Rowe Finance Committee
April 28, 2020
6:30 P.M. via Remote Participation

Present: Vice-Chair Loretta Dionne, Christopher "Selmi" Hyytinen, Paul McLatchy III, Laurie Pike
Absent: Chair Wayne Zavotka
Audience of Citizens: Assessors Chair Frederick Williams

Note: Due to the national COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting was held via remote participation as authorized by executive order of the governor. All votes are taken via roll-call vote.

Call to Order: Vice-Chair Dionne called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:36 P.M., with a quorum of the committee present.

State Aid: The state is expecting a large shortfall in revenue due to the pandemic. This is likely to affect the amount of state aid given to towns. Ms. Pike wondered if it might be appropriate to send letters to the various departments indicating that budget cuts may be necessary if state aid is reduced substantially. Mr. McLatchy felt it might be better to wait until more information is known. Assessors Chair Williams recommended going with the current budgets and make changes if the aid ends up being drastically cut. Vice-Chair Dionne asked when the town would know. Assessor Williams said it's usually July when the town finds out for sure, but due to circumstances may be later.

Minutes: The minutes of April 21st were submitted. A motion was made by Mr. Hyytinen and seconded by Vice-Chair Dionne to approve as written. The votes were as follows:

Christopher Hyytinen	Yes	Laurie Pike	Yes
Paul McLatchy III	Yes	Loretta Dionne	Yes

Broadband Loan Funding: Two lines have been put into the budget for the loan related to the broadband project. One covers the interest owed and is a fixed cost. The other is a line to pay down part of the principal. Due to the way the loan is structured, the town does not need to pay down any of the interest in the coming fiscal year, but is permitted to. The state is giving the town some additional grant moneys, so this may be a way to begin paying down on it.

Town Administrator: Mr. McLatchy recused himself as he works for general administration. The Selectmen have not yet finished their work on fleshing out a structure involving a town administrator and an assistant. Vice-Chair Dionne said that she is still unsure. At a Board of Selectmen meeting a number of people spoke out about their feelings about how now is not the right time to be making major changes. A state DOR report said it was not necessary, and Vice-Chair Dionne feels it would be a hard sell to the townspeople.

Ms. Pike reiterated her desire to see transparency in the process. She wants to see the Board of Selectmen try to work with existing staff and perhaps address a restructuring in

a year. Vice-Chair Dionne agreed. Mr. Hyytinen felt that perhaps the Board should "reset" the Executive Secretary's job to what it was before her (a Town Coordinator) with an assistant that could help. Ms. Pike then suggested that perhaps a statement should be issued from the Finance Committee to the Board of Selectmen about wanting the townspeople to voice their opinions before any lasting decisions are made.

Mr. Hyytinen would like the town employees to be included in this process, as they will be the ones most affected by any changes. Ms. Pike indicated she would like the Selectmen to write a letter to the townspeople linking them to the DOR report and list their goals. The Committee is desiring transparency, input from town employees, everyone to voice their opinion, and make sure people have enough knowledge to voice that opinion.

Accountant: The town is in the process of negotiating a contract to hire an accountant in conjunction with Charlemont and Monroe. This will unfortunately cost the town more, but due to there being a lack of qualified individuals in this area, the Board of Selectmen feels it would be beneficial to retain an experienced accountant.

Grasshopper Program: The Board of Selectmen still have not come to a decision about the future of the Grasshopper program and whether to expand it, reshape it, combine it with the park program, etc. Due to this lack of decision and the uncertainty of the program this summer (with the pandemic), a motion was made by Ms. Pike and seconded by Mr. Hyytinen to level fund the grasshopper budget for FY2021. The votes were as follows:

Christopher Hyytinen	Yes	Laurie Pike	Yes
Paul McLatchy III	Yes	Loretta Dionne	Yes

A question was raised about hiring levels. The park hires as many people as possible with their budget, sometimes even splitting positions to accommodate the number of applicants. The deadline for the Park is May 8th, and only two applicants have applied to date.

Budget & State Aid: Members revisited the topic of state aid affecting the budget. A motion was made by Mr. Hyytinen to level fund budgets if state aid is not received. This motion did not receive a second, but this was likely due to continued conversation and not necessarily a disagreement or lack of support. Ms. Pike noted that departments were asked to keep to a 2.5% increase, but many did not.

Road Paving: Mr. Hyytinen talked to Highway Superintendent Larned on Wednesday. The last two paving jobs done by the town (Cyrus Stage Road and Cross Road) have already begun to crack. Superintendent Larned said that the previous superintendent tended to go thinner on paving jobs, which has led to faster deterioration. Pond Road is next on his list and was last done in 2009.

Mr. Hyytinen has concerns as the plan is currently to just overlay the road. He feels that this will result in a road that doesn't last as long as it would if it were to be ground down

first. For example, in 2011 Zoar Road was ground down *and* overlaid, and has held up reasonably well. He said that he sees a lot of difference in the quality of the road and how long it holds up for.

Mr. McLatchy felt that the concern is not about whether grinding is the better way to go, but simply whether it was an option financially. Roads aren't lasting as long. He asked whether the town wants to do a good job on only half the roads, or a so-so job on all the roads. Mr. Hyytinen responded that he would like to speak with an expert on this who can advise the town.

After discussion, it was agreed not to make any recommendations as this may not be under the purview of the Finance Committee.

Yankee Road: Ms. Pike asked about the plans for Yankee Road, and whether the quick fix that was put forth as an option is still being pursued. This option would cost roughly $100,000, but could stabilize the road for a few years. However, if funding was received to redo the entire road, it would end up tearing up the patch job and rendering it moot (and potentially a waste of money). While money had made it into the transportation bond bill passed by the House, it's uncertain if this will still be funded due to the pandemic. Mr. McLatchy felt that the best thing to do at this point was to wait, and if funding was unlikely, then perhaps resort to the quick fix.

Next Meeting: As the Committee has done all the work it can do until other departments respond to requests for information and/or make decisions, no further meetings were planned.

Adjourn: A motion was made by Mr. McLatchy and seconded by Ms. Pike to adjourn the meeting at 7:34 P.M. The votes were as follows:

Christopher Hyytinen	Yes	Laurie Pike	Yes
Paul McLatchy III	Yes	Loretta Dionne	Yes

Respectfully Submitted,
Paul McLatchy III, Secretary

Approved: *June 5, 2020*

Paul McLatchy III, Secretary

Unable to be signed by entire committee due to COVID-19 pandemic.