



Finance Committee and Town Council Meeting

5/12/2022, 9:00 AM

Virtual Meeting

Minutes

Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, this meeting was conducted via remote means.

1. Call to order, Review Agenda

Members participating remotely: Steinberg; Griesemer; Schoen; Miller; Walker; non-voting members: Hegner; Holloway; Kubiak

Members absent:

Others participating remotely: Town Manager Paul Bockelman; Town Councilor Ana Devlin Gauthier; Town Councilor Mandy Jo Hanneke; Town Councilor Pam Rooney; School Superintendent Michael Morris; ARPS Finance Director Doug Slaughter; School Committee Chair Allison McDonald; Recreation Department Marketing and Registration Coordinator Marion Jordan; Recreation Director Rey Harp; Finance Director Sean Mangano; Jones Library Director Sharon Sharry; Jones Library Board Member Bob Pam; Clerk of the Council Athena O'Keeffe; Minute Taker W. Kaizen

Steinberg declared the presence of a quorum, called the meeting to order at 9:02 am, confirmed all participants can hear and be heard, and announced audio and video recording

Griesemer declared the presence of a quorum of the Town Council, called the meeting to order at 9:08 am and confirmed Councilors could hear and be heard.

2. FY23 Budget Review: Schools

Morris reviewed the school budget documents in the packet; he said that they have worked to maintain level funding as well as current support levels as requested by the School Committee; McDonald said that they have worked not to make cuts to services; both discussed the use of ESSER funding to contribute to help cover cost escalations; Slaughter described the current state of union negotiations and how they have been covering staffing related costs; he said that ESSER funding will help carry the town through FY25; he noted that moving the 6th grade to the middle school should create some savings

Steinberg noted that the school committee and staff are a separate body that makes the final decisions about allocation of funds for the school system and that the Town Council doesn't earmark revenue for the schools

Griesemer asked how firm the \$32,000 reimbursement for covid-related sick time from the state included in the school budget is because she wants to understand what happens if that money doesn't come in; Mangano said that the town's budget is based on how the governor's budget projects state aid and that revenue isn't finalized until the fall; he added that covid reimbursement for sick time from state is a onetime program

Miller asked about Chapter 70 funding and Mangano generally described how the funding formula for this works and said that schools receive many other types of funding

Schoen asked if the school budget is higher than the one called for by the Town Manager or the same because of ESSER fund? Mangano said that the school budget document shows both; Bockelman noted that the Council votes the bottom-line budget and the School Committee decides how the money is spent

Holloway described his review of the school budget; he discussed how the budget might accommodate restoring cuts to art and technology staffing but reiterated that the Finance Committee should be focused on bottom-line budget

Schoen asked about elementary school choice revenues versus expenses and if we control school choice; she wondered if we can project the future savings for 6th grade move to cover restoring staffing cuts over the long term; Morris responded that, while he wants to reduce the budget balance related to school choice, the 6th grade transition cost savings are not clear yet; contract negotiations are also not finished and so he is being cautious about allocating potential extra money right now

Hanneke noted that the School Committee's budget did not follow Town Council's guidance and passed the final decision about the art and technology position back to the Council; she also noted that ESSER money is being used to avoid the Council's guidance because it inflates the school budget temporarily; she wants to know how this money is being spent, if it's being spent on COVID related things that will also go away, or if it's being used for other things; McDonald defended the decision to send the issue back to the Council as well as the School Committee's ability to meet town budget guidelines; Morris said that there are many COVID-related things that ESSER money is being used for, but it is also being used for other things

Rooney asked about the cost of moving the 6th grade and Morris responded that the Regional School Committee will need to figure out the details; Mangano said ARPA funds have already been budgeted to cover some of the planning costs for the move

Steinberg also asked about the cuts to art and technology moving forward and Morris said that while there are efficiencies to be had, especially after the new building is complete, there will be the same number of students in the district

Hanneke asked what happens if state aid goes up? Mangano said that if state aid is higher, it could offset a shortfall, or the town could do a supplemental appropriation; Kubiak said that looking at state cherry sheet, that more state aid is likely coming

