

**Finance Committee Minutes for 6:30, Friday,
April 23, 2021
Via: Zoom Teleconference due to Covid**

1. Call to Order at 6:32. Those present included members Deb Andrew, John Redeker, Jackie Walsh, and Jim Burnham

2. New Business:

- a. Deb has volunteered to send Jackie reminders about upcoming meetings/posting the agenda/putting it on the town calendar.

3. Old Business

- a. Mohawk district FY 2022 operating budget: should we support it at Town Meeting? The Finance Committee each year gives the thumbs up or thumbs down to items on the Town Warrant, including proposed school spending.

(Comments below do not include every comment -- only those the minutes taker had time to write down. They are representative rather than complete.)

-- Jim: The (school district) process is not good. But if the Finance Committee recommended the voters not pass the school operating budget, what are we asking the School Committee to change? He is encouraged that there is a new superintendent and new business consultant. But he isn't happy about the process, with little School Committee review of the budget and very little input from us. He thinks we should give it the thumbs-up, however.

-- John: He is not supportive of the budget, because of the 4.7 percent increase for Shelburne and a lack of trying to make cuts at some place. There is too much administration, he said.

-- Todd: He's not happy about decisions made by the School Committee. School spending is a large percent of the town budget, yet we have no control over it. A lot of problems with the process have been going on for quite a while. Grants pay for a position and then we end up paying for the position after the first year. Staff keeps getting added. The capital requests made this year are just part of a huge list school officials want the towns to support over the next few years. Todd isn't sure school officials are trying to keep assessments reasonable. He wonders about the numbers attached to the capital spending items and whether they are accurate. Administrators are still being added, yet the student population is shrinking. When does it stop? Overall, the process isn't as transparent as it should be.

-- Jim: After town meeting, perhaps we should talk to school officials about the budget document (what we want to see in it in the future, as it still isn't clear/transparent enough) and whether there is too much administration in the schools.

-- Todd: He has sat in on every School Committee meeting and reforming the system is hard. There are fixed costs, such as pay raises for teachers that are contractual. We need to look at what is really needed and what isn't. He is glad there is a nicer superintendent for the district. The way the School committee is run needs to be looked at.

-- Deb: Jim's idea of writing a letter about our issues with the school budgets is a great one. We should consider reading it at Town Meeting. Alex Bogel is running for School Committee, which is great. Deb spoke about the Green Street (Elementary) School in Brattleboro, which has no vice principal and has two teachers and two paraprofessionals in each classroom. The budget and enrollment there are a little less than at BSE. "I believe we are not getting a good quality education" for the money we pay, she said. Deb suggested drafting a letter that we will read at Town Meeting, so that we are supporting the budget with a caveat. That would put the School Committee on notice. Deb volunteered to write a draft of the letter. Our Shelburne reps on the School Committee have been in a terrible position, she said.

b. Mohawk proposed capital budget

-- Todd: It hasn't been good to postpone maintenance. Some issues we've known about for years. There is a huge list that the district wants done. What we are voting on at town meeting is the tip of the iceberg. Also, the cost of the items is not clearly broken down on the warrant.

-- Deb: The lack of due diligence on the capital spending proposal is astonishing.

-- John: We can't approve it all. Look at the Technical School: their requests are about \$6,000 to \$7,000 a year. Mohawk's request is a multiple of 100 of that. They are things that need to be done. But not all at once.

-- Jim: The capital items need to be done. But it's unclear on what the warrant item calls for as far as whether we are paying over 2, 5 or 10 years. It's written as a debt exclusion item. Why? These come from a very long Potomac Capital Projects Working Group list from a few years ago. Some more minor items are disappearing as they have been financed through operating budgets, such as circulating pumps.

-- Deb: (She was on the ad hoc committee that came up with the warrant item.) Things were changed on the list after the final meeting.

-- Jim: There is a lack of oversight.

5. Other issues not anticipated 48 hours before the meeting: None

6. Public comment: no one from the public attended.

7. Next meeting date? Monday, April 26, meeting with Selectboard during its meeting. Our next Finance Committee meeting is at 6:30 on Monday, May 17.

8. Adjournment at 8:27 p.m.