

Finance Committee Meeting
April 3, 2013
7:30 PM
Municipal Center – Selectmen’s Conference Room

Present: Chair, Lee Tarantino; Vice-Chair, Michael Flaherty; Peter Carignan; Thomas DeLuca; Jackie Desrochers (late arrival); Richard Dorney; Stephen Evans; Paul Helmreich; William Rotondi; Michael Thomas. Also present: Town Manager, Michael Yunits.

Absent:

Call to Order

Meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm.

I. Approval of Minutes

Motion was made by Ms. Desrochers to approve the April 1, 2013 Finance Committee minutes as amended. Seconded by Mr. DeLuca. Vote: All in favor, with Mr. Thomas and Mr. Tarantino abstaining. **Motion carries.**

II. New Business

- Annual Town Meeting Warrant Articles:

Article 16 – Demolition Delay By-Law – Mr. Ralph Stefanelli, SERPDD representative and member of the Norton Historical Commission, addressed the FinCom regarding the proposed Demolition Delay By-Law. Mr. Stefanelli explained that the by-law would help protect historical buildings/structures in town and that it has been approved by town counsel. He reviewed the by-law article and its provisions and safeguards. Mr. Stefanelli referred to the White Farm on Rt. 123 as an example. He said that the by-law would provide a process through which contractors, builders, etc. would have to go through when wanting to demolish a historical building. The by-law would not necessarily prevent the demolition, but rather provide an opportunity to develop preservation solutions if possible. He explained that if, after going through the process/negotiations, there is still no agreement and it has been 6 months then demolition may proceed. After Mr. Stefanelli was through reviewing each section of the proposed by-law with the FinCom, Mr. Tarantino said that he would like to see a time limit (preferably 7 days) included in the Emergency Demolition section. Mr. Stefanelli said that he would bring this concern to the SERPDD members.

A discussion was had on whether a list of specific properties should be included in the by-law. Mr. Tarantino said that he didn’t completely agree with SERPDD’s definition of “Historical or Architecturally Significant”, particularly because a building could have historical significance but not be old, so it wouldn’t be considered historical. He feels there needs to be an inventory of buildings deemed “historical” so that homebuyers would be aware of what they may be purchasing.

Mr. Stefanelli said that there is an appeals process and that he plans to discuss this when he returns to discuss the article again with the Finance Committee. He also plans to meet with the other members of SERPDD and discuss further the definition of “Historical or Architecturally Significant”, as well as Section 5 which deals with time limits of the process.

Article 18 – Delinquent Taxpayers –

Mr. Yunits explained that this article addresses a state law that has changed. The law currently allows towns to prevent delinquent tax payers from obtaining building permits, etc. on *only* the property that is delinquent. The new law now allows towns to prevent delinquent tax payers from obtaining building permits, etc. on *any* property in town.

Motion was made by Mr. Flaherty to recommend Article 18 as written. Seconded by Mr. DeLuca. Vote: All in favor. **Motion carries.**

Mr. Yunits informed the FinCom that he attended the Planning Board meeting last night and the one-year delay vote for marijuana dispensaries was approved.

III. Old Business

- FY14 Operating Budget Requests:

#300 School Department Budget – Mr. Yunits said that it has been determined that there will not be a need for any layoffs for FY14. This would mean that the budget for Unemployment could be reduced from \$120K to \$80K. It was suggested that that \$40K could go to the School Department budget. Mr. Yunits said that the new town manager's recommendation is \$23,661,867 (it used to be \$23,621,867).

Dr. Martes, Interim School Superintendent, stated that the new projected Charter School enrollment is 181 students. The current year, FY13, has 188. The average cost per student is about \$10,900, therefore a net of about \$70K for the difference of the 7 students.

Dr. Martes provided a handout showing Massachusetts town enrollments at Charter Schools. He noted that the kindergarten enrollment of Norton students at the Charter School is typically around 12 students but for FY13 was only 5.

Dr. Martes informed the FinCom that the Special Education transportation contract has been made through the BICO Collaborative which will cost \$80K less than projected previously. He also said that since they haven't heard anything on the Federal Sequestration they will be reducing the FY14 budget by \$120K on the assumption that the money will be there.

It was decided that the FinCom would wait on voting until the numbers become more concrete in the next week or two.

#290 Communications Budget – Ms. Charlene Fisk, Communications Director, notified the FinCom that a dispatcher has resigned and another would be going on FMLA in about 6 weeks. She said that the proposed part-timer positions would be very helpful in this situation. She explained that the part-time positions would not be eligible for benefits even if they work 20 hours because it wouldn't be a consistent 20 hours each week. Mr. Yunits explained that the positions would be advertised as "part-time, non-benefit eligible".

Motion was made by Mr. Flaherty to recommend \$528,599 for account #290-510 (Communications – Salaries). Seconded by Mr. DeLuca. Vote: All in favor, with Ms. Desrochers abstaining. **Motion carries.**

Motion was made by Mr. Flaherty to recommend \$109,463 for account #290-570 (Communications – Charges and Expenditures). Seconded by Mr. DeLuca. Vote: All in favor, with Ms. Desrochers abstaining. **Motion carries.**

#543 Veteran's Budget – Mr. Tim Giblin, Selectman and representative of the Veteran's district, addressed the FinCom regarding the effectiveness of the district. Mr. DeLuca said that the 2 most important points of regionalizing were to provide good support for veterans and to make the program more cost effective. He said he feels that the support is great but the program is not cost effective. He asked why the town is paying \$70K for 3 veterans agents to be shared by 4 towns when instead the town could pay a full-time agent (for just the town of Norton) for \$40-\$45K.

