November 20, 2019

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TOWN OF LUDLOW

Meeting of the Finance Committee held on Wednesday, November 20, 2019, beginning at 6:50 p.m. at the Hubbard Memorial Library, 24 Center Street, Ludlow, MA. The meeting took place in the Program Room.

Members present: Eric Gregoire, Chairman, Maureen Downing, Joan Cavallo, Nicole Parker, Richard Moskal, Anthony Alves and Beverly Tokarz

Members excused: Susanne Boyea and Raymond Yando

Ms. Kim Collins was also present

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

The committee met with Patrick McGowan, Director of the Hubbard Memorial Library, Christine Davis and Robert Mishol, Trustees

Mr. McGowan and the Trustees gave the committee a tour of the library prior to the start of the meeting.

Ms. Davis gave a brief summary of the goals and objectives. The Strategic Plan information was provided to the committee and Ms. Davis gave information of how it started, how they determine the goals and objectives and what they believe is essential to serve the community. The Strategic Plan was approved by the MA Board of Library Commissioners in 2016 in order to continue to have the library be a relevant resource to the community. Their long-term dream is to have additional space. The short-term goal is to access grants. The future of a library lies not just in books but in technology and social interactions. They have added technological items such as a telescope to lend, also sewing machines, cameras etc. They are working on a homebound delivery system for those people who cannot access the library. They hope to get the senior van and Keystone Commons van to stop at the library. Some of the children have asked for a bus stop after school, they will investigate that possibility. Their $15,000 Ideal Lab Grant created a make space digital media lab, circulating technology targeted for pre-teen and young adult age groups. They also have chrome books, tablets, headphone and other electronic devices available for in-house use for patrons. Their working on getting the senior population involved, and would also like to explore the possibility to get the 30-40 age group to frequent the library.

Increase in technology means more staffing. They need someone to work with Mr. McGowan to troubleshoot technological issues and provide reference help. They would like an M-1 position, a Reference Adult Services Librarian. That position exists on the Personnel Plan, it needs to be funded. They are asking the Finance Committee to approve the funding of that position. With that position, the library could stay open longer and provide assistance to the director. The starting salary for that position would be $55,000 not including benefits. It would be a non-union position. Mr. Moskal asked about the Senior Outreach and the new position. It was mentioned to the Selectmen when they met at the library. Mr. McGowan spoke with Ms. Villano and Human Resources, who is in favor of the position. They are also looking into the Senior Outreach Program and are speaking with other communities who have something in place. They already have the volunteers who would go to the homes, they need the people to request the books. Mr.

Moskal said that there could be a liability and that is being investigated. Mr. McGowan said it would be geared towards Ludlow residents. They spoke to Wilbraham and are using their information as a basis going forward. They are in the process of working with the trustees to develop a policy and language. Mr. Moskal is very impressed with the library.

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Mr. Gregoire asked if there is a job description. Mr. McGowan said that all the job descriptions were recently updated. This would be a new position. The person would be able to take over for Mr. McGowan. Currently there is no one to fill in for him. Mr. Blanchard has been very helpful in providing assistance when needed. They have transferred to the Town's network bringing them an $800 savings. They have a great support group and good staff. They are not planning to build an addition until the staff is increased. They think five or ten years for additional construction. They would like to expand the hours of operation with additional staffing.

Mr. Moskal updated the committee on the Senior Center Building Project. He announced that the funding came in at a good number. He showed a picture of the building and lot which is being cleared. The groundbreaking is on December 6th at 10:00 a.m. The building should be completed in November 2020. He has a spreadsheet with the listing of all the contractors. They chose the contractor based on price. He would like the information added to the Minutes of this meeting. Their budget was 7.5 million dollars. They came in at 6.99 million for the building. Forish Contractor from Westfield, MA won the bid.

Ms. Downing updated the committee on the Harris Brook Elementary School Building Project. The building will be going up. The steel has arrived. They are ahead of schedule and there are no overages or extras or any additional work order requests. They are a little under budget as well. She will try to have a current packet of information at the next meeting.

Mr. Gregoire gave an update on the FY'21 budget preparations. Ms. Collins provided information that the budget requests and materials for departments are out and due back by December 3rd. Ms. Collins will review what departments have requested and then the Budget Sub-committee will review the requests before coming before the Finance Committee. The guidelines for the budgets were as last year with contract increases for union employees and a 2% increase for non-union positions.

The Tax Rate Classification Hearing continuation took place at last night's Selectmen's meeting. This year the rate will be $20.62 per $1,000. Last year the rate was $19.82. The increase will be 80 cents. Ms. Collins said that they did expect the rate to increase over one dollar. The reason it did not is because of added value which was 67 million dollars because everyone was re-valued. The new growth came in lower than expected. Over the past three years there was a lot of excess levy capacity. This year it's down to $11,000. There wasn't enough room to increase the tax rate as much as anticipated. Because of increased values, last year's increase was about $250 for an average house. This year it's closer to $280. The increase will show on the January tax bill. Mr. Gregoire said that the average single-family tax bill will increase $298 from $4,469 last year to

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$4,767 and the average commercial tax bill will increase by $669 from $9,950 from last year to $10, 619. Ms. Collins said that the Assessors calculations are more updated. The average single-family house is not correct on Ms. Collins work sheet. The other factor that caused the tax increase was that the new growth for last year was $651,000 and this year it was $656,000. Ms. Collins explained that the revenue on the re-cap sheet from 2017 was at 30 million and that included 1.1 million in free cash which gets added in to the number on the re-cap. There was another 1.6 million used in 2018 with 32 million in revenue. In the past two years there hasn't been any money put towards the re-cap and the amount is almost up to 32 million. Revenues are growing, rates have been raised in Town departments etc. $500,000 is included for capital projects. The trash is slated to increase if nothing is done about it. It will be $300,000 in the coming year for re-cyclable. To increase the $11,000, growth would be the biggest way to increase the number along with budget reduction and more revenue. This year the free cash is 1.5 million. Last year is was 1 million. Mr. Gregoire said that the 80-cent tax increase, 18 cents of that is due to the operating budget, everything else is excluded debt, the School and the Senior Center. Ms. Collins explained the borrowing process for the School and Senior Center to Mr. Moskal.

Mr. Gregoire also informed the committee that the Selectmen directed the Board of Assessors to look at the Senior Center exemptions under the MGL. It would have to be approved by the Selectmen and Town Meeting to expand the tax exemptions and certain classifications for senior citizens. This is to give deductions on tax bills for those seniors who meet the criteria, outside of the tax abatement work program. The Assessors will get back to the Selectmen with their findings.

Moved by Ms. Downing, seconded by Mr. Moskal to approve and sign the Finance Committee Minutes of October 16, 2019
Vote: 6-0-1 in favor. Mr. Alves abstained

The next meeting will be held on December 18th. If there is something urgent on the Agenda, we will conduct a meeting. If not, the meeting will be cancelled.

Moved by Ms. Downing, seconded by Ms. Cavallo to adjourn the Finance Committee Meeting at 8:00 p.m.
Vote: 7-0 in favor

Joan C Cavallo

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Ludlow Finance Committee