

Finance Committee

Meeting minutes – September 17, 2009

Present: **Committee Members:** Chris DeSimone (Chair), Michael Landino, Alan Leao Jr, Holly Seiferth, Melissa Tzanoudakis, George Zacharakis

Absent: Chris Johnson (Vice Chair)

Guests: Robert Lambert (BOH Chair), Alfred Buckley (BOH Member), John Marriner (BOH Member), Sandra Grogan (BOH Secretary), Joseph Mazzola (Veterans' Service Officer)

Also present: Town Accountant Theresa Walsh

Chris DeSimone called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

Acceptance of Minutes: On a motion from George Zacharakis, seconded by Melissa Tzanoudakis, the minutes from August 4 meeting with one amendment, was approved by a vote 6-0, 0 abstained.

New Business: Chris DeSimone turned the meeting to the 5-year budget. He wanted everyone to look at the 5-year budget for the next meeting, and try to find areas to cut back since a shortfall is expected. Theresa Walsh noted that the printed copy everyone had was missing salaries. She would fix that and e-mail the corrected budget to everyone. Alan Leao Jr questioned the 2010 state aid because he thought in the town meetings that an additional 95k was going to be received. Theresa Walsh said that the total projected was less than 90k, and she would have to look at the spreadsheet to get actual information. Chris DeSimone ended the discussion with that if everyone could go through the 5-year budget with the idea of trying to find areas that they thought might be worth looking at, as that would be a main topic in the next meeting. He noted that not all months are equal, such as snow and sand, but it is important to find every penny possible of offset the expected large shortfall.

Chris DeSimone moved the meeting to Reserve Fund Transfers.

Present: Robert Lambert, Chairman and John Marriner, member, Board of Health and Sandra Grogan, Board of Health Secretary

The Board of Health wages hourly (\$14,235.00 to carry secretary through June 30, 2010 at 30 hour per week) reserve fund transfer request would allow the secretary to continue working 30 hours per week instead of 15 hours per week voted upon in town meeting. John Marriner, spoke about the different concerns confronting the Board of Health, such as EEE (Eastern Equine Encephalitis), West Nile, Flu, and hazardous waste. He noted that one of the most important roles for the Board of Health is communication, and the secretary fulfills that role. That was one of the main reasons she kept the 30 hours per week. Bob Lambert presented documentation to the Finance Committee demonstrating the different jobs performed by the secretary. He also noted that in the last year budget cutting, that the Board of Health committee cut their budget by 30% instead of the requested 10%. Robert Lambert pointed out that if there was no one to take the calls for emergencies, then the Board of Health would not be responsible. He also pointed out that the state would step in if the office was not being run properly.

Chris DeSimone pointed out that the 15 hours/week was what the town voted at the town meeting. Sandra Grogan questioned if anyone questioned the 15 hours/week recommendation from Nashoba. Chris DeSimone noted that no one questioned it; the town simply took Nashoba's recommendation of 15 hours/week. At this point, Chris DeSimone pointed out that this reserve fund transfer request did not meet the criteria for a reserve fund transfer request but instead should be a town meeting warrant article.

Alan Leao Jr questioned if any calls could be diverted to Nashoba. Robert Lambert noted that some calls were diverted to Nashoba, but most people preferred dealing directly with Pepperell. Sandra Grogan noted that calls do go to Nashoba, but there are some calls that need to be taken care of immediately. Nashoba has often had her taken care of calls that need immediate attention. John Marriner pointed out that Nashoba might want more money if the number of calls from

Pepperell keeps getting higher and higher. There is no contract; Nashoba cannot quit Pepperell's service, but they can increase the money amount.

Melissa Tzanoudakis questioned what Sandra Grogan's hours were at 15 hours. Sandra Grogan replied she cannot work a 15 hour work week. Melissa Tzanoudakis questioned what Sandra Grogan's hours were at 30 hours. Sandra Grogan replied that she works Monday through Wednesday 7:30am – 4:00pm, and Thursday from 7:30am. – 2:00 pm so she is available for contractors. Robert Lambert pointed out that she is available at her house or people can call his house, as well as leave messages on the machine.

Melissa Tzanoudakis noted that at the town meeting it was proposed that Nashoba would be providing administration hours additionally. Sandra Grogan said that there is a draft on file, and that there does seem to be a lot of confusion over what Nashoba does actually provide. Michael Landino thought that the memorandum of how many calls, food inspections, and so on that Nashoba provides should be compared to what we actually do. This would then show the gap of how much more we are doing. Robert Lambert pointed out that Nashoba does the restaurants every 6 months, and then Pepperell goes to the complaints in between. He felt that there was some wrong information given to start. John Marriner added that the memorandum was seen 1 week before Nashoba came to Pepperell and that the memorandum was very vague. Michael Landino repeated that it was important to know what the gap is; what the actual numbers are.

