

**FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES OF DECEMBER 9, 2008**

Attendance:

Present: Allen McRae
Dave Stevens
Dick Montminy
Eliot Putnam
Fred Faulkner
Ken Adam
Tyler Gray

Also attending: Bonnie Holston, Director, Finance & Budget
Carolyn Sloboda, Director, Council on Aging
Bob Stetson, Secretary, Council on Aging
George Sanders, Chairman, Council on Aging
Sherry Gould, Chairman, Zoning Board of Appeals
Bev Cyr, Administrative Assistant, Zoning Board of Appeals
Deborah Williams, Secretary, Cemetery Commission
Susan Fougstedt, Treasurer, Cemetery Commission
James Pickard, Chairman, Conservation Commission
Heather Haapanen, Conservation Commission
Peter Cassinari, Board of Health
Peter Yapp, Vice Chairman, Board of Health
Ted Doucette, Chairman, Board of Health

Meeting opened at 7:00 PM in Room 103, Shattuck Street Building.

2010 Budget

Council on Aging: George Sanders and Bob Stetson presented a three part budget: The COA proper, Services provided by the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART), and the Senior Tax Program. In the COA budget, they requested an additional \$1K for the Meals program, due to increased demand and slightly diminished funding from sponsors. Other expense increases such as postage and Minuteman Senior Services are based on same services, but increased costs to COA. A \$5K increase for MART funding was requested to provide compensation for part time dispatcher services currently being provided by volunteers. Requested increases of \$16K to the Senior Tax Work Program are based on increasing the dollar limit per household, moving toward, but not to, the state limit. Allen reminded them that, at this point, FinCom is only assuming level funded budgets. Although the rationale for all of the requested increases is appropriate, none of those increases should be assumed. If additional funds become available, it would be directed to programs first, before increasing the senior tax program. Eliot asked if there is a way to trace the dollar benefit of the senior tax program. All agreed in the benefit to the town, but the dollar benefit has never been documented.

Zoning Board of Appeals: In attempting to submit a level funded budget, Sherry Gould reminded FinCom that most costs are mandated by the state. She suggested that reducing Bev Cyr's hours from 6 hrs / week to 5 hours / week would be one way to offset other cost increases. Advertising fees, which are borne by the ZBA, are not sufficiently covered by applicants' fees, which go to the town's general fund. At a meeting later this week, Sherry will propose an increase in application fees, with more of an increase for commercial applicants. Bonnie will look at creating a revolving fund of applicants' fees vs. advertising costs for fiscal 2010. Such change would require town meeting approval. Ken asked if the increase in fees would be enough to retain Bev's hours. Allen requested the ZBA to go back, modify the budget, and submit it as modified. Allen will schedule a return meeting to review that budget. Discussion also included the 2009 increase in advertising costs, which could be reduced if the new fees were instituted and the payments were made directly by the applicant to the newspaper in which the advertising was made.

Cemetery Commission: Deb Williams and Susan Fougstedt presented a level funded budget which assumed an increase in Superintendent salaries, offset by a decrease in staff salaries. This increase is based on the assumption that the current superintendent returns to full time service from his recent reduced hours status. No other expenses changed materially. A level services budget was also submitted, restoring the staff salaries and increasing the total budget by \$15K. If the cell tower lease is finalized, the income would go directly to the CC, but that is not reflected in this budget. No crematorium related income is reflected in the 2010 plan, pending support by the Board of Selectmen and town meeting approval.

Conservation Commission: James Pickard and Heather Haapanen presented both level funded and level service budgets. The \$4K increase to level service predominantly reflects the changes in salary due to Heather's filling her position upon the retirement of her predecessor. There were no other significant changes.

Historical Commission: Although on the agenda, no representatives of the Historical Commission attended the meeting. Allen will contact them to reschedule.

Board of Health: Peter Yapp observed that since 2003, salaries have increased only minimally; other expenses have decreased. He voiced concern that when the Board reduces expenses, the following year's budget drops. Allen reminded Peter that 2003 was the year that the State failed to make it's final payment to municipalities, causing across the board shortfalls. In response to the question from Ken Adam, Ted informed him that advertising fees on behalf of an applicant are incurred by the applicant. Although there are no significant differences in level funded vs. level service, level funding this budget would require either reducing Bev's hours or reducing the other expenses. The first pass budget, as submitted, has inconsistencies that need to be corrected.

General Discussion

There was a general discussion among the group regarding when we would know the degree of expected reductions in state funding impacting 2009, and how the town will need to respond to those reductions. Bonnie's best estimate is that we will hear from the state in January.

Reserve Fund

The Reserve Fund balance stands at \$113,992. There have been no recent changes.

Minutes of December 2, 2008

Ken Adam, Fred Faulkner seconded, to approve the minutes of the December 2, 2008 Finance Committee Meeting.

VOTE: Approved by unanimous consent

The next meeting will be Tuesday, December 16, 2008 at 7:00 PM, Room 103, Shattuck Street Building, joined by representatives of the Office of the Town Clerk, Office of the Tax Collector and the School Committee, followed by a joint meeting with the Board of Selectmen and the School Committee.

Motion to adjourn made by Dave Stevens, seconded by Ken Adam.

VOTE: Approved by unanimous consent.

Meeting adjourned at 9:20 PM.