

## Minutes of the March 30, 2023 Finance Committee

Members	Absent	Other
Shaun Galliher	Russ Parks	Bob Graves, Town Administrator
Jim Chivers		Ray Huntoon, Select Board
Bonnie Conner		Charlie Brown, Town Accountant
Mary Rice		Ralph Cormier, Fire Chief
Heather Brown		
Tracey Lussier		
Candy Galeucia		
Sarah Baumann		

The meeting was opened at 6:36 pm.

Chairman Galliher, the Committee, and all others present discussed the options to finance the Tanker. The discussion included the possibility of applying for, and securing the USDA Grant for 35% of the funds. USDA Grant application requires that we have our portion, the other 65%, in account before it will be considered. This would only make us eligible for the Grant, and is no guarantee. Chairman Galliher pointed out that this Tanker was in the Capital Plan for several years down the road, and funding it is a real problem at this time. We are looking at a new Police Cruiser and highway truck this year which will deplete our available Free Cash. The cost that was presented and voted on at the ATM was 431K with 57K to be set aside each year for 10 years. With one year payment of 57K, the balance is 374K, 35% of that is 151K with 65% being our portion or 233K. This discussion will continue at our next Committee meeting on April 6, 2023.

Chairman Galliher, Bob Graves and the Committee went over the current Budget to see where cuts could possibly be made. Some figures are not in yet but Bob expects to have them for our next meeting. Chief Cormier said the part has come in for the pumper and it will be going next week to have it installed. Ray Huntoon also reported that the Highway Truck that was ordered three years ago, should be here within several weeks. This is the first news we have had on the status of that Truck since it was ordered.

The School Budget is our biggest expense and will limit what we can do in much needed areas of our Budget. Ray Huntoon has reached out to other towns and heard from all but the Town of Washington to see if they are willing to stand with us and vote the School Budget down. He has received some positive support for this from several other Towns. It should be noted that 4 (four) Towns voted no on the school building project. The long standing policy that if 2 (two) towns voted no, the project would not proceed, however, the School Committee found a way around that and opted for the popular vote.

That put 4 of the 7 Towns basically without a vote. In a recent meeting with the Superintendent, Financial Advisor, and our School Representative, we asked that they try to make some cuts because we simply cannot afford the 4.1% increase to the Town of Hinsdale. So far, we have not heard back from them. If Hinsdale votes the School Budget down, and the other towns do as well, that will force them back to the table and make those cuts.

Chairman Galliher explained the 2 ½ % tax levy that is State Law, and that to exceed that levy limit, there has to be a vote at a Town Meeting to override that limit. Historically, that override has not succeeded in any of the 7 surrounding Towns. If we were to fund all the requests and needs this year, we would be over the 2 ½ levy limit.

Chairman Galliher and the Committee went over other budget items, including the Police Officer Salary accounts. Funding and retaining qualified Police Officers is a problem facing all surrounding towns. Although our Officers do have a current contract, it has been proposed, and must be considered, of bumping that annual salary up in order to retain them. Sargent Zip, who briefly attended our meeting, reported that one of our current Officers has taken a position in Becket and will be leaving by June.

We also have a request to add a 5<sup>th</sup> officer to reduce the overtime required to cover shifts. Chief Rathbun's contract ends in June and it is expected that the Select Board is or will be negotiating a new one with the Chief.

A motion was made and seconded to accept the minutes of the March 23 Finance meeting as written. The motion passed unanimously.

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn at 8:37 pm, the motion passed unanimously. The next regular meeting of this Committee is Thursday, April 6, 2023 at 6:30 pm in the downstairs Community room at Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary A. Rice, Secretary