

Rowe Finance Committee
Regular Meeting and Joint Budget Hearing with the Board of Selectmen
January 30, 2019
6:00 P.M. at Rowe Town Hall – Meeting Room 1

Present: Chair Wayne Zavotka, Vice-Chair Loretta Dionne, Christopher “Selmi” Hyytinen, Paul McLatchy III, Laurie Pike

Board of

Selectmen*: Chair Jennifer Morse, Vice-Chair Dennis May, Selectman Chuck Sokol

Other

Attendees*: Sandy Daviau, Council on Aging Chair & Tax Collector; Christopher “Selmi” Hyytinen, Police Officer (briefly); Margaret Rice, Board of Health Chair; Joanne Semanie, Board of Health Clerk; Julie Shippee, Police Chief

*During the budget hearings which began at 6:30. Chair Jennifer Morse was present during the Finance Committee meeting beginning at 6:00.

Call to Order: Chair Zavotka called the meeting to order at 6:04 P.M., with a quorum of the committee present.

Minutes: The minutes of January 23rd were reviewed. One correction as made, and the minutes were accepted as amended. The minutes of January 16th were signed, having already been approved.

Stipends: Ms. Pike has been reviewing the FRCOG wage salary spreadsheet and has noticed that the Board of Health members received the highest stipend for that role in Franklin County. Chair Zavotka repeated his findings from the last meeting to Ms. Pike, and the committee seemed to be in agreement that perhaps stipends as a whole should be reviewed. There is no background information as to why stipends are at the levels they are, they just “are”.

Accounting & Broadband: Chair Zavotka reported that the Massachusetts Department of Revenue has made it clear that they do not want to be involved in auditing telecommunications companies, of which the new broadband/Wired West project will fall under. Therefore, they were not able to give guidance as to what will be needed in regards to accounting for the town. Town Accountant Tracey Baronas has requested an increase in her salary to cover broadband accounting each week, but it remains unclear whether the bulk of the responsibility will be left to Wired West once up and running. Right now her budget includes 10 hours, which has been approximately what she has been putting in on her time sheets, but doesn’t include responding to emails and other items done off-site.

Wage Survey: Board of Selectmen Chair Jenn Morse had discussed the possibility of having a company conduct a wage study, something the Town of Ashfield recently did. She was able to contact Mary Flanders Aicardi, a professor at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, who was willing to do many of the same things that a paid study would do, but at no cost to the town. It will not be as comprehensive as a paid study, but will save roughly \$5,000-\$7,000.

Joint Meeting: At 6:30, the Board of Selectmen called their meeting to order.

Council on Aging Budget: Council on Aging Chair Sandy Daviau has requested a level-funded budget of \$3,800. She is looking to replace her computer, which was last updated in 2007. She contacted the Executive Office of Elder Affairs in Boston, and discovered that she is able to use part of her state grant to purchase a laptop, so there should be little to no cost to the town. When she retires at the end of the fiscal year, she will also need some file cabinets for her paperwork, as she currently stores that in with her files in the tax collector's office. No funds are being set aside at the moment, as the various offices in town hall might be able to consolidate/clean a few existing cabinets out for the Council's use.

Ms. Daviau informed the two committees that she is having difficulty with the new policy of only putting in for mileage reimbursements every six months, rather than after every event. The problem that the town was facing was that many small checks were being cut (less than \$10), and sometimes people would forget to cash them, causing issues with the reconciliation. She informed the committee that mileage is being reimbursed at \$0.20/mile, rather than the official \$0.58/mile. It is also only being given to those who request it. The Selectmen suggested she try going back to the previous method and see if people will be better about cashing their checks.

Tax Collector Budget: Tax Collector Sandy Daviau and Chair Morse submitted a budget for the tax collector's salary that totals \$8,320, or a 4.81% increase over last year's. As the position is going from an elected to an appointed position, the Board of Selectmen will need to consider whether the salary needs to be adjusted. If they are looking to hire a qualified person with experience, it's unlikely that even the \$8,320 requested line will be enough to attract someone, whereas it may be sufficient if they are looking to hire anyone willing to learn the job. The operations line included funding for consulting and training for the new hire.

