

BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

(Finance Cte/Board of Selectmen)

Monday April 4, 2022 – 10:00 AM – Richmond Town Hall & Access via Zoom

PRESENT: Neal Pilson, Chair Board of Selectmen; Roger Manzolini, Selectman; Alan Hanson, Selectman; Danielle Fillio, Town Admin.; Bob Gniadek, Chair Finance Cte.; Steve Patterson, Finance Cte.; Pat Callahan, Finance Cte.; Bob Youdelman, Finance Cte.; Steve Traver, Richmond/W. Stockbridge Fire Chief;

Bob Gniadek called the meeting to order at 10:08 with a roll call of attendance.

Finalize Review of FY23 Town Budget and Articles:

Treasurer/Collector Expense Account: Credit card services used for postal charges, trainings, etc. for Paul Lisi.

ATT Mobility – a monthly charge for two I Pads that were purchased but never used.

A monthly reimbursement to Paul of \$45.00 for his personal cell phone. All other employees have town-owned cell phones.

Labor Law Posters required to be posted every year.

Total Expenses budgeted \$24,000 which is an increase of \$1,000 needed to cover the increase in the Affordable Care Act end of year reporting and processing.

Roger questioned the need for the increase when only half of the current budget has been spent at three-quarters of the way through the year. The decision was to level fund that line item.

Clarification of Ambulance Service Costs: Danielle explained that adding two full-time employees to the Fire Dept. will bring the apportionment up slightly, but those costs are divided equally between Richmond and West Stockbridge and the SAFER grant, which is very likely to be awarded to Richmond, will cover the costs of start-up. Even if the grant does not come through, the Town has enough money to cover at least one year. Bob said that, with Danielle's explanation, he is satisfied to move \$45,000 from free cash to the Ambulance reserve to make up the difference. The Finance Cte. was satisfied that their questions had been answered satisfactorily. Bob commended Chief Traver for finding this grant opportunity to increase services and reduce costs.

Treasurer/Collector Salary: Danielle explained that the contract with the Treasurer had recently been negotiated and signed by the Selectmen. It calls for a reduction of hours to 28 per week at a salary of \$68,000 (current salary of \$72, 737 is for a 34-hour week). Bob noted that

28 hours at \$68,000 comes out to \$46.70 per hour – an increase of 15% for working fewer hours. One question was whether the Treasurer’s position has a formal Job Description and whether the responsibilities can be fulfilled at the reduced hours.

There was a discussion of the consequences if the Finance Cte. does not approve this line item. Danielle said that there is a clause in both the Treasurer’s contract and in hers that the contract is in force pending approval of the town at the Town Meeting. She added that any amount in the warrant that the Finance Cte. does not approve can be amended on the floor of the Town Meeting.

Discussion continued that included comments about the unfairness of one employee receiving a 15% raise when everyone else is getting 3%, suggestions about ways to either increase his hours to the point where the raise will be 3% or reduce the salary amount to the point where it would be a 3% increase over FY2022. It was noted that, in order to reopen contract negotiations, both parties would have to agree. There were objections to bringing the issue to the floor of the Town Meeting and attempts to find a way to resolve the issue before that becomes necessary.

A possible alternative solution was put forward to honor the existing contract but advise the Treasurer that he may not be receiving any other increases for the next few years.

By a vote of 3-1, it was decided that the Finance Committee will not approve the line item as written. If a re-negotiation is possible and a new contract is created, the Finance Committee will look at the line item at a subsequent meeting. Neal said that a meeting must be set up with the Treasurer as soon as possible and that it would be prudent to have Beth Goodman, Town Counsel present. The meeting will take place the morning of Monday April 11th and the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Cte. will meet Monday April 11th at 3:00 PM to review any revisions to the new contract and finalize the budget.

Finalize Review of FY23 Town Budget and Articles:

Vacation buy-out option and longevity bonuses were discussed with a suggestion that in future the two items be individually listed as line items for each department. A total of \$7,500 was included in this budget and the explanation to the Town is that in the past the items were not budgeted as they were seldom used, but it is being partially budgeted now as a conservative action.

Tax Collector/Treasurer Assistant: Danielle explained that this item was used during the time Paul was out on Workmen’s Compensation Leave.

ARTICLES:

Conservation Land Fund: reduced from \$28,000 to \$10,000.

Transfer of Free Cash to General Stabilization was \$167,000 and is now \$225,000.

Sewer System: Danielle noted that the auditor may be willing to send a letter stating that, "based on the current status of the account, there is no shortfall to the sewer debt service." Danielle will inquire.

Danielle advised the group that the Board of Selectmen wants to do a church land road layout, but that a survey will have to be done, the cost of which she does not know and which may vary with whether the decision is to do the entire road or just the top portion. Neal said that the Town's agreement with the Church commits Richmond to create a formal road from the East side of the Church up to Rte. 41. He suggested that the cost of the survey be made a warrant item. It was suggested that a better course of action would be to not budget for the survey now, but to hold a Special Town Meeting in the future to approve the cost of the survey, once the actual cost is known. A warrant article for the Town Meeting will ask the Town to ratify the agreement the Town has signed with the Church.

Steve asked how the Town pays unanticipated, unbudgeted items that come up in the course of the year. Danielle explained that it is at the discretion of the Finance Committee. The final decision was that the item will be left off the budget for now as suggested.

Bob G. said the debt service for the new building will be over \$340,000. He asked if the Town should be asked to approve making it \$350,000 to cover potential higher interest and debt service payment fees.

Bob G. noted that he was advised that the tuition for Hancock students to attend the Richmond School was \$8,300 per student. At ten students that comes to \$83,000 and there is currently \$31,000 in the budget. There was a discussion of how best to recognize that money in the budget. It was decided to put it in as \$60,000 and be prepared to justify to the State during the tax rate certification process why the number is higher than last year.

The estimated tax rate for 2023 will drop from \$12.62 to \$12.55.

The changes to the budget agreed upon today will be reflected in a new budget that Danielle will forward to each member of the BAC as an Excel Spreadsheet.

The Following line items were each approved by the Finance Committee by individual motion, seconding and universal aye vote:

General Government – all items with the exceptions of line 11 (Treasurer/Collector salary)

Protection – Total of \$155,974

Health and Human Services – Total of \$274,485

Highways – Total of \$761,835

Culture & Recreation – Total of \$84,315

Employee Benefits – Total of \$363,216

Town Insurance – Total of \$120,000

Unclassified – Total of \$68,287

With the clarification of the changes being made to the Articles, they were approved with a motion by Pat to approve the total expenditure as amended. Bob G. seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

There being no further business before the Committee, a motion was made to adjourn. It was seconded and adopted by unanimous consent.