

Finance Committee Meeting
Thursday, February 26, 2015
Minutes

Chairman John F. Doherty called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Members present were Theresa M. Manganelli, Richard K. Hayden, Robert P. Palmer, William Wallace Excused: Bernard P. Nally Jr., Jonathan R. Eaton

Also Present: Jeffery Hull, Town Manager, Kendra Amaral, Assistant Town Manager

Veteran's Services:

PRESENT IN INTEREST: Louis Cimaglia, Veterans Agent

Mr. Cimaglia – Reviewed FY16 budget. Requested in this year's budget is a reclassification of the Directors position and a full time Veterans Service Officers. Explained the current employee Joe Downs has been working in the Veterans Office for six months.

The training conference budget has gone up. Veterans Agents have to be certified by the State in order for the community to continue to get the 75% reimbursement on benefits. They need to attend conferences and training, DVS will administer a test. Association has been fighting for years to get certification and wants everyone certified by October of this year. Certification has to be renewed every 3 years, and any new hire has six months to be certified.

Office supplies went little over this year because it did not include cell phone costs. Having the cell phone has helped. The Veterans staff sometimes get calls at night, on weekends, etc. The Wilmington Police department goes far and above surrounding city and towns on what they do with these kids; they are out there to get them help. Brief discussion on Tewksbury hiring a Director of Veteran's services and Reading starting their program.

Mr. Doherty – Asked if for new or returning Veterans if they see much drug use. Unfortunately its becoming a problem. The veterans are all banged up with injuries. Unfortunately the kids that are all banged up are on pain medications. They try to wean them off, but in some cases the VA just takes them off.

Mr. Cimaglia - The Veterans Office has a computer terminal, allows veterans to look for jobs.

Mr. Doherty - Asked if they are running into problems with our residents not getting proper treatment. They need help getting through the bureaucracy, that's where we come in. Brief discussion on drug abuse. Suicide rate still up. Approximately 22 suicides a day not including active duty members nationwide. The problems are not limited to drugs; its depression, PTSD, traumatic brain injuries. VA is great, they just overwhelmed, systems are older and not designed to handle it. VA has great detox facilities if you can get them to go. Program out in North Hampton, called Ward D, is strictly PTSD. Everyone who has gone there has gotten a lot out of it. We need more facilities. Veterans have to be clinically diagnosed with PTSD and sober to attend Ward D. Brief discussion on GI bill and the education they can get.

Mr. Doherty – Inquired if Veterans assistance reimbursements are coming in steadily. Every three months we get paid for last year's quarter. We do get reimbursed for some conferences. The funds into the General Fund.

Mr. McDonald – Stated that he understood it to be \$400,000 comes back to the Town. No, 25% of the 400,000 comes from tax payers.

Mr. McDonald – Asked who handles processing veteran aid. Veterans office. Brief discussion on how Reading and Wilmington are combined and the need to have one full time Veterans Director for Wilmington and one full time for Reading. Millions of dollars come into Wilmington to help residents. Explains how there are a lot of veterans in need due to the war and how additional employees are needed to handle this. Discussion how much a veteran can get in benefits and the application process. Brief discussion on taxpayers paying a 25% of the \$400,000.

Mr. McDonald – Makes a statement on how the government should pay 100% not 75%. Advised to contact the congressmen. No further questions.

Town Clerk:

PRESENT IN INTEREST: Ms. Sharon George, Town Clerk

Ms. George – Presented the books recently sent out for refurbishment. The records are from 1732, and have been refurbished and protected.

Mr. Doherty – Asked if these books stay at Town Hall. In the vault.

Mr. Wallace – Asked how the vault work is coming along. Expect to have it done in the summertime. The current conditions in vault are terrible.

Ms. Manganelli – Asked how many births occurred in an average year. Quite a few, they kept a good history of everything.

Reviewed FY16 budget. Budget includes next presidential primary in March 2016. The budget always includes money for a special town meeting. Memory packs have gone up for the voting machines, up on postage due to more censuses.

Mr. Doherty – Asked if there are a lot of voters that are renters. About 65%.

Mr. Wallace – Asked if there are any plans to move the census online. Not as of now. Brief discussion on census. The Secretary of State sets the process. Passports were up considerably. Turnaround for a passport is four to six weeks. The Town was recently evaluated by the state. We are doing everything we are supposed to do. Next year we are facing a lot of election laws changing. Presidential primary may start the change, with early voting 10 days prior to election. The Town will have to setup a polling booth at Town Hall. The state currently pays the Town for three extra polling hours; not sure if the new extra polling hours would increase the state reimbursement. The extra polling hours are only for Federal and State elections, not town.