Board of Health Budget: Chair Maggie Rice happily informed the two committees that the projected cost of the repairs at the transfer station were roughly \$8,000-\$12,000, far less than originally predicted. The Board of Health has also been awarded a grant which will allow for the purchase of 13 composters, which will be "raffled" off to residents interested in them.

In regards to the recent implementation of vehicle tags, she reported that people had been very nice about them, only mentioning one irate resident. They are still looking at moving towards pay-per-throw, possibly as of July 1st, but nothing has been set yet. They are considering giving homes 52 free bags a year when they go to purchase their tags, which will allow for one bag a week. Additional bags could be purchased if needed.

An additional \$500 was being sought under wages for snow removal, as attendants sometimes have to go down on off days to clear the areas that the town plows cannot reach.

The moneys being paid for transfer station tags is currently going into the general fund, which will ultimately become available as free cash. Mr. McLatchy opined that since the goal has been to not use free cash towards operating expenses, and the tags are being

charged as a way to defray costs, perhaps a revolving fund would be a more useful account to place the proceeds in. Moneys from this account could then be used to pay expenses.

Police Department Budget: Mr. Hyytinen briefly stepped down from his role as Finance Committee member and moved to the audience as he is employed as a reserve officer for the town. The budget for the police department remained mostly unchanged. Chief Shippee has requested the 2.5% COLA increase for all wages, and her operations line has decreased slightly.

The first of two capital requests for the year is roughly \$50,000 to replace the 2011 cruiser. The vehicle is still usable, but now has 91,000 miles on it and is starting to show wear and tear. Chief Shippee also said it is beginning to “feel” a bit worn. If approved, the \$50,000 would completely pay for a new vehicle that has been designed *as* a police cruiser, rather than one that has been retrofitted. Once purchased, the current cruiser would remain in service, but there would be no plans to replace it once it reached the end of its life. Members seemed supportive of a new vehicle under this plan, but not if the goal was to permanently increase the size of the police “fleet”.

The second request for a capital project was for bulletproof vests. By state law, vests must be replaced every five years, and they are now due. The town would simply need to front the money and then be reimbursed through a state grant.

As a special project, Chief Shippee is requesting approximately \$2,298 for a radar sign that would display a person’s speed. Though not mobile in its design, Chief Shippee believes it would not be difficult to shift it around town from time to time. Research will be done to see if a grant might be able to pay for part or all of it.

On a non-financial note, Chief Shippee asked the Board of Selectmen to consider Melinda Herzig as a candidate for the open position as a reserve officer. Melinda has worked in town before and would like to come back. The Board seemed agreeable, but wanted to follow the proper hiring procedures and make sure it was posted in the appropriate newspapers.

Mail Boxes: At the last meeting, the two boards briefly discussed scaling back on the number of PO boxes in town. There are a total of ten PO boxes being rented at a rate of \$900 per year. If this was reduced to two boxes- one for general mail and one for the tax collector, this would save roughly \$720 per year. Mr. McLatchy reported that he had found a wall-mounted option for roughly \$500, but the two boards questioned whether a locking system was even necessary. Perhaps the existing mail slots in the second meeting room might be adequate. Chair Morse will contact the other elected bodies that have boxes as the Selectmen cannot *require* them to close their box. There has been some feedback already from a few of the officials stating that they didn’t have any issue with closing their boxes.

Next Meeting: The Finance Committee will meet on Wednesday, February 6th 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 by Ms. Pike and seconded by Chair Zavotka to adjourn the meeting at 8:10 P.M. The vote was 5-0-0 in favor.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Paul McLatchy III, Secretary*

Approved: _____

Wayne Zavotka, Chairman

Loretta Dionne, Vice-Chairman

Paul McLatchy III, Secretary

Christopher "Selmi" Hyytinen, Member

Laurie Pike, Member

Attachments:

- Council on Aging Budget
- Tax Collector Budget
- Board of Health Budget
- Police Department Budget
- Police Capital Requests