum wage which would be a cost savings of \$500. Mr. Jankowski noted this individual is young and new so that may be a good idea. Selectmen Zager noted it is hard to find a minimum wage employee, so he did not

have an issue with it being \$1 higher. Mr. Alderson asked how much they work. Mr. McCue said they are up to 19 hours a week doing the general landscaping of the property in the cemetery. Kent Wilkins asked is it just the Assonet Burial Ground? Mr. McCue said yes it takes awhile as you cannot use power mower and it has a lot of weed whacking which adds up the hours. The increase in the payroll line considers that the minimum wage will increase again in January. Selectmen Zager asked if they pick up leaves etc. in the fall. Mr. McCue said they do a fall and spring cleanup. Mr. McCue noted when they had a dry spell and did not need to mow as much, they had the sexton clean headstones.

Treasurer presented by Jessica Thomas. Ms. Thomas noted that payroll is flat but her and her two employees' contracts are up for negotiation. increase in education stipend is for her certifications. Selectmen Zager asked when she will be taking the test. Ms. Thomas noted that due to COVID it is unclear if the test will be available this August and the test is once a year. \$500 from repairs and maintenance and put into payroll processing which covers timeclock and payroll system. Increase in postage as post office has increased fees. Mr. Jankowski noted there is a discussion in removing the timeclock what would the saving be from that. Ms. Thomas said it is under \$100 month with a \$150/year fee. In state travel would be for the training fee if she is able to attend this year.

Tax Title presented by Jessica Thomas. Ms. Thomas did not ask for any extra monies and zeroed out mailings and moved it advertising as that is going up. She noted she uses all of this budget each year and most of it we make back from the sales of the property or owner makes payment.

Debt presented by Jessica Thomas. Ms. Thomas total is \$660,000 (interest and principal) in addition the New Police Station principal payment if \$500,000, interest is 2 payments of \$45,000 each totaling \$90,000. With interest going down each year.

Selectmen Matthews asked how much longer we have for the Freetown Elementary School. Kim Fales believes it is three more years.

Long Term Debt – presented by Jessica Thomas.

SRPEDD – presented by Jessica Thomas. This bill is sent each year and is based on population

County Retirement/Union Pension – presented by Jessica Thomas. County Retirement is a fixed amount and cannot be changed. The LIUNA Pension is based on hours worked by retiree and goes up yearly. Mr. Jankowski asked if the hours went down last year due to COVID19. Ms. Thomas was unsure of why. Kim Fales noted this was half the year.

Unemployment Benefits – presented by Jessica Thomas. We generally do not lay people off so we do not have to pay a lot here. The budget was increased last year due to COVID. This year we are suggesting setting at \$15,000. Selectmen Matthews noted \$20,000 seems high as we do not use it so going to \$15,000 would be good. Mr. Alderson thinks we should leave it at \$20,000 as a buffer as if it is not used it goes back to the general fund and if needed it is already allocated. Kim Fales noted that amount would not cover one employee at the highest rate. It was agreed to leave it at \$20,000.

Health Insurance – presented by Jessica Thomas. This year we will have one month where we do not pay at all so this year the health insurance went down. We could fully fund it and use money for something else. Mr. Jankowski asked if we add employees is that figured in. Ms. Thomas said that had been figured in. Gary Martin asked the premium holiday is a rare thing, right? Ms. Thomas noted there was one last year and they are doing another one this year. Mr. Martin said this is not something we can count on and in the future, we are going to think this is a big increase and we may want to leave the budget high, so we do not see a large jump in the future. Selectmen Matthews asked are you suggesting \$1.68 (level funding from last year) all were fine with this. Health insurance stipends went down (people who do not take health insurance). Mr. Alderson asked how many people get this stipend. Ms. Thomas noted the stipend is \$100/month and about 12 people take this stipend at this point. Mr. Alderson asked why do we pay them for not taking insurance? Selectmen Matthews and Selectmen Zager noted it is an employment benefit. Mr. Jankowski said a stipend is \$1200 vs. three to four times the cost to the Town for providing Town Health Insurance. Selectmen Matthews said we are giving them an incentive to go on their spouses plan and saves the Town thousands of dollars. Kim Fales noted it is in the collective bargaining agreement.

