March 09, 2020 Minutes

Town of Sharon Finance Committee Meeting

**Present:** Daniel Lewenberg, Patricia-Lee Achorn, Anja Bernier, William Brack, Gordon Gladstone, Charles Goodman, Ann Keitner, Ira Miller, Edward Philips and Anil Ramoju.

**Not Present:** Arnold Cohen.

Also present: Krishan Gupta, Director of Finance and Fred Turkington, Town Administrator.

1. **Paul Patel of the Personnel Board reviewed Article 4: Personnel By-Law for the Personnel Board’s Recommendation on Executive Salaries:**
   1. The Personnel Board met in February 2020 to review executive salaries, which will be printed in the warrant.
   2. There are few personnel by-laws, and they include how employees can transfer sick days from one year to the next and salary caps.
   3. The Personnel Board’s role is to meet monthly, perform the duties according to the by-law, and review executive salary compensation such as for the Town Administrator’s staff.
   4. The Board makes sure they see fairness in the ratings and then provide concurrence or not. This year concurrence is unanimous.
   5. The Personnel Board will conduct a survey this fall for July 2022 salaries.
   6. Intention for salary caps is to set them 10% over the maximum at the outset. Four employees are impacted by salary caps this year. No bonuses are given. Some employees are near the cap due to their experience and expertise.
   7. Fred Turkington, Town Administrator, and Committee members discussed that the maximum cap for the Police Chief is more than $20,000 above that of the Fire Chief, and how this is due to the marketplace and that Police Chiefs typically have college degrees.
   8. Merit increase is typically 2 ½%, and most employees are given a cost of living increase.
   9. Salary surveys historically were done annually and were less comprehensive. Now the salary surveys are much more comprehensive and include benefit information to ensure they are comparable. The upcoming salary survey this fall will be the second comprehensive one the Town has done.
   10. The wording of the article is completed, but 5 of the nine unions are still in negotiations and may not settle by April when the warrant goes to print. This is typical. Union negotiations revolve around a range of issues, not just salary.
   11. The Finance Committee discussed waiting to vote on this article.
2. **Review Proposed FY2021 Library Budget** – Cheryl Weinstein, Chair of Library Trustees:
   1. The only salary change in the Library’s budget is for Lee Ann Amend’s salary.
   2. Majority of the budget is level funded. Salaries are higher based on longevity.
   3. The library is requesting an increase of $300 for postage.
   4. OCLN dues have decreased due to a reduction in fees. Full usage statistics are online.
   5. The budget includes step increases for staff, typically of 1.5%. There was one staff member whose hours increased when they went from part-time to full-time.
   6. Actual legal spending for 2019 was $3,000 due to the legal fees of the new library. The library won’t be responsible for these fees going forward.
   7. Committee members discussed that the library is probably right-sizing its budget, but that this is the second year in a row that it is coming in above the Priorities budget limit. Other Town departments have come in on budget after making tough staffing and other choices, and the Committee strongly recommends to the library that they work to come in at budget in the future.
   8. The value of the library was discussed. Cheryl stated that for every dollar spent there is $7.38 value based on what the cost would be to taxpayers if they had to buy books, pay for services, etc. Committee members discussed that other Town departments can’t necessarily calculate their value, such as for the cost of an ambulance ride or a good quality education. Every department has to make painful cuts to stay within their budgets.
   9. Some departments, other than the library, have also come in above budget. Overall budget targets were met.
   10. There is an earned time schedule for employees. Employees who have perfect attendance for a calendar month are paid earned time. Budgeted in 2020 significantly less than the three-year average. Payment for earned time is made in the first half of the budget year.
   11. Grant funding for the library was discussed. Grants are of differing amounts and are typically for programming. Committee members encouraged library staff to include staffing expenses for events in their grant applications.
3. **Library Programming & New Library Update** - Cheryl Weinstein, Chair of Library Trustees:
   1. The new library will not require an increase to personnel. There may be an increase to custodial salaries, as it will be larger. Utilities may increase due to the larger size of the building, or they may decrease depending on efficiency.
   2. Lee Ann Amend was selected as one of 50 librarians across the country to participate in a library veteran’s forum.
   3. Although some abutters to the new library have concerns, library staff have also been hearing from other abutters and neighbors that they are excited for the new library. There will be a meeting tomorrow night to hear concerns.
   4. For the library to secure the promised grant monies construction must begin by July of 2021. The Historic Commission, which is currently reviewing the paperwork, can delay demolition for up to one year if they feel there are assets at the existing building worth saving. The building itself could be bought and moved, or elements of the exterior building such as doors could be sold.
   5. The Zoning Board has to approve certain variances for the project to proceed because it is in a residential area.
   6. The by-law states that the Historic Commission must hold a hearing, and that they have 14 days to make a determination after receiving the paperwork which was submitted to them recently.
4. **Vote Pro Forma Annual Town Meeting Articles:**
   1. Article 1 - Appoint Finance Committee members and Nominating Committee of the Finance Committee members:
      1. The Committee will not vote on this article but wishes to thank the nominating committee for their work.
   2. Article 2 – Act on Reports:

**Motioned:** by Edward Philips **Seconded:** Ann Keitnerto recommend approval of Article 2 **Voted:** 9-0-1. Charles Goodman abstained.