Mr. Giblin said that the coverage and level of service is better with the 3 agents.

Mr. DeLuca said that if Norton had its own agent and he/she was out sick/vacation, Norton veterans could still receive telephone support from the Attleboro Veterans agent, which has been done in the past. He also noted that there would not need to be a secretary either because veterans could call the VSO directly.

Mr. Giblin said that the workload of the agents have increased because of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Mr. Giblin said that the Director's salary is \$80K, the Deputy Director's salary is \$66,500, and the other VSO's salary is \$45K.

Mr. Tarantino asked why there is such a big difference between the salaries. Mr. Giblin said that it was due to experience and training. Mr. Tarantino said that he has reservations that as they gain that experience and training they would be likely be requesting a significant increase in pay.

It was noted that there is no obligation for Norton to stay in the district, that it is a year-to-year contract. A discussion was had on what would be involved in going from the district back to having one agent for the town. Mr. DeLuca said that the state would help train a new VSO if needed. It was noted that the more experienced the agent is, the better – specifically in helping agents file forms. Mr. Rotondi said that he feels that 3 months training isn't enough time and that it may be a disservice to the vets. Mr. DeLuca disagreed. Mr. Helmreich said that he is torn in his decision on whether to go back to one agent or to stay in the district. Mr. Tarantino said that he feels that the overseers of the district have an obligation to review the cost effectiveness of the district annually.

Mr., Giblin explained that when the district started there were 2 VSOs, but then the work load increased and another was added, then the state required a secretary be employed as well. He said that there isn't any talk of expanding the district to any other towns.

Mr. Carignan asked Mr. Yunits whether the veterans of Norton would receive lesser services if the town voted less for the Veteran's budget. Mr. Yunits said that he would ask town counsel.

#610 Library – Mr. Helmreich suggested that the FinCom re-examine this budget and consider the additional \$16K the Library is requesting once more of the FY14 budget has been voted upon.

Motion was made by Mr. Flaherty to recommend \$345K for account #610-570 (Library – Charges and Expenditures). Seconded by Mr. DeLuca. Vote: All in favor. **Motion carries.**

#711 Maturing Debt –

Motion was made by Mr. Flaherty to recommend \$1,393,233 for account #711-590 (Maturing Debt – Maturing Principal on Long Term Debt). Seconded by Mr. DeLuca. Vote: All in favor. **Motion carries.**

Motion was made by Mr. Flaherty to recommend \$62,500 for account #711-594 (Maturing Debt – Repayment of Temporary Loans). Seconded by Mr. DeLuca. Vote: All in favor. **Motion carries.**

#750 Debt Interest –

Motion was made by Mr. Flaherty to recommend \$325,525 for account #750-590 (Debt Interest – Interest on Long Term Debt). Seconded by Mr. DeLuca. Vote: All in favor. **Motion carries.**

Motion was made by Mr. Flaherty to recommend \$111,032 for account #750-594 (Maturing Debt – Interest on Notes). Seconded by Mr. DeLuca. Vote: All in favor. **Motion carries.**

#911 Unemployment – Mr. Yunits reminded the FinCom that there are no layoffs planned for the School Department so this number can be lower than first thought. His recommendation is \$80K.

Motion was made by Mr. Flaherty to recommend \$80K for account #911-570 (Unemployment – Charges and Expenditures). Seconded by Mr. DeLuca. Vote: All in favor. **Motion carries.**

#940 Miscellaneous –

Motion was made by Mr. Flaherty to recommend \$165K for account #940-540 (Miscellaneous – Fuel Expenses). Seconded by Mr. DeLuca. Vote: All in favor. **Motion carries.**

Motion was made by Mr. Flaherty to recommend \$507,488 for account #940-570 (Miscellaneous – Charges and Expenditures). Seconded by Mr. DeLuca. Vote: All in favor. **Motion carries.**

- Annual Town Meeting Warrant Articles:

Capital – Ambulance Fund – Chief Schleicher addressed the FinCom regarding using the Ambulance fund to fund a brush/mini pumper and a hydraulic generator on the Capital Plan. He said that the equipment would in fact be used for rescue efforts. FinCom members felt that buying this equipment with Ambulance Fund money is going beyond the purpose of the Ambulance Fund. They would like to see these equipment purchases be made through Capital.

It was suggested that \$58K should be taken from the FY14 Fire Department budget and put into the general fund and that \$58K should come from the Ambulance Fund and be put into the Fire Department budget to be used for the purchase of the equipment. This suggestion was referred back to the Capital Improvements Committee.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for April 8, 2013 at 7:30 pm.

Adjournment

Motion was made by Mr. Carignan to adjourn at 9:50 pm. Seconded by Mr. DeLuca. Vote: Unanimous. **Motion carries.**

Documents Referenced: Minutes of April 1, 2013
Article 16 draft, with town counsel's comments
Article 18 draft
Charter School information handout from Dr. Martes

Respectfully Submitted by: _____

Lee Tarantino, Finance Committee Chair

Date Approved

Sara Lyons, Finance Committee Secretary