Life Insurance – presented by Jessica Thomas. Basic plan is \$5,000 with employee pays .44 cents/month for it. When they retire it is a \$2,000 life insurance policy?

Medicare – presented by Jessica Thomas. This is based on payroll.

Elections – presented by Cheryl Estrella. Yearly this fluctuates based on number of elections. For 2022 only have annual Town Election. Election worker wages went down a bit. Maintenance contract for machines is \$1,200/year. Postage is level funded, she noted early voting and mail in voting has been approved by the state, so we need to fund for doing mail voting for all qualified residents. Selectmen Matthews asked if this number would go up this year. Ms. Estrella said she believes this number will go up. Election other supplies bumped up to \$2,500 from \$0 as currently the supplies we have for elections are very old, totes with wheels or zippers broken, each one is about \$165 each. The ballot boxes that lock up are 40 years old and need to be replaced. Mr. Jankowski asked if they make the same kind. Ms.

Estrella said they do but she is looking for a better product. Election's food was added as a line item as the workers are given coffee and pastries and the previous Town Clerk baked these and paid for them out of her own salary. Ms. Estrella is asking this cost (\$150/election) is covered with this budget item. Finance Committee asked what is your new figure? The new total is \$26,791.75

Registration/Registrars presented by Cheryl Estrella. The Town Clerk is entitled to a stipend based on the number of registered voters of \$300. Salaries and wages kept the same. Printing has been severely underfunded for years. Could not but their own paper or have color printer. This money is for 2 mailings, street list book and other related printed items. Office supplies increased to \$1,000 which was an increase of \$550 will allow them to buy registrar stamps, own paper etc.

Town Clerk – overall budget decreased. Asked for a Town Clerk salary increase which would be approved by voters at Annual Town Meeting. She noted the public records requests are ample and can be a full-time job. We are third from the bottom on salary compared to other Towns. How many people are in the other Towns, somerset 2 and 1/2 Lakeville 2 and 1/2, Rochester part time clerk, it varies from Town to Town. Would like to make current Clerk to be promoted to Assistant Town Clerk at new fiscal year. Longevity will no longer be needed. Educational incentive MGL said once Town Clerk has run in 2 elections and been Town Clerk for 5 years will get \$5,000 stipend. She is not eligible for this currently. Dog license program stayed the same. Town Clerk office supplies has been underfunded for many years and is using own personal office supplies from home to get office up and going. Looking into getting software (QuickBooks) to track incoming revenue, currently doing on paper. In state travel going up as in person meetings will begin in June. Dues and memberships increased by \$20. Kent Wilkins asked for verification on budget book page 38 last line item should be \$110,254. Capital asset requests one to replace voting machines, she did pull this one, current machines that there are no more parts available to fix if they break. MA State said there are new standards and machines so we will hold on this. Request for a database system for Boards and Committees, we currently have an internal Access system and is cumbersome. The new system tracks ethics trainings, current employment dates etc. to help streamline this information.

Planning Board – presented by C. Nils McKay the budget went down about \$700. Decreases in printing, postage, office supplies. Dues and membership increased for memberships and training for clerk and planning board members. Selectmen Matthews asked what was other charges that went up. Mr. McKay noted that was in the supplemental packet distributed this evening. Whole total changed by how much. Kim Fales said decrease by \$652.

Zoning – presented by C. Nils McKay Salary and wages went down a little (\$1,950). Mr. Jankowski asked how often they do. Mr. McKay said four-five meetings.

Soil – presented by C. Nils McKay – he noted no changes were made.

