

**MINUTES
FINANCE COMMITTEE
FIRE STATION
37 STATE ROAD
GREAT BARRINGTON MA 01230
NOVEMBER 8, 2016
5:30 PM**

The chair called the meeting to order at 5:31. Members present were Walter Atwood, Thomas Blauvelt, Will Curletti and Janet Lee. Also present was town manager Jennifer Tabakin.

Minutes of the September 14, 2016 meeting were approved, without objection.

The chair confirmed that members agreed to the Selectboard's proposal for a joint meeting on November 21 to discuss the budget policy and schedule, set for 7:00 PM. Blauvelt will be away; the rest of the Committee will be able to attend.

REPORTS: Blauvelt said that the Community Preservation Committee had completed reviewing the final eight applications. The total sought is \$668,000, which is more than will probably be available; the state has yet to advise how much it will provide. The CPC will meet December 6 to vote on what to recommend to Town Meeting. Atwood inquired about the fate of the funds that had been granted to the 100 Bridge Street project, which is reportedly stalled. Blauvelt said that if the project does not go forward the remaining money will not be spent. Some has been paid for engineering. The chair reported on the final action of the school district's Regional Agreement Amendment Committee. The principal substantive change would be to apportion future capital costs on the basis of assessed value (that is, equalized value). The school committee has sent it to the towns, evidently concurring in the RAAC desire for the towns to deal with it at special town meetings. It will not matter to adopt this before the school budget is presented at the next annual town meeting unless there is a large new capital expenditure proposed. Curletti reported on the school district's finance committee process; Atwood asked to be sure they supply figures detailing the choice-in and choice-out students.

FINANCIAL COORDINATOR: The town manager said she had asked for a contingent allocation of reserve funds because she had been concerned about having enough money to support the consultant if we had trouble finding a new hire. The town has now hired someone for the position who has a municipal accounting background. He lives in Hillsdale and will be starting in December. The name and details will be announced at the Selectboard meeting next week. He will be doing the traditional town accountant job, which is not all of what Lauren had done. Responsibilities for bonding arrangements and for representation to the Berkshire Health Group will be shifted to the Treasurer. The town manager has budgeted for a month of overlap training with the consultants to get the new accountant up to speed. Although the reserve funds that had been approved just in case they are needed have not been expended, the town manager would like to reserve the possibility of using them for this training if necessary.

BUDGET POLICY FY18: The Committee discussed whether to revise or expand the FY17 budget financial policy document for use in preparing the FY18 budget. The chair asked whether the goal of a "reasonable and affordable" tax rate should be made more precise; the consensus was to leave this general. The chair asked whether it would be a good idea to return to the practice of holding the Committee's meetings to review budget details separately from the similar Selectboard meeting. Separate, smaller meetings could be simpler to schedule, involving five people instead of ten. The town manager would prefer that the initial briefing overview be presented to the two bodies together. After discussion the consensus was to continue the joint meetings, in part because it gives the boards the opportunity to hear and respond to a wider range of questions and concerns at that stage. The chair asked whether the way the Town Meeting approves budget line items gives the town manager the right degree of flexibility to shift funds to meet needs, or whether votes should be taken at a higher level of aggregation to increase flexibility. The town manager said that

the Town now votes at the level of the department. Because some functions are quite small and thus not really full departments, it can be hard to make adjustments. Moreover, some items are inappropriately rolled up into the town manager-Selectboard category. Changing our practice about this could prompt questions, though, and trying to fix this could create new problems. The town manager will examine whether some changes to deal with this issue could work; if so, she will then find out whether they are consistent with DOR requirements. Some phrasing details and typos were also noted.

RESERVE FUND TRANSFER FOR DPW: The town manager said this would not be needed. A promising candidate has appeared, so it looks like there will be no need for an interim or consultant.

CITIZENS SPEAK TIME: David Magadini asked that the town consider investing something in the K-Mart store that is closing, supposedly because they were not making enough money, in exchange for keeping it open. The town manager wondered whether the timing is right in this case to offer a tax incentive for them to stay, but that the town should consider doing that in an appropriate situation.

The meeting adjourned without objection at 6:14 PM. The next meeting will be a joint meeting with the Selectboard on November 21; the chair will alert the members if that meeting time is not 7:00 PM.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Wise". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Michael Wise, Chair