

Lenox Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: January 20, 2022

Members Present: Dave Carpenter (DC), Kristine Cass (KC), Michael Feder (MF), Mindi Morin (MM), Blaise Gregory (BG) David Neubert (DN)

Guests: Chris Ketchen (CK)

Absent:

Meeting called to order at 6:05

Reviewed meeting minutes for November 4, 2021. Motion to approve the minutes and all approved. Reviewed December 2, 2021, minutes. Motion to approve minutes approved. Communicated the resignation of Andrea Pignatelli from the committee.

CK Reviewed the 2023 Town budget based on the document sent to the group prior to the meeting. Discussed an overview of fixed costs, driver of the overall increased to the budget.

MF asked to understand where the discretionary items are coming from such as the library.

KC would like for us to think strategically about what departments that we should meet with, those with meaningful changes.

MF felt that we should consider meeting with those departments that might not be growing to understand if they are forgoing something that does matter

KC noted the overall 2% increase but continues to increase in years to follow and what this is attributed to

CK explained this is a placeholder for debt services. An example would be the public safety building and that the wastewater fund is not included in this. This would roll off and would not impact the sewage tax bills in the future

MF discussed the assessments this year and that they will continue to grow in the following year because of cycle lag and transactions. He explained this is based on a consultant that reviews the town broken down by neighborhoods.

DC asked Chris that the point has been made of the rising assessments and summarized a previous conversation in a past meeting. The question was regarding the tax rates going up and the assessments going up, such as in other towns and would that be the case for us.

CK Richmond as an example of an 8.8% tax levy and taxes increasing by roughly 10%. Due to the tax levy, yes this would go up

MF suggest we have something to show the residents what their tax bill impact will be

DC explained that an overview of websites around MA, many of these have captured what MF is referencing. With many missteps in other towns reporting, we should provide this information

KC part of this is just the assessment, but based on MF's meeting with the assessor's office, this is not something they will put together but that we could

KC suggested that MF put together a summary of this that can be included in our letter, or this can be distributed before the town meeting

DC agreed that it is important and more urgent that we be sure to communicate to the town. He also asked the committee where the school is with the negotiation process and if the 3% is accurate

CK communicated that he sits on the school committee as the 8th member during the vote. He is not aware of how negotiations are doing though

MM communicated that on 2/17 the school committee has a public meeting to review their budget

MF and KC discussed that the sequence of when these budgets are being reviewed by the select board does not allow the finance committee to review and express our views. He feels we should be more a part of the beginning of this process. A suggestion would be to change this sequence. Warrant is late May, select board gets it in January but may not need that until March. It is suggested that CK bring this to us in pieces January – February. CK can then flag areas the finance committee has communicated prior to that meeting.

KC pointed out that we can review these numbers and express our concerns at the next select board meeting. We could get on their agenda to present our questions once it is presented by KC

Committee agrees with the approach of us reviewing red flags and addressing this at a select board meeting

CK broke down discretionary expense additions (1 police officer, EMS coordinator position) as two examples

- Next Steps
 - high level breakout from CK to the team
 - MF will summarize property taxes
 - Find new members

Meeting adjourned at 7:03

Respectively Submitted,
Mindi Morin, Secretary