

**Finance Committee ~ Minutes of Meeting
Tuesday, April 22, 2003
Fairbanks Senior Center - 7:30pm**

Present: Co-Chairs Michael Grosberg & Tracy Billig, Sheila Stewart, Bob Jacobson, Bob Hurstak, Marty Ragonas, Larry Rowe, Don Hutchinson, John Nikula, Shauna Simmonds, Bill Kneeland. Also present: Maureen Valente, Town Manager, Robin Porcella, Recording Secretary, Selectmen Larry O'Brien & Kirsten Roopenian, SPS School Committee members, LSRHS School Committee members, Pauline Paste, LSRHS Business Manager

Opening remarks from Co-Chairs:

Co-Chair Tracy Billig opened the meeting at 7:35pm. She informed the audience that there would not be a discussion held on Article 54 at tonight's meeting, but members would be available to answer questions after meeting.

Item 1: Introduction of new members:

New members of the Finance Committee are Shauna Simmonds and William Kneeland. Co-Chair Tracy Billig reminded the committee that the new members could participate in the discussions, but cannot vote until after the Annual Town Meeting comes to a conclusion.

Item 2: Update / Impact of K-8 and LSRHS Employment Contract Settlements:

LSRSH: presented by Renel Frederickson, School Committee Chair

Renel Frederickson stated that she was part of the negotiation committee, and that this complicated negotiation began last May. The main issue facing them, was that the high school is not very competitive in regards to the salaries being offered. The bottom of the salary grid is more competitive than the top. The LSRHS school committee believes this is not a generous contract. She reminded the committee that during the fiscal crisis of 1991, the teachers took a pay cut and then the difference was never made up in the following years.

The school is facing layoffs, no matter what is done. There will be larger class sizes, and teachers will be expected to teach longer days.

Sheila Stewart stated she would like to know what benefits are offered to the other Towns that were used to do the salary comparison against.

Larry Rowe stated we are trying to get to an "average" salary rating compared to the other Towns. LSRHS is not the lowest paid, but we just do not want to be the worst paid school system.

SPS (K-8): presented by Bill Braun, SPS School Committee

Bill Braun stated that the SPS School Committee took a one year approach. Teachers who are due step increases, will get a 1% increase while Teachers who are maxed out will get a 3% increase. The net impact for just a year is a little less than 2%. The committee has not determined the number of positions that are to be lost. The committee will begin negotiations again in the fall or early next year. The only way to currently keep positions, is to limit salary increases.

Marty Ragones asked how the Town's negotiations were going. Town Manager, Maureen Valente stated no employees will be getting a Cost of Living increase, except for the Engineering and Highway Departments due to contract requirements. She stated that a lot of employees are maxed out. In order to give a Cost of Living increase, positions would need to be eliminated.

Item 3: Discussion on FY2004 Budget and time line for next town meeting:

Town Manager, Maureen Valente, stated she is allocating \$1,000,000 in cuts. She believes this should be the worst scenario. The only other problem would be if the figures came in exceeding one million. Maureen Valente reminded everyone that we are working on the worst case scenario, and that it is possible we might not even need to cut \$1,000,000.

Maureen Valente went over the time frame for tasks to be complete to prepare for the May 21 Town Meeting continuance.

Sheila Stewart asked if we were not considering an override before, why are we considering it now. Larry Rowe stated that the State Aid cuts were worst than expected, and the people's opinions have changed.

Dates for future meetings:

May 6 - Budget Hearing. Each cost center is to be given a half hour to present their budgets.

May 8 - Deliberation

May 12 - Possible joint meeting with the Board of Selectmen

John Nikula asked if it could be clarified as to what will be done with Minuteman. Bob Hurstak stated it should be separate and stand alone. Maureen Valente said she would wait, and work on Minuteman at the end.

Sheila Stewart asked when the definite figures would be available. Maureen Valente stated the figures would be received sometime tomorrow. It would then take her about a day to review them. She is hoping to have the figures committed by Friday.

Item 5: Article 54 - Special Act - Senior Citizen Real Estate Tax Exemption

A resident of Sudbury asked how the Town Charter could be changed, so that so much time would not be spent on an article like this in the future, knowing that it will not be past by the State Legislature. Co-Chair Michael Grosberg informed the resident that this is a discussion that would need to be taken up with the Board of Selectmen. Michael Grosberg offered to introduce the resident to two of the selectmen who were present at the end of the meeting.

John Nikula asked if the reconsideration failed, is there any other way for this to get approved. Selectmen Kirsten Roopenian insisted that there is no way that this will pass. Kirsten Roopenian informed the committee that Maureen Hafner, Director of Assessing, had additional information that was not allowed to be presented at the April Town Meeting.

Shauna Simmonds stated she was waiting for the Finance Committee to discuss the flaws in Ralph Taylor's presentation. When she was at the April Town Meeting, she was wondering if this really was a "win – win" situation as Ralph stated it would be.

Michael Grosberg asked the committee how do we inform the citizens of Sudbury about our position? Bob Jacobson stated we should inform the citizens of when & where the vote will place. Marty Ragones liked the idea of a letter being included in the Town Crier.

Selectmen Kirsten Roopenian reminded the committee that if Article 54 was to get passed by the Town and the State Legislature, that this would have a negative impact on the Town's bond rating.

There being no further business, the committee adjourned at 9:30pm.