Public Buildings – presented by Jeff Chandler. Mr. Chandler Custodial Salary and Wages there is an increase of \$32,507 to cover this position. He added an extra 5 hours (yearly) of overtime to come in early for cleaning that needs to be done before staff arrives. He noted the Town Hall building is going to need some extra attention. There is also 15 hours (yearly) of overtime for snow and ice removal before staff arrival. Uniform allowance flat at \$950. Electricity for town stayed flat. Electric for police station increased to \$96,000. Mr. Alderson asked if this was in Police or Building Budget. Mr. Chandler said it goes to his budget. Mr. Alderson asked does that include the schools? Mr. Chandler said it does not. Mr. Martin noted the monthly bills seem to be \$5,000/month. Mr. Chandler noted he has been paying an average of \$8,000/month since December. Mr. Martin noted the March expenditure from Ms. Fales that since the station opened it was about \$24,000. Ms. Fales said the first significant bill was \$3400 in Dec, Jan was \$3579 Feb \$5199. The old police station is about \$262 and the streetlight at old station is applicable. Mr. Jankowski said it may be about \$70,000-\$75,000 based on the most recent bills. Ms. Fales noted they will have to run AC all the time. Mr. Jankowski asked what type of heat. Ms. Fales said it is propane. Electricity for Fire Station and Highway Barn and COA stayed flat. Transfer bumped up to \$4,300, Library dropped to \$700 which was a \$50 drop. White's Library bumped up to \$1,400 going to increase hours. Mr. Martin asked at the Transfer Station is the plan to be open 7 days a week instead of 4. Mr. Jankowski said the increase will be about 5 days. Mr. Chandler noted this is considered with the increase. Mr. Martin noted they overspent this line before, and this number needs to be increased. Mr. Jankowski said we are going to 5 days. Mr. Martin noted that if we are open 5 days that would be an increase of 25%. Mr. Martin said it should be around \$5,000. Mr. Chandler will recalculate. Kim Fales noted they have electric heat there which is a contributing factor. Whites Library increased by \$200. Parks, Schoolhouse, flagpole, bandstand \$800, last year was \$1,384 but the total paid out at this point is \$300. Heating for Town Hall \$6,500 kept it flat, Police Station put at \$18,000 based on current propane prices, Fire Stations \$10,000 which is \$1,000 less than last year at this point spent \$3,600. Highway Barn heating \$1,000 up \$200 from last year, this year already spent \$600. Mr. Jankowski asked if there is any plan to fill in cracks in wall? Mr. Chandler said yes, they are going to start to address that and windows. He noted age is showing on most of the buildings around Town excluding new Police Station. Heat at library went down \$300 for Hathaway and down by \$500. Water kept flat from last year. Came down on Town Hall Grounds by \$1,000. Came down on Police Station equipment by \$600, Grounds at Fire Station for hoses and lawn mowers to do the work there at \$2,000. Highway Barn at \$3,000 some equipment wearing out this was a drop of \$1,000. Transfer Station dropped to \$500 tidying up, fixing ramps. Increase of COA grounds painting around pavilion and structure around it but is not going to do anything too much in case. Selectmen Matthews asked the group to take a moment and look through all the lines and see if they have any questions. Mr. Jankowski asked what is the \$3,000 decrease on Town Properties Town Hall? Mr. Martin noted \$6,000 better

reflects what was spent in previous years. Ms. Fales said that line item was originally set up for a cleaning service when we did not have a custodian. There is some money in that line to do some major cleaning project like carpets or window cleaning. Selectmen Zager asked if anyone had any other questions. Selectmen Matthews noted that he expected costs to go up with the new building.

Salaries – presented by \$75,000 for Building Commissioner. Mr. Alderson asked what was the reasoning for this? Mr. Chandler said he went by what other towns are paying. Mr. Martin asked is this something that gets set at Town Meeting? Ms. Fales said it is set by Board of Selectmen. Selectmen Matthews asked for Mr. Chandler to send him that salary analysis he prepared. Increase on longevity to \$750 as the Clerk would be full time in Building and not being split between Building and Health. This is the same reason that Building Clerical went down. He has budgeted in for 10 hours in the year for any potential overtime for the Clerk. Mr. Jankowski asked if that was in the \$45,000. Mr. Chandler said yes that is in the \$45,000. The vehicle is a 2006 he is asking for funds to have brakes done, going to need a good tune up as well. Selectmen Matthews noted the increases are for salary increases but cut back in other areas. Gas Inspector this past year we have had more permits pulled but is able to decrease by \$1,000. Plumbing was also decreased by \$1,000. Finance Committee asked are they paid per inspection? Mr. Chandler said yes, he believed it is \$35 per inspection. He noted the number of inspections has increased. Electrical is at \$18,000 which covers two inspectors one covering Assonet and the other does East Freetown.

