

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday November 15, 2022

1. Call to Order and Roll Call Vote – P. Orenstein opened the meeting via Zoom at 7:00pm with a roll call: Milena Cerna, “aye,” Richard Geiler, “aye,” Madonna Meagher, “aye,” Anne O’Dwyer, “aye,” Philip Orenstein, “aye.”

Also in attendance: Town Manager Mark Pruhenski

2. Committee Member announcements or statements

- a. A. O’Dwyer stated Finance Committee and the Affordable Housing Trust meetings are both held the second Tuesday of the month and asked to consider moving the Finance Committee meeting to the third Tuesday. The Committee discussed other meetings scheduled on Tuesdays that might present conflicts – but agreed to consider changing the meeting schedule after the coming Budget Season, if necessary. It was clarified that in person meetings require reserving the Town Hall meeting room.

3. Approval of Minutes for Oct 6th and Oct 18th meetings

M. Meagher made a motion to approve the October 6, 2022 minutes; A. O’Dwyer seconded. P. Orenstein asked if any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: M. Cerna, “aye,” R. Geiler, “aye,” M. Meagher, “aye,” A. O’Dwyer, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 5-0.

M. Meagher made a motion to approve the October 18, 2022 minutes; R. Geiler seconded. P. Orenstein asked if any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: M. Cerna, “aye,” R. Geiler, “aye,” M. Meagher, “aye,” A. O’Dwyer, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 5-0.

4. Town Manager Update –

a. Two Reserve Fund requests – Department of Public Works and Police Department

- i. Chief of Police, Paul Sorti, presented a request for a reserve fund transfer of \$23,300 to cover expenses for required training for four police officers due to an unanticipated number of current openings -- plus an additional transfer of \$11,400 to cover training of two more officers as openings are expected in the next few months – for a total request of \$34,700. He explained there are critical staffing issues due to strong competition for trained officers and the loss of part-time officers who were not trained and therefore, were decertified on July 1, 2022. He also stated there is currently a pool of seven police officer applicants who have passed the hiring exam and are potential new hires.

- A. O’Dwyer confirmed the openings are for full-time officers and there are no part-time officers remaining.
- Chief Sorti stated if the \$11,400 for the two additional officers is not needed, it will be returned.
- P. Orenstein asked if, given the staff openings, the Department is under budget on salary compensation? – Chief Sorti replied there are no savings as there has been a significant amount of overtime for the remaining staff. P. Orenstein confirmed the state sets the fee for the training program.

M. Meagher made a motion to approve a reserve fund transfer of \$34,700 (\$23,300 plus an additional \$11,400) for the Police Department for police officer academy training; A. O’Dwyer seconded. P. Orenstein asked if any discussion – P. Orenstein asked that the memo be updated so it is evident \$23,300 and \$11,400 is being approved. Roll call vote: M. Cerna, “aye,” R. Geiler, “aye,” M. Meagher, “aye,” A. O’Dwyer, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 5-0.

- ii. M. Pruhenski presented a reserve fund request on behalf of Joe Aberdale, DPW Superintendent, stating the Town must comply with a new State statute that requires recycling of mattresses - and a place is now needed to store them. He requested \$4,000 to fund the purchase of a storage unit rather than renting one. He noted the unit would be monitored and when close to full, pick up will be scheduled. It was confirmed the unit is sealed/watertight.

R. Geiler made a motion to approve the reserve fund transfer for \$4,000 for the DPW purchase of a storage unit for mattress disposal and recycling; M. Cerna seconded. P. Orenstein asked if any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: M. Cerna, “aye,” R. Geiler, “aye,” M. Meagher, “aye,” A. O’Dwyer, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 5-0.

