**Lenox Finance Committee Meeting Minutes**

Date: January 17, 2023

Members Present: Kristine Cass (KC), Mindi Morin (MM), Blaise Gregory (BG), Josh Levin (JL) David Neubert (DN)

Guests: Graham Moriarty, (GM) Chris Ketchen (CK)

Absent:

Meeting called to order at 6pm

KC kicked off the meeting asking for a motion to approve the minutes from December 19, 2022. BG made a motion to approve and JL 2nd. All except DN approved; DN abstained.

KC introduced CK to the meeting who distributed the Town’s preliminary budget. CK reviewed the document and reviewed the last page, A-14 which shows 5-year tax levy information. CK explained that because in recent years residential property values have increased faster than commercial property values, the assessors have adjusted the tax rates to keep tax levy increase equitable. Our ability to continue to do this is limited, so this year more of the burden is likely to fall on residents. JL asked if there are other ways to fund this and it would be to reduce expenses or Increase usage of the occupancy tax in the operating budget more than the currently planned increase. There would also be a potential to increase occupancy tax like what the Cape does. DN did express he would speak to this at town meeting to explain this in detail, if needed.

KC asked what the minimum school spending is and where we place, CK explained that we are double that number. KC asked how the selectboard feels about the budget and CK explained that it will be reviewed in detail, the potential to declare additional funding and review spending by department for savings. DN feels that we need to prepare the town for the increase in taxes, which the group did agree. KC recapped next steps being first the state budget coming, assuming this will be 2% in and CK explained the next step is to work with each department.

KC pointed out that as we continue to see YOY growth in the school budget that is higher than other departments, we want to be sure that other very important areas are not being cut to accommodate the school budget. CK communicated that in two weeks we will have another budget to review. We as a committee can also sit down with the tax accessor to understand how tax rates are set. Committee agreed that the town should not compromise on what is needed in the operating budget, such as tree removal, to accommodate the overall % of the entire town budget.

KC started a discussion on what departments we need to meet. MM suggested public safety for us to assist in supporting their increase. DN also suggested the community center. DN will also attend the rate setting meetings at the end of November and December. We agreed that we need to meet with public works. DN suggested that we also touch base with departments that we have not met with to check in how we can assist. Committee agrees with this approach.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Department | Type | Person Assigned/Meeting Dates |
| Public Safety | Meeting |  |
| Public Works | Meeting |  |
| School | Meeting |  |
| Library | Touchbase | Kristine |
| Community Center | Touchbase | Josh |
| Chamber | Touchbase | Mindi |
| Health and Human Services | Touchbase | Mindi |
| Enterprise Fund Meeting (water and sewer | Meeting | David, Meeting February 15th |

KC reviewed the 2021 town report. Committee reviewed letter and we will continue to edit.

MM discussed with the team two potential previous members that we should reach back out to.

KC will look to schedule our next few meetings once we receive confirmation from CK On budget.

Meeting adjourned at 7:06pm

Respectively Submitted,

Mindi Morin, Secretary