Police – presented by Chief Carlton Abbott. Chief Abbott noted lines with an increase. Wages for Police Officers increase reflects mandates in collective bargaining agreement and addition of two new Police Officers. He noted there will be a lot of officer turnover in the next couple of years and there are changes with police reform. This will no longer have Reserve Officers. The current Reserve Officers will need to do 200 training hours so they would be fully certified officers and will be moving on to find full time jobs. Mr. Wilkins noted there are a couple of retirements coming up how will that affect the dept. Chief Abbott noted that there are several retirements on the force. Mr. Wilkins asked if patrolman would move up? Chief Abbott said yes, we hope they will be moving up internally. Mr. Alderson asked is this a national or state law. Chief Abbott said it is a state law and he noted this is a big impact as many departments rely on these part time officers. Finance committee member asked the two positions you are adding are they replacing the two retirement officers. Chief Abbott said they currently have 19 full time officers and are requesting to go to 21. This number includes Chief Abbott. Mr. Wilkins asked if we had someone at the academy? Chief Abbott said that there is a reserve officer currently on a leave of absence in the police academy, but he is going to New Bedford. Sick leave retirement buys back under the collective bargaining agreement they can cash out any sick, vacation and comp time on the books. The figures reflect these amounts. Longevity is increasing but it is reflective of the collective bargaining agreements. This is the same for training stipends. Gary Martin noted there is a significance uniform allowance, why? This

would be to outfit the two new officers and replacements for retirements. Selectmen Zager noted building maintenance is going way up due to new building. Firearms & Defensive equipment increasing. Chief Abbott noted it is a real challenge nationwide to get ammunition and when you can prices are very high. Mr. Wilkins asked how your vehicle maintenance is going? Chief Abbott said we have a lease program so most of the vehicles are not too old, so these costs are low. Selectmen Zager noted that having the lease it is a fixed amount and makes it easier to budget.

Communication - presented by Chief Carlton Abbott. Full time dispatchers' wages are increasing due to the collective bargaining agreement. There is 1 full time supervisor, 6 part time. He is asking for \$41,000 to hire one full time dispatcher. The reason he would like this is it is hard to staff these parts time positions and it is a challenge to fill these shifts forcing dispatchers into overtime situations which is terrible for morale as well. Repairs and maintenance equipment request for \$10,000 to integrate police and fire records management system to be in one location at the police station on the server. This will allow police and fire units to access that database to see hazards and how many times calls have been made. This will also let them know in real time what chemicals are on site and other issues. Mr. Jankowski asked if each department would keep their own hardcopy records. Chief's Abbott and Silvia said yes but they are going more digital where they can. Mr. Martin asked is this an annual expense Chief Abbott said it is a yearly cost that you pay to the vendor. Chief Silvia said once integrated both Police and Fire will have electronic access so when the Fire Dept is on a call they can see the records, currently they do not have access. Fuel budget is staying static with no change. Kim Fales noted he is still asking for the same amount for capital requests as last year for leases.

Fire – Chief Gary Silvia presented. Salaries for full time firefighters is increasing due to contractual increases. The firefighter sub was reduced and moved to full time salaries as the full timers were taking these shifts. Fire Core man salaries increased to \$2,500 as calls increased to 11% more. Gross overtime gone up to \$9,900 taking \$4,000 from part time salaries so it washes. Overtime and training have gone down as there was no CPR trainings and less needing recertification. Fire educational and career incentives is going up as we have more paramedics certifying this year. IT has gone down a bit and moved to communications budget to help with transfer over to police station. New server was installed, and ambulance software and medical records will stay there. Fire Training Materials sharp increase \$22,500 dept of public health said cannot train in person so everything had to be online, so an online training program was purchased with CARES Monies. The benefit was that on call staff like it as they do not have to come to the station monthly for drills and would prefer to do it this way if possible. Mr. Jankowski asked if staffing is remaining the same. Chief Silvia stated it was staying the same. Mr. Martin asked about capital budget? Chief Silvia said we are due to replace engine 2 as it is a 1996 so it is due to be replaced. It takes 425 days to get a fire truck done. Assonet's truck just came in and it was a FY19 order. Wants to place order now but keep in mind it will be

