

Sudbury Finance Committee
Hybrid Meeting Minutes
March 4, 2024
7:00PM

ATTENDANCE

Members of the Finance Committee present were: Co-Chair Michael Joachim, Co-Chair Eric Poch, Andrew Bettinelli, Henry Sorett (remote), Susan Berry (remote), and Ryan Lynch

ABSENT

Colin Wang, Mike Ferrari and Maura Carty

ITEM 1: Welcome and Member Roll Call

Co-Chair Joachim called the meeting to order at approximately 7:02PM, declared a quorum present and roll-called members present. He read the Municipal Remote Meeting Disclaimer.

Opening Remarks by Co-Chairs

This meeting is devoted to Article 3 (Operating Budget) of the warrant.

ITEM 2: Public Comment

There was no public comment.

ITEM 3: FY25 Budget Discussion

Co-Chair Joachim reviewed the FY25 operating budget, broken down by cost centers. Discussion followed.

SPS and LS

Mr. Sorett stated that, while the FinCom can rely on the guidance of the school in matters of education, building matters such as solar arrays and roofing are in FinCom's purview.

Mr. Ryan noted the importance of relying on the School Committee in terms of the objectives and goals of running and operating the schools and providing the best education to serve the community. The override approved last year was an overwhelming example of how the Town prioritizes its schools. The FY25 budget is in keeping with the level service budget headcount and preserving the additional services that were necessary as a result of the transition out of the pandemic.

Ms. Berry noted that she does not have an issue with the FY25 budget, but she is concerned that the estimated increases in later years are larger than Town revenues may be able to support. Additionally, she is concerned that Tier 1 includes the possible needs for additional teachers depending on enrollment. In the past, Tier 1 needs have been paid by extra money in the budget because of the prepay of OOD transportation and tuition. However, if SPS uses the extra money for teachers, they may need to include this expense in the budget the following year.

Co-Chair Poch agreed that since some Tier 1 asks were not included in the budget, it is going to be a harder prospect in FY26 and FY27, creating a structural deficit.

Co-Chair Joachim noted that the SPS base budget was increased by approximately \$1 million with the prior year override and this year's vote to provide extra Chapter 70 monies, helping SPS to maintain student supports originally funded with Covid monies. He added his support for SPS' practice of building its budget from the bottom up.

Of the 3.89% guidance given to LSRHS, only 3.4% was taken due to anticipation of the potential decrease in student enrollment starting in FY26.

The LSRHS school building debt is coming to an end in two years.

Mr. Sorett noted the need for clarification of the arrangement with the vendor of the solar array as to energy cost savings for operating the building. Co-Chair Poch noted that LS is having a meeting this week to address the issue.

Vocational

Co-Chair Poch stated that having separated from Minuteman as a member town, Sudbury has not been accepted for membership in another vocational school. Although vocational enrollment by Sudbury students has decreased, he pointed out that there is enough social discussion about the benefit of pursuing vocational education over incurring college debt that the Committee needs to keep an eye on this budget line item.

Town-wide Budget

Co-Chair Joachim noted that there is no new headcount and no new initiatives. Collective bargaining agreements expire at the end of the year creating uncertainty in FY25, and the Town has had unmet needs preceding the present Town Manager's tenure. Increases in costs are outpacing revenue. There is no quick solution to the problem and the Town Manager is assessing the situation.

Mr. Sorett, referencing serving unmet needs, expressed the need to provide relief for the number of seniors "barely holding onto their homes." They have been in town for forty to fifty years and now cannot afford the taxes. He reviewed his motion to approve the budget with reductions in the amount of \$236K.

Ms. Berry stated the importance of having facts to back up places the Town can save money. She was not in favor of the motion.

Mr. Bettinelli agreed and stated that the Town had a well-established system where permits were pulled and processed in a timely manner by employees interacting with the public.

Co-Chair Poch, referencing the FinCom's discussion of full-time staff and overtime in the police and fire departments, stated it was its role as an independent objective body to look hard at real numbers for cost savings.

Co-Chair Joachim stated that he did not believe staff are providing unnecessary services and did not support the cuts proposed by Mr. Sorett. He will allow the three remaining members not present to voice their opinions as well.

Mr. Sorett asked the Committee to consider what structural changes could be made to make the cost of government smaller.

Debt Service

It was noted that the Town has done a good job in tracking debt service and is moving in the right direction in increasing debt in the levy.

Vote on Warrant Articles

Co-Chair Joachim suggested that warrant articles be voted at a later meeting when more members are present.

Discuss FinCom budget report and inclusion of additional budget information

Ms. Berry reviewed her presentation of additional budget detail for inclusion in the Warrant Report.

Proposed Firearms bylaw

Co-Chair Joachim began the discussion on the proposed firearms bylaw in anticipation of the Select Board's presentation to the FinCom. He advised members to view the videotaped presentation ahead of time as well.

Mr. Sorett was concerned about the risk to the Town of costly litigation. While the FinCom did not take a position on last year's bylaw warrant article, it had the right to consider taking a position on this year's article in light of the financial risk posed.

The Select Board will be conducting a public forum on the issue, and the FinCom will make its recommendation at a later date.

ITEM 4: Rules and Operating Procedures

Co-Chair Joachim reviewed the current provision in the FinCom Rules and Operating Procedures on issuing a minority report. The Committee considered the issue and agreed to continue its discussion at the next meeting.

ITEM 5: General business

- **Transfers and other business**
There were none.

- **Liaison reports**
Ms. Berry reported that SPS is meeting tonight.
LS is meeting Wednesday night with a presentation on the solar panels.

- **Calendar**
March 11 and 18 – deliberation/vote on warrant articles.
March – meeting with Select Board tbd.

- **Approval of Minutes of February 8 and 15, 2024 – to be deferred to next meeting.**

ITEM 7: Public comment

There was no public comment.

ITEM 8: Adjournment

Upon motion duly made by Co-Chair Poch and seconded by Mr. Sorett, it was unanimously voted to adjourn. Ms. Berry-Y, Mr. Lynch-Y, Mr. Sorett-Y, Mr. Bettinelli-Y, Co-Chair Joachim-Y, Co-Chair Poch-Y. Motion carries 6-0, unanimous.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Martin Barraford
Recording Secretary