March 16, 2022

Meeting of the Finance Committee held on Wednesday, March 16, 2022, beginning at 6:00 p.m. in the Selectmen's Conference Room, Town Hall.

Members present: Anthony Alves, Acting Chairman, Joan Cavallo, Richard Moskal, Matt Goncalves and Beverly Tokarz

Members excused: Maureen Downing and Susanne Boyea

Kimberly Collins did not attend the meeting

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

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Mr. Alves explained that he will be filling in for Ms. Downing who couldn't make the meeting this evening. He recognized and welcomed the new Town Administrator, Mark Strange.

There were no Visitations or Correspondence. The only item for Old Business was budget information updates and discussion. He was not present for the last meeting. Ms. Downing informed Mr. Alves that the Selectmen would like a recommendation by their meeting on April 5th. The Level 2 budget is close to the Levy Limit at $86,000. Ms. Downing explained to Mr. Alves that she had discussions with some of the larger departments in a liaison capacity to get their feelings on their budgets. She met with the Police and Fire Departments and School Department. Mr. Moskal is the liaison to the DPW and he will be reaching out to them.

The committee will discuss how they want to approach the next two weeks. Some of Ms. Downing's concerns were the timing, what was sent to the committee for an approved Level 2 budget and what is remaining in the Levy. There is not much room for changes or additions. At the last meeting the committee spoke about their feelings going forward. He opened up the discussion as to how to approach the next two weeks. Mr. Alves could see as an option, scheduling another meeting at the end of the month. Ms. Tokarz checked the calendar in the Selectmen's Office to see if the next two Wednesday evenings are available to meet. Ms. Cavallo asked about the commitment from the committee by April 5th. Mr. Alves said Ms. Downing indicated to him that the Selectmen would like to meet with the Chairman or committee to have a conversation as to where we are in the budget process and our recommendations regarding the budget. That leaves two weeks. Ms. Cavallo said the committee hasn't looked at the budget at all, basically because the committee didn't receive it until recently. He feels that letters should go out to every department giving them the opportunity to meet with Finance rather than a more targeted selection of departments as the committee has done in the past. The conference room is available on March 30th. At that time departments can discuss their budget. He doesn't in vision the larger departments meeting, because Ms. Downing has already had discussions with them. This meeting will be to give other departments the opportunity to meet if they would like to. Mr. Alves asked Mr. Moskal if he could reach out to the DPW prior to March 30th for any updates. At that time Ms. Downing can provide an update on the Police, Fire and School departments and Mr. Moskal can provide an update on the DPW. Those were Mr. Alves thoughts. Ms. Cavallo voiced her concerns as to when the committee received the budget, which was at the March 2nd meeting. Mr. Moskal said that the budget is the loosest he's seen in six years. There was back and forth opinions on how the budget was done etc. Mr. Alves said that the budget seems very similar to how it was last year in terms of receiving a Level 2 budget which has been approved. . Last year Mr. Gregoire and Mr. Alves met

with the Selectmen and went over the committee's suggested changes and at that point they were told that basically the budget has been voted on and there were no changes to be made. That was when the committee made amendments to present at Town Meeting.

Moved by Ms. Cavallo, seconded by Mr. Goncalves to send a letter to departments to see if anyone is interested in meeting with the committee with concerns and respond within a week. The next meeting will be held on March 30th and at that point a decision would be made relative to the budget.
Vote: 5-0 in favor

The committee tabled the Minutes from March 2nd until the next meeting.

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Mr. Alves said that he also sits on the Capital Planning Committee. They had two meetings to date. The first meeting was to see what kind of requests came in. They went through them and selected what departments they wanted to speak to relative to their Capital projects. The first round of those happened on Monday. They met with the DPW, Hubbard Memorial Library and Westover Golf Course. They will have two more weeks of meetings. School, Police and Fire departments will still need to be looked at. After all meetings are completed the Capital committee will vote on what projects they will be approving. That may happen on April 4th to be presented to the Selectmen on April 5th. Ms. Cavallo wanted to know how much money is available. Mr. Alves didn't have the figure with him, but thought Free Cash may be at 4 million dollars, then there is Stabilization and Finance Committee Funds. There are sizable requests. The Fire Department would like a new ladder tower truck at a cost of 1.5 million dollars. He thinks 1 million dollars will be put in Stabilization. Finance fund is $100,000. The Capital committee has not targeted an amount that will be used for these projects. They want to go through every department, viewing their requests before making any decisions on a figure.

Mr. Moskal asked if the Board of Selectmen approve the increases for the Fire and Police Departments. Mr. Alves said that his understanding is that the Level 1 budget is the requests that came in from departments based on the parameters given to departments by the Town Accountant and Town Administrator. The Level 2 budget was decided by the Sub-committee and presented to the Selectmen who then voted to send it to the Finance Committee. Ms. Tokarz read a portion of the March 2nd Minutes outlining the money that is allocated for Capital projects. They started with 4 million dollars in Free Cash. There are some items already spoken for as well as money targeted for Stabilization and Finance Funds and whatever money is remaining. Ms. Alves said that there are different pots of money. There is Free Cash, ARPA Funds, etc. Part of what they will take into consideration in Capital is the vote, either yes or no on a certain item. Some requests could be sent to the Selectmen to use ARPA Funds, which the Selectmen control.

Mr. Moskal said that the DPW did reach out to him regarding the second bridge problem on West Street, Indian Orchard. That is a major project. That bridge could be shut down. The DPW are in discussion with Springfield to come up with a plan on how to repair it. The Wilbraham bridge is under control. The Indian Orchard bridge is in worse shape than the Wilbraham bridge was. The other issue is the Senior Center. They are approximately $400 thousand dollars under budget. They purchased a full purpose generator. He will provide more updates at the next meeting. Ms. Cavallo asked if the Senior Center can be used as a holding place for residents in an emergency situation. That facility could not be used because there are no showers. They can use it as a warming center. Ms. Cavallo said the high school can be used as a holding center because they have showers that

can be used. Ms. Cavallo asked what will happen to the $400,000. Mr. Moskal said that is a very political issue. They have no idea what will happen to the funds. He was told by the previous Town Administrator that the money goes into the General Fund. If a department wants money for something, they have to go through Town Meeting for approval. Mr. Goncalves said that if any unexpected surprises occur, they have the ability to use those funds for that purpose. The generator will take 8 to 10 months to come in. Until the project closes, money can be used for needed items. The school project is also underbudget. There are tight rules on that money from the State.

Moved by Ms. Cavallo, seconded by Mr. Moskal to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting at 6:35 p.m.
Vote: 5-0 in favor

Ludlow Finance Committee

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