

Rowe Finance Committee
Regular Meeting and Joint Budget Hearing with the Board of Selectmen
January 23, 2019
6:00 P.M. at Rowe Town Hall – Meeting Room 1

Present: Chair Wayne Zavotka, Christopher “Selmi” Hyytinen, Paul McLatchy III
Absent: Vice-Chair Loretta Dionne, Laurie Pike
Board of Selectmen*: Chair Jennifer Morse, Vice-Chair Dennis May, Selectman Chuck Sokol
Executive Secretary*: Janice Boudreau
Other Attendees*: Daniel Poplawski, Board of Health; Margaret Rice, Board of Health; Joanne Semanie, Board of Health Clerk & Town Treasurer; Katherine Sprague, Town Clerk

*During the budget hearings which began at 6:30.

Call to Order: Chair Zavotka called the meeting to order at 6:06 P.M., with a quorum of the committee present.

Minutes: The minutes of December 17, 2018, November 5, 2018, and January 16, 2019 were submitted for review. With no corrections, the minutes of December 17th were approved and signed. The minutes of January 16th were approved with one change (attachment list). Mr. McLatchy will fix the last page and return to the next meeting for signatures. The set of minutes from November 5, 2018 had already been approved at a previous meeting and just needed to be signed.

Stipends: Chair Zavotka reported on his research into stipends in surrounding towns. The definition he received from Heath was that a stipend was to cover costs, such as for mileage, copying, etc... Heath determines stipends based on the number of meetings a committee has per year. Colrain only gives stipends to two boards- Board of Selectmen and Board of Assessors. Ashfield gives stipends to their Board of Health, Board of Selectmen, Assessors, and School Committee members. He is still waiting to hear back from Charlemont and Buckland.

Chair Zavotka felt that the stipends need to be reviewed and determine how each body should (or shouldn't) be paid. There appears to be no precedent, other than “they’ve always been this way”. There is no clear practice for when stipends have been increased.

Mr. Hyytinen asked about whether a pay scale could be used for officials, as more experienced officials might be more efficient with their work. Mr. McLatchy opined that for elected officials, the amount is set by town meeting, and not likely something that can be varied based on the individual elected to the position. This would be possible with appointed positions.

Budget Hearing: The Board of Selectmen joined the Finance Committee and called their meeting to order at 6:30.

Conservation Commission Budget: Due to the weather conditions, Conservation Commission Chair Ramon Sanchez did not attend. They have also not yet submitted a written budget. Their hearing will be postponed to February 20th.

Town Clerk Budget: Town Clerk Kathy Sprague attended the meeting to discuss her budget. The stipend has been increased by the COLA of 2.5%. She requested an increase from \$350 to \$450 for registrar stipends, going up from \$75 to \$100 per person. This is because the need to certify signatures can be quite numerous. Ms. Sprague said that sometimes she gets thirty or so documents that need certifying, and three members have to sign each one. Her overall budget is down 3.6%, but this is due to one less election in the upcoming year.

In regards to elections, Chair Zavotka's term is up, and as both Ms. Pike and Mr. Hyytinen were appointed to fill vacancies, they will have to run for their seats at the annual election as well. This will mean that there will be three open seats.

Accountant Budget: Town Accountant Tracey Baronas was not present to discuss her budget. She has requested an 8% increase in her salary on top of the COLA as she has had to deal with the broadband accounting, which wasn't in her job description and has added additional time each week. She also feels that the accountant's salary should be more in line with the treasurer's salary. There is a question about whether joining Wired West will take away much of the accounting responsibilities of the town. If so, perhaps a permanent increase to her salary is not warranted, but a one-time extra payment to cover her additional time could be sought. Some concern about whether this position's line *should* be comparable to the treasurer's line was raised. More research is needed.

Board of Health: As they had been waiting patiently, the Selectboard recognized the Board of Health members. They requested that a third member be appointed to the board to fill a vacancy, and also wanted to update the Selectmen on a matter with a resident that has a "crowded" yard. Apparently there are legal avenues that the town can take to compel the resident to clean up certain items from his yard (old tires, oil drums, etc...) that pose a public health risk. In the absence of a blight bylaw, nothing can be done about items that don't pose any risk.

Treasurer Budget: Treasurer Semanie presented her budget. In general, the costs of most things are going up, which has been reflected in her budget. She also realized that she did not budget anything last year for borrowing fees, which have now been added to the proposal. As this is the first year she has had a budget, there is still some "trial and error" in figuring out numbers.

Discussion ensued about ways that the town might save money in the payroll department. A suggestion was made that all employees be required to sign up with direct deposit, and perhaps pay stubs would no longer be mailed, but available online. This idea seemed to be supported, but ultimately it will be the Selectmen who make the final decision on if and when this change would be implemented. The two boards also discussed PO boxes and

whether it might make sense to purchase a large inside box and have one person sort the mail rather than rent ten or so boxes each year.

OBRA/Social Security: Treasurer Semanie updated the Selectmen and Finance Committee that her research into the OBRA vs. Social Security matter was still ongoing. Apparently there is no clear answer about whether or not part-time employees can choose to have deductions go into *either* Social Security or OBRA, or if they must go into OBRA. While the town matches the employee's contribution to Social Security, they do not match OBRA contributions. The school committee may also have made it policy that the part-time school employees need to contribute to OBRA, which brought up a question of whether payroll matters for those employees falls to the School Committee or the Board of Selectmen.

Stipends Revisited: Chair Zavotka repeated his findings to the Selectmen on stipends. A brief conversation ensued about salaries vs. stipends and how stipends for elected officials should be calculated.

Next Meeting: The Finance Committee will meet on Wednesday, January 30th for the next budget hearing. They will meet at 6:00 and go over a few things before the budget hearing at 6:30.

Adjourn: A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 P.M. The vote was 3-0-0 in favor.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Paul McLatchy III, Secretary*

Approved: _____

Wayne Zavotka, Chairman

Paul McLatchy III, Secretary

Christopher "Selmi" Hyytinen, Member

Attachments:

- Stipend Email
- Stipend Findings
- Town Clerk Budget
- Town Accountant Budget
- Treasurer Budget