* 1. Article 3 – Sharon Friends School Funds Records & Appointments:

**Motioned:** by Edward Philips **Seconded:** William Brackto recommend approval of Article 3 **Voted:** 9-0-1. Charles Goodman abstained.

* 1. Article 8 – Norfolk County Retirement Annual Assessment:
     1. Assessment cost of $4,087,106 at a 6.3% increase. The Committee expressed concerns over ever increasing funds.

**Motioned:** by Edward Philips **Seconded:** Anja Bernierto recommend approval of Article 8 **Voted:** 10-0-0.

* 1. Article 9 – Unemployment Fund.
     1. Will allow the Town to appropriate $9,000 to the unemployment fund. There is a balance currently in this fund, there is no deficit.

**Motioned:** by Edward Philips **Seconded:** William Brackto recommend approval of Article 9 **Voted:** 10-0-0.

* 1. Article 10 – Funding Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) Trust Fund:
     1. This represents a 42.8%, or $150,000, increase from last year’s funding. Paying more into this fund will help facilitate the Town to have discounted rates and better bond ratings in the future.

**Motioned:** by Edward Philips **Seconded:** William Brackto recommend approval of Article 10 **Voted:** 7-2-1. Gordon Gladstone and Ira Miller dissented. Charles Goodman abstained.

* 1. Article 11 – Funding Assessor Inspection Services. This represents pre-funding for the large assessment that is done every three years.

**Motioned:** by Edward Philips **Seconded:** Anja Berneirto recommend approval of Article 11 **Voted:** 9-0-1. Charles Goodman abstained.

* 1. Article 12 – Annual Audit Appropriation.
     1. Krishan Gupta, Director of Finance, will send committee members a copy of the report. Budgeted $59,000 for FY21, which is a decrease of 7.81% primarily due to bringing fixed asset accounting in-house. Mr. Gupta’s budget increased slightly in order to do this, but by less than half of the amount of the recovered costs.

**Motioned:** by Edward Philips **Seconded:** Anja Bernierto recommend approval of Article 12 **Voted:** 10-0-0.

* 1. Article 13 – Revolving Fund Authorizations:
     1. This is to authorize each of the revolving funds for FY21.There is a slight increase for the Counsel on Aging (COA) budget and Recreation. More revenue is coming in.
     2. Committee members decided to wait to vote on this article until seeing the tables.
  2. Article 14 – Property Tax Exemptions:
     1. Would grant the Board of Assessors the authorization to give estate tax exemptions to residents such as those that are legally blind.

**Motioned:** by Edward Philips **Seconded:** Anja Bernierto recommend approval of Article 14 **Voted:** 10-0-0.

* 1. Patricia-Lee Achorn stated she will correct the numbers for Article 10 and recirculate to the committee with additional comments.

1. Liaison Updates:
   1. Sharon Schools - William Brack, Ann Keitner
      1. Discussed that Dr. Greer, Superintendent of Schools, has sent steady updates on COVID-19 to parents of school children. She was intending to hold her Schools State of the Union meeting tonight but will instead broadcast it on Sharon TV tomorrow morning in an effort to reduce exposure.
      2. A COVID-19 event has been communicated to school students and parents. A spouse of a middle school teacher is presumed positive for the virus, although she hasn’t been tested by the CDC. Children of the affected family have been attending school and there was an event Friday night that the family attended. All those present at the event have been contacted. School trips have not been cancelled as of yet, although some parents are choosing to not let their children attend these.
      3. The CDC has clear travel alerts that are constantly updated. The School Committee is paying close attention to these and using them as guidelines.
      4. Schools will continue with increased cleaning regimens and other strategies to reduce exposure. Six hours were spent on Sunday decontaminating the Cottage Street School.
      5. Committee noted that there will be various departments across the Town who will have increased spending on cleaning and decontamination because they are public spaces.
   2. Planning Board - Arnie Cohen
      1. No update given as Arnie Cohen was not present at the meeting.
   3. Standing Building Committee - Gordon Gladstone:
      1. Standing Building Committee started yesterday to set up a website controlled by them through the Town’s website that will post documents to facilitate the sharing of information related to the building projects.
   4. Library - Charles Goodman:
      1. No additional updates.
2. **Minutes to be Voted: March 2,2020**

Change to meeting minutes: Charles Goodman’s name will be added to the library liaison update.

**Motioned to approve minutes as amended by the chair:** by Anja Bernier **Seconded:** Patricia-Lee Achorn to approve the March 6, 2020 minutes **Voted:** 9-0-1. Anil Ramoju abstained.

# Topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chair in 48 hours:

* 1. Fred Turkington stated there is no update as to when the marijuana dispensary will open.
  2. Mr. Turkington will send the warrant articles to committee members, and Mr. Gupta will send out the tables and last year’s write-ups.
  3. Dan Lewenberg, Finance Committee chair, will follow up with the School Committee to get the full-time employee (FTE) schedule that was discussed previously.

# Adjournment:

**Motioned:** by Anja Bernier **Seconded:** Patricia-Lee Achorn to adjourn **Voted:** 10-0-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:13 pm.