

March 15, 2021 Minutes
Town of Sharon Finance Committee Meeting

Present: Daniel Lewenberg, Patricia-Lee Achorn, Anja Bernier, William Brack, Arnold Cohen, Brian Collins, Charles Goodman, Ann Keitner, Ira Miller, Jada Wang.

Not Present: Gordon Gladstone.

Also present: Krishan Gupta, Fred Turkington

1. Dan Lewenberg, Chair, Gave Opening Remarks

- a. This meeting is being held through the Zoom online platform due to the State of Emergency based on the COVID-19 outbreak.

2. Brief Priorities Committee Recap – Dan Lewenberg

- a. Successful debt issuance of \$24,495,000 with an interest rate of 1.351%, includes refinancing of \$10 million of existing debt.
- b. S&P Global ratings on March 5 stable at AA. Will post ratings on the Finance Committee website, encourage Committee members to read.

3. Personnel Board Presentation – Paul Pietal

- a. The Personnel Board Committee determines the minimum and maximum for salaries. This coming fiscal year adjusted 2.11% for salary range minimum and maximum limits.
- b. Search process starting soon for Police Chief. The Deputy Police Chief will be the interim Police Chief after he retires April 30. Deputy Police Chief will be 65 next year so he is not eligible for the position.
- c. Mr. Pietal will double check Town salary raises are not above 3.5%.
- d. Discussion regarding reducing the maximum salary for the Police Chief new hire. Town employees at the maximum of their range:
 - a. Fire Chief salary: \$157,106.45
 - b. Police Chief salary: \$175,154.00
 - c. Assistant to the Town Administrator: \$98,977
 - d. Town Engineer: \$122,144.00.

4. Newly Added Annual Town Meeting Article – Gas Utility Easement for the High School – Peter O’Cain

- a. The new high school has a main that was installed by Eversource. They have since asked for a 20-foot-wide easement for it. It is on Town property at 181 Pond Street and therefore must be voted on at Town Meeting.
- b. Typically, the utility pays for a survey. Surveys are preferred over drawn plans for future use. Need to have a survey or plan that is recorded in the registry of deeds. If Eversource does not pay for the survey, then the schools will have to. There is no current cost estimate for this.

5. Town Clerk Salary Determination

- a. A letter on the completed election work from Mark Hogan, Town Clerk, was emailed to the Committee.
- b. Working on determining a fair salary for this position. Could prorate the \$5,000 salary bump for the portion of the certification credit Mr. Hogan has completed and give the second half next year once he has completed the entire certification.
- c. Committee discussed that the overtime spent during the election cycle is reflective of an ongoing issue and may need to be addressed by hiring a part-time seasonal worker under the Select Board budget.

Motioned: by Anja Bernier, **Seconded:** Ira Miller, to recommend approval of the salary proposed for the Town Clerk as described by the Committee Chair. **Voted:** 9-0-1. Charles Goodman abstained.

6. Vote Town Meeting Articles:

- a. Article 2- Name change to Select Board:

Motioned: by Anja Bernier, **Seconded:** Ann Keitner, to recommend approval of special legislation to change the name of the Board of Selectmen to the Select Board. **Voted:** 10-0-0.

- b. Article 3 - Conveyance of Town land of 4600 sf at 20 Briar Hill Road to abutter at 18 Briar Hill Road for the water tower project. Abutter will pay all costs at approximately \$3500, which will go to the Town:

Motioned: by Patricia-Lee Achorn, **Seconded:** Ann Keitner, to recommend approval of the conveyance of land at 18 Briar Hill Road. **Voted:** 9-0-1. Jada Wang abstained.

- c. Article 8 – Norfolk County Retirement annual assessment:

Motioned: by Arnold Cohen, **Seconded:** Patricia-Lee Achorn, to recommend approval for an authorized appropriation of \$4.2 million, an increase of 3.9%, to the Norfolk County Retirement Fund. **Voted:** 10-0-0.

- d. Article 9 - To recommend to appropriate \$300,000 of funding for the Unemployment Fund, representing an increase of \$225,000 or 300%. The Committee decided to vote on this article at a future meeting.
- e. Article 10 – To recommend to appropriate \$400,000 to the Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) Trust Fund.

Motioned: by Anja Bernier, **Seconded:** Ann Keitner, to recommend appropriation of \$400,000 to the OPEB Trust Fund. **Voted:** 10-0-0.

- f. Article 11 – To fund \$50,000 for the assessor inspection and evaluation services budget.

Motioned: by Ira Miller, **Seconded:** Anja Bernier, to recommend authorization of \$50,000 to fund the assessor inspection and evaluation services. **Voted:** 10-0-0.

- g. Article 12 – Annual Audit Appropriation:

Motioned: by Ira Miller, **Seconded:** Patricia-Lee Achorn, to recommend authorization of \$59,000 to pay the costs associated with the Town audit. **Voted:** 10-0-0.