paid for in the next budget. There is another engine that has 125,000 miles so it will be replaced in 2023. So, he would like to replace this year so we would receive it in FY22. Mr. Jankowski asked so you must allocate those funds before the order is placed? Kim Fales said you would want a commitment to form the Town to approve the money before the order is placed. Mr. Wilkins noted we are still in a 4-year cycle. Chief Silvia said the ambulance was in an accident last year and lights will go out while you are driving so it is time. Mr. Wilkins asked how many miles a year do they put on. Chief Silvia said about 24,000 a year. Selectmen Matthews asked how long are the leases? Kim Fales said that we own them, and they are 3- and 4-year ones. Mr. Jankowski noted the windows and boiler are in the capital? Chief Silvia said he spoke with Jeff Chandler and those would be taken care of through him. Kim Fales noted that she does not have anything on that.

EMA – presented by Chief Gary Silvia. No increases.

Animal Control – presented by Lisa Podielsky – only change is to upgrade dog license database so it can work out in the field so if she picks up a dog in the field, she can look it up in the field to help find an owner. The fee has gone to \$1,980 to have licenses for Town Clerk's office and Animal Control Officer. Selectmen Matthews asked if she could scan them in the field. Ms. Podielsky noted that she received a free scanner, and this is the first thing. Mr. Martin asked what is the "ask Kim" note in salary line. Kim Fales noted the Board of Selectmen will be making the determination on increases.

Transfer Station – presented by Vicky King. Salaries some increases. Waste and disposal went up due to mattress problem they had. She is working with a vendor to take mattresses now for \$10 each. Capital Purchase for a compactor for the cardboard. The cardboard are in open containers and you get less money when it is wet. She is also looking to use new snow removal equipment and entrance for Transfer Station ices up and would like to have work done on the drainage to help alleviate that issues. Mr. Jankowski asked part time \$13,734 is that for one person. He continued we currently have herself, 16 hour per diem person and an attendant position that is funded but not filled. We are having issues filling this position. He would suggest can we add 4 hours to this position so we can fill this position. He would like to work with Kim Fales to see if we can make this happen which would give us 2 people and being able to be open 5 days a week. Vicky King noted we can reduce the per diem person's hours to help fund this position. Kim Fales suggested requesting \$800 for longevity as she is due an increase based on the collective bargaining agreement. Kim Fales said no number was put in for capital. Vicky Fales said the amount would be available from ABC early next week. Kim Fales asked for a price for the plow box. Vicky King noted Chuck Macomber had located one for \$18,000 but she will confirm with him. The drainage issue out front is being addressed by Highway Department.

Council on Aging – presented by Barbara Place. Added for part time clerical as the Senior Clerk

is retiring in December. Also, capital asset of \$2,000 to replace carpet and tiles on each level. Upstairs is the original flooring. There seems to be an issue with seepage through floor. She is having a company come in to quote on a permanent fix for this. Jeff Chandler is going to get a quote for putting in a cement pad outside for the generator. Kim Fales noted on the worksheet you asked for a level fund for clerical but put in for an increase, but it is not in the budget. Barbara Fales said yes that needs to be added in. Kim Fales said that everyone needs to add this into their books as it is not reflected. Finance Committee asked if this is a temporary position. Barbara Place said yes, this is a temporary increase. Kent Wilkins asked about new carpet is it for downstairs? Barbara Place said the carpet upstairs is buckling and downstairs there is an issue with seepage coming through the floor. Barbara Place noted she has some grant money that may cover fixing downstairs. She also noted that the kitchen is torn apart, and the grant will cover that. Mr. Jankowski noted that Water and Sewer, Library and one other were not available to meet so we can stop for tonight and set up another meeting.

- Motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:35pm was made by Selectmen Matthews and seconded by Selectmen Zager.

List of Documents/Exhibits used by Board during this meeting.

- Budget binders

Respectfully Submitted,

Lu-Ann Souza

Motion to adjourn the Finance Committee Meeting by Katie, seconded by Margaret at 8:36, approved unanimously.

Added by Gary Martin