

Lenox Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: April 8, 2021

Members Present: Joan Bruno (JB), Dave Carpenter (DC), Kristine Cass (KC), Michael Feder (MFe), Mark McKenna (MMc), Mindi Morin (MM), Elliott Morss (EM), Andrea Pignatelli (AP)

Guests: Chris Ketchen (CK), Clarence Fanto (CF), Bob Vaughn (BV), Melissa Falkowski (MFa), Molly Elliott (ME)

Absent: David Neubert

Meeting called to order at 5:03 PM.

Lenox Public Schools

MFe provided an overview of the revised school budget, which requests an increase of 3% over FY2021. MFa described how several line items, including staff stipends for student clubs, were reduced to historical levels. The decrease in textbook funding will be covered by grant funding.

MFa explained that grants are earmarked for specific expenditures. Grants are often available for use during multiple years, and MFa utilizes grants fully during the eligible time frame. MFa reported that the ESSR grant is covering about \$135k in the budget, and some of that will need to be added to the operating budget in future years. KC asked if the budget reductions will impact the amount returned to the town at the end of next year, and BV reported that it is likely to be less. MFa reported that the amount returned is usually in the range of \$70-100k, but the amount returned for FY2020 was much higher, about \$300k, due to COVID closures.

MFe asked for enrollment data. ME reported that there are 20 incoming kindergarteners that are Lenox residents, and the schools plan to take a total of 18 choice students in kindergarten. The official enrollment numbers are recorded each year on October 1st and June 1st. BV reported that the FY2021 is anomalous because some families withdrew their children due to COVID.

MFe asked about school-related costs that are reported outside the school budget. CK explained that school benefits costs are included with the school budget in the town warrant. Vocational education fees does not appear in the school budget, and there is a recent trend toward more students choosing vocational education, so CK expects that cost to increase. Two additional numbers are required by state and not appropriated at town meeting – outgoing choice tuition and outgoing charter tuition. In the preliminary state assessment, both of those numbers are increasing.

Chamber of Commerce

MM reported that there was a misunderstanding regarding the budget that the Select Board approved for the Chamber of Commerce. Jenn Nacht presented two budgets at the Select Board meeting – a budget with a \$25k increase and a budget with a 3% budget. Jenn believed that the \$25k budget was approved, but the Select Board believed that they approved the 3% budget.

MFe suggested that the Finance Committee should reaffirm the Finance Committee's support of the \$25k Chamber budget increase. JB suggested dropping the matter, and MFe agreed. MM explained that there is lack of clarity surrounding the goals of the Chamber and also mentioned that there might be an opportunity to ask for additional funds after town meeting. CK reported that information is changing very late in the process this year, partly due to

federal stimulus dollars for which none of the rules have been written. Future town revenue streams are potentially significantly higher than originally anticipated, so it is possible the Select Board to be able to find funds to support the Chamber's \$25k request. CK reported that the town may be eligible for \$500k-\$1M in federal funding, plus additional support from the pending infrastructure legislation.

Finance Committee

MFe suggested that the Finance Committee might improve our contribution to the town. EM asked what time Finance Committee meetings should be held, and will follow up on time preferences.

EM made a motion to accept the minutes from the prior four meetings and adjourn. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 5:53pm.

Respectively Submitted,
Kristine Cass, Secretary