- h. Article 13 – Revolving Fund Authorization:
 - a. This article is to recommend authorization for revolving funds for FY22. No requests for changes from the previous year. Committee decided to vote on this article at a future meeting after they can review the balances and a table for each fund.

- i. Article 14 – Property Tax Exemptions:

Motioned: by Ira Miller, **Seconded:** Patricia-Lee Achorn, to recommend authorization to the Board of Assessors to grant state exemptions for FY22 for specific categories of veterans and their survivors including individuals with disabilities, the legally blind and qualifying elderly. **Voted:** 10-0-0.

j. Article 15 – Act on Reports:

Motioned: by Anja Bernier, **Seconded:** Patricia-Lee Achorn, to recommend authorizing action to be taken on reports. **Voted:** 10-0-0.

k. Article 16 – Sharon Friends School Fund Records and Appointments:

Motioned: by Ann Keitner, **Seconded:** Anja Bernier, to recommend acceptance of records and appointments. **Voted:** 10-0-0.

l. Article 17 – Authorize participation in the Community Septic Management Program:

- a. This article would authorize increments of \$100,000 up to a total of \$500,000. Intention is to get the authorization in place to use over subsequent years as necessary. There are two residents currently who want to utilize the program. Eligibility guidelines including income limits will be determined by the Board of Health but has not yet been defined. Committee decided to vote this at a later date.

m. Article 20 – Special legislation to increase the membership on the Select Board from 3 to 5:

- a. The Select Board did not meet to discuss this yet and may not be unanimous on their vote. Committee discussed that there are limitations with having such a small board and for a quorum, and that it would make sense to have a larger, more diverse board. Surrounding peer towns have either 3 or 5 members on their Select Boards.

Motioned: by Anja Bernier, **Seconded:** Ann Keitner, to recommend authorizing the Select Board to file a home rule petition to the general court of the Commonwealth seeking the enactment of a special act by which the number of members of the Town Select Board will be increased from 3 to 5. **Voted:** 10-0-0.

n. Update on the library article:

- a. Fred Turkington discussed that the Select Board declined to submit an article to take any portion of property by eminent domain. Also voted down including as a placeholder an article that would change the zoning of the 1 School Street site. This leaves few days remaining to finalize buying property from one of the abutters.
- b. Town meeting is Sunday May 2nd at 1 PM outdoors at the middle school.
- c. Encourage Committee members to watch the Select Board meeting online to get an idea of the status of the project.
- d. All principals for the project including Gordon Gladstone, the architect, OPM, library trustees, Town Administrator, Select Board and Town council discussed articles and status of the project and agreed to retain a library program specialist to do a peer review of which the outcome will be shared with the ZBA. The ZBA, based on that document, could potentially modify their position.
- e. Also discussed timeline for moving from 75% to 100% design documents, which is the next milestone in this project with a deadline of August 1. MBLC does not want to modify the project scope, but they may be willing to extend the design deadline because that time could be made up in the bid process. April 24 is a deadline for the architect to spend the funds in the building process to finish the designs.

- f. Making a last ditch effort to purchase property from the Freemans and to engage a specialist in the next 4-6 weeks. All parties are committed to getting this project approved.
- g. If this is not settled, the Town is authorized to borrow approximately \$10.5 million of which \$1.3 million has been spent so far. \$930,000 is from a state grant which would have to be repaid. That would leave \$9 million to spend on this project which would be insufficient. Would have to go back to Town for a vote to rescind, and the funds could potentially be reappropriated to the high school project.

7. Liaison updates:

- a. Schools - Ann Keitner
 - a. School Committee approved their budget as presented last week.
 - b. Extending an offer to Peter Botelho for the position of Superintendent of Schools. He has accepted an offer to negotiate.
 - c. Ms. Keitner will be asking Dr. Dussault and Mr. Aghayev for a further breakdown and details of financial information for this Committee. Committee members should submit to Ms. Keitner any specific items they would like included.
 - d. School committee leadership has changed. Judy Crosby is no longer the chair of the School Committee. Adam Shain is the new chair, and Veronica Weisman is the vice-chair.
 - e. Per the Department of Primary and Secondary Education the elementary schools are going to offer full time either remote or in person starting April 5, the middle school will start April 28, and the high school is still undecided for their full time start date.
- b. Library – Charles Goodman
 - a. Trustees meeting later this week.
- c. Planning Board – Arnold Cohen
 - a. No updates.
- d. Standing Building Committee - Gordon Gladstone
 - a. No updates.
- e. Community Preservation Committee - Patricia-Lee Achorn
 - a. This committee has not met again. Ms. Achorn drafted a write-up and has circulated to Cory Snow. They have to vote their budget by next week and are waiting for bonds to cover Rattlesnake Hill.

8. Topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chair in 48 hours

9. Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned through unanimous consent at 9:35 pm.