- b. Housatonic Water Works – M. Pruhenski stated that the Town will receive state funds for temporary relief for HWW customers and a press release will go it soon. He stated once the timeline is confirmed, it will be brought to the Selectboard to consider three options/or some combination thereof – (i) purchase of bottled water in five-gallon recyclable containers for every household for the worst 8-10 weeks in summer; (ii) small grants for homeowners to purchase water filtration units for their homes or to buy replacement filters; (iii) purchase and install one/three/five -gallon water filling station in Town. He clarified for the last option, if the location is Housatonic, a water filtration system would also be needed. The Committee expressed support for these options.
- c. Town discretion on Cannabis related free cash – M. Pruhenski stated he had just received an email from David Doneski, Town Counsel, that he will forward to Committee members, providing guidance for host-community agreement negotiations with retailers starting in December – and to inform FY24 budget discussions. P. Orenstein clarified this relates to funds received through host agreements between the Town and cannabis retailers. The question these guidelines address is how much flexibility the Town has in allocating those funds for more general purposes or if they are to be used in a more restricted/narrow way. P. Orenstein noted this is important for the budget process. M. Pruhenski stated D. Doneski provided a bullet list of acceptable uses for the 3% community impact fee noting there is less focus on prevention and more broadly on community improvement. The Committee discussed/clarified the 3% local option tax and 3% community impact fee are both under the host agreement, but there is a different process for each – and while there have been differences of opinion on how the community impact fee can be used, the local option tax can be used as the Town directs. It was agreed that D. Doneski’s email will be included in the packet for the next meeting/public discussion.
- d. Search for new Town Finance staff member – M. Pruhenski reported the new Accountant/Finance Coordinator, Allison Crespo, will start on December 5 – and noted her solid finance/municipal experience. It was agreed she would attend the December Finance Committee meeting and its meetings go forward. P. Orenstein requested a budget report for the December meeting, if possible (recognizing that Ms. Crespo will have been on the job a week at that date).

5. Update on Local Option Tax Revenues – P. Orenstein referred to historical data in the packet on local option revenue consisting of cannabis, room occupancy and meal taxes - and noted the overall positive trend. Though the Committee discussed the anticipated leveling/tapering off of cannabis related revenues and highlighted its impact on the budget process especially since these revenues have been used to offset property tax increases.

6. Update on Community Preservation Committee – R. Geiler stated CPC step one applications were received for open space, historical preservation, recreational land and community housing projects. Nine applicants will provide more detailed project plans. P. Orenstein asked about the Ian Rausch/Alander Main Street project – R. Geiler stated the project received funds last year for façade preservation – though plans changed for use of the building. The CPC asked that, in the future, they should be informed in advance by a recipient of any changes to prior plans before any request for additional funds. R. Geiler noted there is total \$1.72m in requests. The Committee discussed the CPC budget (available funds) is substantial and derives from a 3% surcharge on real estate taxes and additional revenues from the State. R. Geiler clarified the CPC makes recommendations to fund projects, but it requires a Town Meeting vote to approve.
7. Future meeting schedule – 3rd Tuesday of the month @ 6:30 pm
 - a. December 13 (2nd Tuesday)
 - b. Upcoming budget season – P. Orenstein stated there are no plans for a January Finance Committee meeting as the budget process will include four Selectboard-Finance Committee meetings in late February-to-early March. He added budget materials will be on the Town website including a PowerPoint and detailed budget by department. M. Pruhenski clarified the budget meeting schedule would be circulated in January with initial presentations in February and the public hearing in late March. R. Geiler noted if the Finance Committee regular meeting schedule is to change it would not be until March.
 - i. O'Dwyer asked that the Budget Policy be approved by the Selectboard before budget season and for the Finance Committee to be present for discussion. Steve Bannon replied the Policy will be on the December 5 meeting agenda and the Finance Committee will be invited with the goal of discussing/finalizing the policy at the meeting. M. Pruhenski confirmed it would be early in the agenda and perhaps the meeting would start at 5:30pm. P. Orenstein clarified revisions have been made to the initial draft and the Selectboard has the final draft version.
8. Citizen Speak Time – No citizens requested to speak.
9. Media Time – No media requested to speak.
10. Adjournment - R. Geiler made a motion to adjourn; A. O'Dwyer seconded. P. Orenstein adjourned the meeting by unanimous consent at 8:10pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow, Recording Clerk