Ms. Manganelli – Asked what the benefit is. This is the way 30 other States are voting. Laws in Massachusetts are strict, we have to have an in and out table, other states did away with the out table. 16 and 17 year olds can be pre-registered and kept in queue until 18. As of now when teens get a license there is a box that they can check off to vote, lots of problems with this, teens don't understand what they are checking off. This creates extra cost in elections, not sure if the mandates will be funded. There is a lot of going online; example death certificates are now online.

Mr. Doherty – Asked if you can get a birth certificate and pay for it online. Can do same day turnaround and pay for it.

Mr. McDonald – In regards to illegal alien or aliens, asked if the Clerk's office interacts with the police department. The Clerk's Office has no idea who is an illegal alien.

Historical Commission:

PRESENT IN INTEREST: Kathleen Black Reynolds, Chair of Historical Commission

Ms. Reynolds – Updated the committee on what they have done to try to save the Whitefield School. They had contractors come in to review the structure of the building. They found it was structurally sound. The Commission would like the building to be included in the Facility Master plan. The Commission cannot support the demolition of the building.

The Commission has been approached by the Chair of the School Committee to tour the Roman House building and see why it is not adequate for school administration. If School Administration needs a site, why not consider the Whitefield. Brief discussion on the Roman House being demolished or moved in the future. Brief discussion on the Historical Commission, the members, that they meet monthly, except July & August. They are very active and involved. There are only six members, with one seat vacant.

Brief discussion on Butters Farm and the lack of long or short term plan. There is an article on the warrant to sell the property. The Commission has exhausted all possible resources for Butters Farm. The best possible solution is for it to remain a single family residence, surplus it and sell it to a home buyer who can afford to renovate, live there or sell. Habitat for Humanity has come in, but the amount of work needed is outside their budget abilities.

Mr. Wallace – Asked if the Historical Commission provides to people who live in historical district or property, recommendations on how they can keep their property up, example doors, shutters. We send out a welcoming package to new residences who move into the historic district. Brief discussion on not being a full local Historic Commission, they do not have a say on what a homeowner does with their home, except the if they have a preservation easement like the Richardson Estate, and Butters Farm have. Discussion on limits of the Historical Commission. They have to sign the permit for demolition, but cannot stop a structure from coming down.

Mr. MacDonald – Has ideas, thoughts and comments would like to share, students that are tech savvy come up with great ideas, and asks if it would be wise for us to put an incentive program or scholarships to have them work on a design to save Whitefield School, so the Town doesn't have to come up with money from taxpayers. Regarding the Roman House, he would like to see an incentive or some type of action being taken with local developers, where if they have a vacant lot or house they are demolishing that is in close proximity, to move the Roman House. Where a developer moves the building and gets another piece of property in turn of giving up his land to move the house. Thinks this may be a way to save the Town's money. Asked how many square feet are in the Whitefield School.

Mr. Doherty – The Finance Committee did do a walk through last year of the Whitefield. It is in tough shape. They couldn't use stairs, ceiling falling down, there is asbestos and other issues.

Mr. McDonald – Regarding feasibility study not interested in my taxes to go up. Mr. Doherty – Taxes would not be going up, not a override on budget. Ms. Manganelli – Comments on how gracious Mr. Hooper was during the walk through of Whitfield School, he did not comment and did not try to influence either way. Discussion on developers being for profit and they would not come to save a building on their money.

Ms. Reynolds - There was an RFP put out to the population regarding Whitfield with zero response. Second comment, there does need to be more communication with Building Department. The Historic Commission needs to be more proactive, with historic resources. If there's a roof that needs to be repaired, let's work together to get grant money or raise money. Everything is time constraint with grants, we need to communicate better and proactive. We are all volunteer meeting once a month.

Mr. Wallace - Asked if there are public buildings or town owned property, why if deemed historical, doesn't the historical budget include for example roof repair. Example Harden Tavern's roof was in the budget. Certainly there are opportunity to have conversations with George and improve communication. They do a good job, trying to maintain Harden Tavern and public buildings, with limited resources.

Mr. Wallace - Major renovations become more sponsored by Historical if there is a building considered to be Historical in nature. Can come from either source, Historical Commission if they have recommendations on buildings and the conversation happens with himself or George, they are put on as Articles. Brief discussion on where funds should be recorded and used and the history of historic building that are currently being used.

Discussion on the need of a feasibility study of buildings.

Mr. Wallace - Asked why the vault has not been done, if funds are allocated. Public buildings are extremely busy and are doing a great job.

