

Williamstown Finance Committee

March 23, 2022

Minutes

Members present: Michael Sussman, Charles Fox, Paula Consolini, Melissa Cragg, Dan Caplinger, Fred Puddester, and Beth Goodman. Absent: Doris Karampatsos and Elaine Neely.

The Finance Committee meeting began at 7pm with the resumption of the Public Works hearing, with Chris Lemoine, the Director, presenting. Included in the budget book were detailed projections for capital expenditures for Public Works and Enterprise Funds for fiscal years 2023, 2024, 2025, and beyond.

Total FY23 capital for all public works departments including facilities, highway, parks, plus the new lighting for the public library total \$467,600. This includes engineering services related to the Hart Landfill and road repairs to Front Street, John Street, Manning Street, and Brook Road. It also includes, if available at a reasonable price, replacement of a 17-year-old 4X4 pickup truck hopefully with an electric vehicle (consistent with our town's carbon neutral objective), replacement of a 13-year-old double cab pickup truck, and replacement of a 12-year-old commercial mower. Notably, town capital expenditures for public works' departments are expected to rise in future years to \$834,000 in FY24, \$1,244,000 in FY25. These plans include continued road repairs which are prioritized based on traffic levels, condition of road, and water and sewer repair plans. Items of size in FY24 and FY25 include replacement of the DPW roof and Cole Avenue repairs.

Discussion turned to the Enterprise Funds. Sewer plans \$411,000 in repairs focused particularly on Hoosac River bank stabilization and sewer line relocation, lift station rehab at Simonds Road, and replacements of a 12-year-old truck/crane with costs shared 50/50 between water and sewer. Sewer expenditures which have run at over \$400,000 annually for the past several years are expected to drop to something closer to \$100,000 annually. Acknowledged however were those unexpected items such as weather related events affecting riverbanks affect this number significantly.

Conversation moved on to Water. When Chris originally prepared the capital plans, he expected repair of well two to commence in 2024. Conditions warrant moving this up a year to 2023. Costs are estimated at \$1.5 million. This repair has been planned and funds are available in free cash to pay for it. A special warrant article will be prepared for this item. Another \$191,000 in other well cleaning, the aforementioned truck/crane shared with Sewer is planned.

[As an aside, Charlie Blanchard pointed out that it is actually the FinCom that currently serves as the Town's Capital Planning Committee, though in principle it would probably be better to have a

committee consisting of Dept heads as the Capital Planning Comm. (But Charlie hastened to acknowledge that he was completely happy with the outcome of the FinCom work so far.) We should defer any revision of this current arrangement until the arrival of a new Town Manager, deferring to his judgment with respect to the procedure. Caplinger added that the Fincom needs to have some input into the Cap Planning process, and not just the Dept Heads. Puddester added that, since prioritization is a critical issue in this area, this may be the main place where the FinCom has some ongoing role to play in this process.

We turned next to the Human Services budget (p.88), with Brian O'Grady presenting the issues. He explained that the \$30K proposal for Mental Health Consultants is simply 'ball-parking' since no one quite knows what to expect. And the electric increase on p. 89 is in the same category; but everyone is contending with this uncertainty. The cell phone addition on p. 90 is to eliminate the usage of personal cell phones. There ended the discussion of Human Services.

Anna Osborn presented Veteran Services' budgets about which there were no questions.

The David and Joyce Milne Public Library budget (p.93ff) was presented by Library Director Pat McLeod. Dan Caplinger reminded the committee that his wife worked at the library but that he has received approval from the Town Moderator to participate in consideration of the library budget. There is a big increase in the Administrative Assistants line, which has largely been a function of the impact of Covid on the delivery of services. But the incorporation of these assistant services also means that there is a \$10K reduction of wages in line #51132. But this shift further plays into the big increase of \$46K in line 51122. We have to spend 19% of the budget on books, media, and the like, but there was a Covid-related decline in this expense during the period from FY20 to FY21. So, we now have a \$10K increase proposed for FY23. Renovations to the Library are all being funded by user donations and the income from the bookstore on Spring St. So that is why the Town budget in this area is so low.

Next on the agenda was the report on the work of the CPC, provided by Melissa Cragg (since the Chair, Phil McKnight, could not be present). The CPC starts its annual work in late November and works toward final decisions in late January. There were four applications this year for the money generated by the 2% surcharge on our tax bills. Including an estimated \$75,000 from the State, total receipts are expected to total about \$350,000. Of this \$100,000 is paid in debt service related to prior funding of Cable Mills leaving \$250,000. Four new appropriations will be recommended to Town Meeting by the CPC. Recommended will be \$100,000 for the Affordable Housing Trust which will be shared with Habitat for Humanity. Recommended will be \$50,000 for historic renovations for the Meetinghouse project Recommended will be another \$400,000 for Phase III at Cable Mills paid over several years and possibly requiring a small debt issuance by the town. And finally, recommended for the Store at Five Corners was \$50K, in the category of historic preservation. Every vote was unanimous except for the last one, which was a response to the fact that they had already raised so much money from within the community. Hence, the question was raised, if they have so much money, why should they get any CPC money? The answer was that an endowment fund had to be created from the money previously raised in order to provide for the continued maintenance of the building. CPC recommendations are presented to the

town meeting by that committee with recommendations to either support or decline by the Finance Committee, Select Board and possibly others. We will vote on these at our April 6 meeting.

The Committee moved onto the last item on the agenda which was completion of discussion of Article 37. Paula Consolini let this portion of the discussion. The Finance Committee has been asked by the DIRE committee about how, in our budget review process, we might address the concerns of Art. 37 adopted by the Town Annual Meeting. Puddester pointed out that we have a good Affordable Housing Comm working on the issues of accessibility and inclusion. It was pointed out by another person that, although the FinCom is only an advisory committee, we could ask the Affordable Housing Comm whether they had any special needs in this area which could be addressed by the additional money they had originally requested from the CPC. Someone else suggested that the next time we have a FinCom vacancy, we could ask DIRE if they had any member who was interested in serving on the FinCom, and we could then recommend that person to the Town Moderator for appointment to the Committee. Paula will prepare a Finance Committee response to the DIRE Committee including our first quarterly report.

Blanchard will give us an update on the final figures for the FY23 budget proposal before our next meeting, scheduled for Mar 30, when we will also hear the school budget proposal for FY23. The week after that we will review the warrant articles and vote on the ones that are relevant to our financial concerns. We will meet next week at 6pm to try to settle all the remaining issues, so that we can indeed vote on the warrant articles a week later as the sole remaining item of business for this year's work.

A motion to adjourn was made at 9:30pm and, not surprisingly, was unanimously approved.

(Minutes prepared by Charles Fox)
