

Town of Sudbury ~ Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting
Monday – September 15, 2008
Grange Hall – 7:00pm

Present: Chair Chuck Woodard, Jamie Gossels, Bob Jacobson, Bill Kneeland, Marty Ragonas, Jim Rao, Sheila Stewart, and Debbie Zurka

Item 1: Approve Minutes:

Chuck Woodard stated that had had previously emailed his recommended corrections.

VOTED: To approve the minutes of the July 14, 2008 meeting. On vote, motion carries 6 in support, 0 opposed, and 2 absent (Jacobson, Stewart).

Item 2: Transfers & Other Business:

There were no transfers to be voted on.

Item 3: FY10 Budget Strategy:

Chuck Woodard stated that the objective was to decide whether or not to impose Spending Growth Limits. He stated that the committee would welcome the publics' input. Because of the size of the audience it was asked the audience members try to limit their comments to one minute.

Chuck Woodard stated that he believes there should be a spending growth limit over the next three years. This way, the limit will coincide with contract negotiations. The limit should be set at 4.5%. He reminded everyone that the FinCom has no say in any of the contract negotiations. The proposed spending limit could be adjusted year to year depending on student enrollment figures or other uncontrollable factors. He stated the FinCom limits will not result in position cuts if negotiations stay within the modest levels assumed in the FinCom projection.

Bob Jacobson reiterated that mismanagement is not the problem, but the number of school age children in Sudbury. Sudbury has a very limited commercial tax base. He reminded everyone that the FinCom is open minded and are willing to listen to what the impacts will be to the cost centers.

Marty Ragonas stated that she agreed with Bob Jacobson and the recommended 4.5% level. Jamie Gossels stated that at first she was uncomfortable with imposing the spending limit, but she will agree if the level is set at 4.5%. She reminded everyone that they need to be mindful of last year's override failure.

Based on the economy, Debbie Zurka stated that she is very concerned about some of the override amounts that would be needed to cover the 4.5% level.

Bob Stein stated that is a great idea what the FinCom is planning, considering the economic times. He stated that salary increases should be considered very carefully. He stated that the school committees need to be made aware of the financial condition of the town. He recommended that a menu ballot be considered for future overrides. The taxpayers should be allowed to decide who deserves the money.

Bob Jacobson thanked Mr.Stein for his comments & suggestions. He stated the there have been meetings with the school committees and Lincoln FinCom. As for the menu ballot, that has to be decided by the Board of Selectmen.

Selectmen Larry O'Brien stated that the Bd. of selectmen will be participating in union negotiations. Selectmen Keller will handle LSRHS, and Selectmen O'Brien will handle SPS.

Mary Mahoney, SPS Union President' stated that the elementary teachers do not make as much as the high school teachers. The SPS teachers make 6 to 8% less in salary. She is worried about the younger teachers in Sudbury, because they will not be able to afford to stay with the Sudbury schools because of the salaries being offered elsewhere.

Bob Jacobson reminded everyone that you can't just look at the salaries. You have to include benefits. The town pays 90% of the health premiums for town & SPS employees.

Jack Ryan stated that his concern is that the cart before the horse. School has only been opened for two weeks now. SPS & LSRHS might both see increases in enrollment figures. He stated that the FinCom has not sat down with the school committees in an open-public format to discuss the figures. He stated that this should be worked on in a collaborative basis. The FinCom needs to work with the school committees and find out from the schools how bad things are. This project will take more time on everyone's part.

Chuck Woodard stated the new union contracts will have a major impact on how bad things are for the cost centers. Chuck Woodard further stated there have been various meetings with the town & schools over the past year. He stated that it is unlikely that the FinCom and the cost centers will agree on a spending limit. He believes the FinCom's figure will always be lower. He stated that a tone needs to be set now for the upcoming budget season.

Some members from the Council on Aging voiced their concerns over Sudbury seniors not being able to afford to stay in Sudbury. Selectmen Larry O'Brien stated that many people involved in town government would love to be able to do more for the seniors. Several articles have been put forth at the Annual Town Meetings. State laws do not allow for municipalities to create a separate tax group for seniors.

VOTED: On motion, to support a spending limit for a term of three years. Motion made by Marty Ragonas and seconded by Debbie Zurka. On vote, motion carries 8 in support and 0 absent.

VOTED: On motion, to support a spending limit at a level of 4.5%. Motion made by Bill Kneeland and seconded by Marty Ragonas. On vote, motion carries 8 in support and 0 absent.

Item 4: Annual FinCom Letter to Cost Centers:

Chuck Woodard stated he would add "4.5% increase in section 1, and a "2.1% increase" in section 2.

Maureen Valente reminded the committee that there are school employees that do pay into Middlesex Retirement. The committee needs to remember that when the markets crash, the retirement board looks to the member towns to make up the difference.

Bob Jacobson suggested that liaison meetings be held before the November FinCom meeting. The cost centers need to be made aware of what is expected.

Item 5: Interview prospective FinCom candidates:

Chuck Woodard explained what tonight's process would be.

The applicants interviewed were Mark Rosenthal, Thaddeus Gozdeck, and Howard Levy. Although Bob Stein would not be re-interviewed, he was still to be considered to fill the vacancy.

The applicants were asked the same set of questions that had been asked to the applicants at their June 16th meeting that had been held to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Ralph Verni. Some of the questions included: explain your background, why they applied, comfort level with public speaking, their perception of the FinCom, ability to take a leadership role on the FinCom, if they have served on another committee or board, and would they be willing to commit 3-years to the committee.

Item 6: Vote on a new member:

Chuck Woodard reminded the committee that tonight's vote is only making a recommendation that the candidate be appointed. The candidate will need to meet and be approved by the Town Moderator.

The committee members gave general opinions on what they thought of the applicants, and how the members interpreted the applicants' answers to the questions.

It was agreed that the same ballot process used at the June 16th meeting be used tonight. By secret ballots, the committee was asked to list their preference of candidates with the preferred choice being listed first. The committee had a general discussion regarding each of the applicants.

The committee agreed that Thaddeus "Todj" Gozdeck would be presented to the Town Moderator, and a meeting with Town Moderator Myron Fox would be scheduled. Chuck Woodard agreed to contact the other applicants about the committee's decision.

Item 7: BRTF

Marty Ragonis presented the BRTF Preliminary Revenue Report and introduced four of the BRTF members that were in attendance. She indicated that the task force had met approximately 9 times over the summer, and that the committee had devoted much and effort to the project. Due to summer delays, the expense side of the report would report at a later date.

The task force made recommendations in four areas:: commercial development/sewer, energy, fundraising, and legislative initiatives. Recommendations were discussed, explained, and questions answered. After approval of the report by the Finance Committee, it will be presented to the Selectmen on 9/23 who will determine the next steps.

Sheila Stewart thanked the task force for all of the work they have done.

VOTED: On motion, to support the Preliminary Revenue Report prepared by the Town of Sudbury's Budget Review Task Force as submitted. Motion made by Bob Jacobson and seconded by Jim Rao. On vote, motion carries 7 in support and 1 absent (Zurka).

There being no further business, the committee adjourned at 10:25pm