Ms. Reynolds - If there are funds available through grants Historical Commission will get it done, but Town may need to match, Commission is good at finding money, but they have time constraints. Roman House is a landmark in the Town. Discussion on if someone would be interested in Roman House, there is a process, Town owned, have to be deemed surplus. Commission would put best foot forward to have it moved, renovated etc, but need time to do this.

Ms. Manganelli – Regarding feasibility study, she does not want to have the study done, put on a shelf, then 10 years from now find that it is outdated and we need a new one.

Mr. Hull – Explained this is plan to address current and future needs.

Ms. Manganelli – If you need to do a study it needs to be a working study. Have done many studies in the past and had to do them over. Looking more of a business standpoint.

Mr. Hull – Typically larger business have a game plan, not focusing on the current needs and not understanding the consequences for the future. This document will evolve ever year

Ms. Manganelli - Asked when the last facility master study was done. It was just an architectural study. It was in late 1990's and addressed conditions of buildings, didn't talk about the use.

Mr. Wallace – Asked if it is in the Finance Committee realm, to say as part of the budget process, get a five year capital space plan document. Ms. Amaral - Capital improvement budget is incorporated. Out of the facility study some recommendations will ultimately be incorporated in the capital improvement plan, so we can target the next priority. Understands the frustration on studies that get put on a shelf but some are mandated to be done to be eligible for grants. If we approach the study as something we plan to use it will not collect dust.

Mr. Wallace – Believes should be made as an annual process and updated every year.

Other business:

Mr. Doherty - Last meeting prior to public meeting, Schools next week, got electronic copy of Shawsheen School, would like other members to get a copy. Would like to see the personal wages, schools, police, fire.

Mr. Doherty - Regarding benefits asked how do we stand within other communities. Are they in the same range. Town conducted a study on this with approximately 155 communities, varies anywhere from over 90% down to 50%.

Ms. Manganelli - Asked if when in negotiations does the Town negotiate changes in health. Example Companies are going much lower, example will pay 60% of insurance for individuals, if they have a family the employee has to pay the difference. Most recent change done a few years ago, deductible and co-pays, 12 different unions, used insurance advisory committee, bit of a challenge they don't speak on behalf of their unions, in this particular instance provisions of law that the state had adopted to allow cities and towns to implement changes in co-pays and deductions unilaterally. Selectmen would have to adopt this particular revision. Positive impact last couple of years, rates have gone up modestly, always have flux in health insurance. Have not had any recent conversation to the change of rate from 75-25%.

Ms. Manganelli – Asked what the deductible is. Major plan to get employees off Master Medical, no managed plan. Out of this process we were able to get folks out and into HMO and PPO. Looking to encouraging more people to move from PPO to HMO, rates and costs are better. We do have to offer PPO, the HMO Blue New England, covers people who live in NE States, if people were to move out of State need a to have a plan to offer them. Discussion on deductible and co-pays.

Mr. Doherty – Asked if retiree's that are still on the Town's health pay 25%. They do. It has been the practice that retirees pay the same as active employees. From a legal stand point, there is no legal obligation to bargain but have not chosen to do this.

Mr. Doherty – Asked if the we have checked on Blue Cross Blue Shield and how their service is. We get a lot of feedback, very positive.

Mr. Doherty – Basically they get a percentage of everything that goes through. Administration fee is flat rate per employee. Brief discussion on contracted rates from doctors and hospital that are set by insurance company.

Ms. Manganelli - Asked how often do we look at other health plans. We did it last year and look at them every couple of years. BCBS is most cost effective. Brief discussion on losses and prevention.

Mr. Wallace - When we talk any municipally or government health insurance and pensions, we need as citizens to force the same people under these plans to adopt major reform. Believe pension and health for government is out of control, 80% of pension doesn't exist anymore. Discussion on private and state pension funds percentage, how they don't receive social security and pension fund reform.

Mr. Hull – Provided an update on issues for FY15. Talked to Mike Woods on snow and ice total. To this point we will spend \$1,010,000, more than expected. Budget \$550,000 expecting \$400,000 but that at this point. Even if we don't get any more snow in the next 6-7 weeks, with the melting and freezing that will happen we will need to sand. Expect to spend additional funds during the remainder of the winter months.

Mr. Doherty – With the cold, asked how are we doing on the heating fuel. Looking at that as a possible offset.

There being no further business, a motion was made by William Wallace, seconded by Richard Hayden. Approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

The next meeting of the Finance Committee is scheduled for Tuesday, March 3, 2015.

Respectfully submitted,

Recording secretary