Regarding the art and technology positions, Griesemer said that the School Committee must make final budget decisions, the Council will not tell it how to spend its money, it will just give it the money. Steinberg said that in the next couple of years, budgeting may well be even harder

3. FY23 Budget Review: Library

Sharry reviewed the library budget documents included in the packet, including her answers to the finance committee's questions

Kubiak asked about the four staff vacancies; Sharry said that they are not going to fill them for the next fiscal year; Kubiak asked about new software for accounting; Sharry said they use the Munis system for town-related funds, and that they were looking at QuickBooks for their other funds

Griesemer asked if the 4% drawn from the endowment this year is the same as in past? Sharry said yes; Bob Pam said 4% per year is the agreed sustainable level of making withdrawals from the endowment

Schoen asked how current losses in the market will affect the endowment; she also asked about cost escalation for the library construction project and how this will effect the construction plan; why the library didn't move special collections two years ago, and why buy shelves now when everything is going to need to be packed for storage soon? Sharry said that the shelving will be used at the North Amherst Library during the construction; re. cost escalation, the library will stick to the allocated budget and make whatever cuts are necessary; Pam said the endowment has fallen but not enough to endanger the new building project

Schoen asked if the MBLC can cover cost escalation and Sharry said no

Griesemer asked about storage space during construction and funds for moving; Sharry said they are budgeting for renting space beyond what is available in the other library buildings and from the town; also, they need to keep lending books, so books won't need to be stored;

Schoen asked about the use of the proposed North Amherst community room during the Jones Library renovation; Sharry said that they haven't decided yet how that room will be used.

4. FY23 Budget Review: Recreation, Cherry Hill, Pools

Harp reviewed the budget book pages on recreation; he said attendance numbers are moving back toward pre-COVID levels

Schoen asked if participation in adult education programs has diminished; Harp said that the numbers have been down but he wants to see this remain a focus; Jordan said that these numbers were already diminished before COVID; Harp said interest in adult sports is up.

Schoen asked about:

- the proposed pickleball courts and if they will be installed at Mill River
- instruction in both pickleball and tennis
- youth programs on golf course at zero or low cost
- the condition of the basketball courts near War Memorial Pool

Mangano responded by describing the various funds related to recreation.

Miller asked about the status of the needs assessment for the youth empowerment center; Harp said that it is in process.

Devlin Gauthier asked if the \$30,000 staff budget line covers full-time staffing at Cherry Hill; Harp said that yes, there is someone there at all hours when it's open; Jordan described how the staffing of the club house and maintenance staff works.

Members spoke in general support of having a strong Recreation Department.

Harp said that they are facing challenges for summer hiring.

Steinberg asked if numbers were falling historically because kids are spending more time on computers; Harp said that anecdotally youth sports numbers are way down; regular camp numbers are stable and currently full, sports camps are not; Steinberg also asked if there was currently enough money to cover subsidies for low income families; Jordan said yes for both regular programs and after school programs; Harp said that they need to advertise the subsidies more; Kubiak suggested calling it a contribution not a fee

5. Public Comment

Lauren Mills, South Amherst, Board of Health member, spoke about the basketball court conditions as well as including members of the public more in discussions about opportunities for youth recreation in Amherst

6. Items not anticipated by the Chair 48 Hours in advance

None

7. Announcements and next agenda preview

Next meeting: 5/12/22

8. Adjourn

Steinberg declared the meeting adjourned at 11:54 am

Minutes prepared by W. Kaizen

Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented:

05-12-2022 Finance Committee Agenda

FY23 Fin Com Additional Library Questions

FY23 Jones Library Budget Request Presentation 5-12-22

FY23AmherstBudgetDocumentProposal_02.08.2022 (1)

FY23ExpenseBudget_AsVotedByAmherstSchoolComm_03292022

FY23ExpenseBudgetUpdate_03292022

Response to Resident Questions 3-25-22

Why We Need a Head of Young Adult Services at Jones Library 3-18-22