Finance Committee
Minutes of March 14, 2016

Present from the Finance Committee: Chairman Louise Tremblay, Bob Corey, Ed Pitta, Gerald D'Avolio, Joseph DiCarlo and Richard Ahern. Also present: Town Manager, James A. Duggan, Ann Vandal, Assistant Town Manager, Diane Daigle, Accountant and Recording Secretary Samantha Carver. The meeting was held at Town Hall Conference Room 2nd floor, 62 Arlington Street, Dracut, MA.

Absent: Helen Hamel

The Chairman opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. Ms. Tremblay announced that the committee has a new member Richard Ahern. Ms. Tremblay asked Mr. Duggan to begin the discussion on the budget.

Town Manager Duggan began the discussion on the general government section of the budget. The Department Heads present for this discussion were: Lori Cahill – Recreation/Conservation; Debra Barton – Tax Collector, Jayne Boissoneault – Town Clerk, Elections & Registration; and Rebecca Ferreira – Veteran's Agent.

Mr. Duggan discussed the Town Moderator, Board of Selectmen and Town Manager budgets having contractual obligations but level funded. Finance, Accounting, Assessors budgets have contractual obligations, mainly level funded. Some printing and binding increases and dues and publications increases for training. Mr. Pitta asked questions on the appraisal process with the Assessor's office. Ms. Vandal stated that they do a complete appraisal of the Town every three years so that figure for the vendor changes from $50,000 to $150,000. Ms. Tremblay asked about the liens on the properties getting fined and how the owner pays them. Mr. Duggan stated that they are paid off when they want a clean tax title certificate or after a year are rolled into the tax payment amount and reflected in the tax bill. Mr. Duggan directed the Committee to the measures of activity for the tax collector's office and commended that office on the tremendous amount of work they produce with processing all the tax bills.

Mr. Pitta asked if for next year's budget when there is an appreciable difference on the budget like in the Assessors where it goes up for the town wide assessment, if a footnote of explanation could be added so that he wouldn't have to ask the question.

Mr. Duggan continued on the budgets with the Law Department and noted an increase in this budget due to the Kinder Morgan pipeline special attorney for the Town. Human Resource budget is level funded with a slight increase in dues and obligations. There is also an increase in employee training because some of the employees don't know Microsoft well and have asked for some training.

The Committee asked Mrs. Vandal a question on the IT Department budget and she stated that all the Dell equipment is leased.

The Town Clerk's budget there is a slight reduction due to a new hire who came in at a lower rate than the employee that was there. There is an increase in elections and registrations due to the presidential primary and election this year. Mr. Duggan noted that the Capital Planning Committee approved an expenditure for voting machines for this year. They will be getting ten machines, nine for the precincts with one spare.

Conservation budget shows some contractual obligations and it was noted by Mr. Duggan that Ms. Cahill has handled quite a few notice of intents this past year with fifty six filings. The Committee looked at the recreation budget and Mr. Pitta asked about the part time payroll and what that consisted of. Mrs. Cahill stated that she has two hundred part time people that work but not all at the same time, there may be referees that do three games and other that do more.

The Committee discussed the skateboard park. Mrs. Cahill stated that they had a monitor at the park last year and were able to gather some statistics for usage and age groups of people using the park. Mr. Duggan stated they have some funds for a monitor this year and they'll see how usage goes this year.

The Committee moved on to the planning board budget which includes the Community Development Director's salary. There was a brief discussion about storm water regulations that the Town is going to have to address in the near future.

The Committee discussed the Veteran's budget next and Mr. Duggan explained that the Veteran's Agent's office will be moving to the Council on Aging building. Mr. Duggan praised Mrs. Ferreira for coming into this job without a lot of training on the regulations and she has really done a great job helping the veteran's get what they need for services. The Committee looked at the veterans aid benefit and Ms. Vandal stated that this budget is a moving target and it allows the town to defer the expenses to the next year until the revenue comes in. The Town gets reimbursed 75% from the State of these benefits.

The zoning board budget is level funded with a slight increase for part time payroll and advertising. The building maintenance budget has a small increase for payroll obligations. Budget 197 insurance is for liability and casualty insurance also including self-insured police and fire on the job injury. Budget 198 Permanent Building budget has a slight decrease in their budget.

Ms. Tremblay asked the Town Manager if he could explain to the Committee the two override questions. Mr. Duggan explained that the Board of Selectmen took a vote on Tuesday for two override questions by a three to two vote. The first question is a focus on public safety and Mr. Duggan explained the shortfalls in the staffing and how the Town has grown by 52% since the 80's and they don't have the staffing in these two departments reflecting the size of the Town. The override for this question is for $560,000 for police and fire to be able to hire six more police officers and three more firefighters.

The second override question is for technology for the schools and once they are able to equip the schools with the technology that they need in future years the additional funding may be used to hire additional personnel.

Mr. Duggan stated that he is working collaboratively with the schools. He is doing an outreach program with the Police, Fire, and Superintendent to discuss the articles at different venues and on difference media outlets. He wants people to discuss the issues and ask questions prior to voting so everyone has a complete understanding of the overrides and needs of the community for both public safety and the school department.

Mr. Duggan stated he will be voting for both. He stated that a good school system is essential in a Town and he believes that the school department should have the proper tools to accomplish their goals.

Mrs. Tremblay also asked Mr. Duggan about the article in the Lowell Sun today about the Regional Communications Center and what is happening with the funding for that.

Mr. Duggan learned today that the State is not going to fund any new buildings only rehab existing communication facilities. He stated that he will be having a meeting with the Secretary of Public Safety to discuss this further. He talked about the two grants they had applied for the first being for a design of a building and the second for the building itself. Mr. Duggan was disappointed to learn of this decision today and is hoping to continue the dialogue on the issue with the Secretary.

Mrs. Vandal continued the discussion on the budget going over the revenues summary. Ms. Vandal explained that the budget is based on 2 ½% of the current showing $375,000 new growth. The abatements are estimated at just under $300,000. The Special Assessment was to contruct Robbins Avenue and assess the immediate abutters, this action took place in 2012 and there are only a few years left on the assessment. The meals tax has been estimated at $300,000 in this budget. Mrs. Vandal went down through the rest of the revenues noting that the licenses for alcohol permits and building permits has increased. Investment earnings are down due to the interest only being 1%. There was income brought in from the town auction which is held every couple of years. The State Revenue is level funded we don't have final numbers yet same with the assessments. Special Revenue Fund, Mrs. Vandal explained every year this money has gone back into the general fund however the State has ruled it has to go back to the library so budget lines have been rearranged. The SRF loan for the Englesby School debt is almost complete and will be coming off soon.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is Monday March 21, 2016 at 6:00 p.m. and the budgets discussed will be public safety and public works along with some of the other miscellaneous other budgets.

Adjourn

Mr. Pitta made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:40 p.m. Mr. Corey seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Finance Committee

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_____Absent: Helen Hamel _____