Michael Landino questioned what the animal inspector does. Robert Lambert answered that there was many assorted things such as dealing with chicken on other people's property, dog bites, inspecting horses, and dog or animal dying on roads.

Alan Leao Jr questioned if by working the 30 hours/week instead of the authorized 15 hours/ week, was Sandra Grogan getting benefits that she was not qualified for when she was working the authorized 15 hours/week. Sandra Grogan confirmed that yes she is getting benefits since she is working the 30 hours/week. Sandra Grogan added that this job cannot be done in 15 hours/week.

Holly Seiferth questioned if the job had to be done in a 15 hour/week timeframe, could they lean towards an appointment based setup. Robert Lambert answered that they had tried that in the past, but the schedule got overloaded.

Michael Landino questioned if Nashoba was providing good services for what they were providing. Robert Lambert answered positively.

George Zacharakis asked what other town Board of Health secretaries were working for hours. Sandra Grogan answered that Townsend was working an average of 37 hours/week.

Chris DeSimone ended the conversation saying that the memorandum needed to be looked at.

On a motion from George Zacharakis, seconded by Holly Seiferth, the Reserve Fund Transfer for \$14,235.00 (100-51100-5113) as written on 8/27/2009 was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was not approved by a vote 0(Aye) -6(No).

Reserve Fund Transfer Request – Present: Joseph Mazzola, Veterans' Service Officer.

The Veterans' Benefits request (\$3,039.00 for October benefits) is due to an unusual amount of veterans applying for benefits. Joseph Mazzola explained that there has been an increase in the amount of veterans applying for benefits. This is currently for 3 recipients. He will be entering a supplemental appropriation for the remainder of the year through a warrant article at special town meeting, which will probably be 28K-30K. That amount is the worst case scenario. He explained that the people who are eligible complete paperwork which goes through Boston, then comes to the towns they live in. He noted that the towns get 75% refunded back. As the people on the rolls status changes (they get jobs, they get federal benefits, or new people become eligible), then the monthly amount changes. Joseph Mazzola also explained that if the town does not have enough money in the account, then the money would have to be received from the state, and then the state charges the town twice as much.

Chris DeSimone questioned if these veterans were Vietnam veterans or younger veterans. Joseph Mazzola replied that the veterans could be any age veteran – Vietnam, Korean, even peacetime veteran. He also noted that the disabilities were different kinds too – medical or other. George Zacharakis questioned if there was a tracking system. Joseph Mazzola answered that the veterans came in monthly, as well as Boston had a tracking system. He worked with the veterans for whatever they had the disability for. If they had unemployment disability, they had to provide job hunting documentation. If they were on medical disability, they had to provide doctor documentation.

On a motion from George Zacharakis, seconded by Michael Landino, the Reserve Fund Transfer for \$3,039.00 (100-5430-57771) as written on 9/10/2009 was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6(Aye) -0(No).

Business: Chris DeSimone notified the group that he had been sitting in the interview process for the Town Accountant, strictly from the point of view of Finance Committee member and how the interviewee would interact with the Finance Committee.

Chris DeSimone brought the discussion to the outsourcing/regionalizing committees that was posted to the town. No one has volunteered. Chris DeSimone thought that the Finance Committee members could research and make recommendations on these by splitting up into two teams of 2 and 1 common member. Chris DeSimone felt he could be the common member to both teams. He requested that everybody think about which sub-committee they would like to be a part of, and at the next meeting they could split up into team.

Chris DeSimone pointed out that there was a copy of the letters that were sent to the school districts for their information, as well as a response from North Middlesex Regional school district.

Chris DeSimone thought that if everyone agreed, he would write up a warrant article for special town meeting as a blank warrant now, but to be used later for whatever the Finance Committee can come up with savings in the budget. The committee agreed to the idea. Melissa Tzanoudakis commented that there were already some good ideas, such as the insurance stipend. Alan Leao Jr handed out some documentation on Group Insurance that he had done some research on. He felt it was worth continuing to research. He commented that Groton School district participated, and that Chelsea and Springfield were both looking at it. He wondered what Pepperell might be able to save with it, and how far could it go with town employees and contracts. Chris DeSimone thought it was worth the research, as that was part of what Finance Committee is for – making recommendations. Theresa Walsh noted that for some town employees there is a union, it is not a simple process, but there are people to talk to and work with.

The discussion moved to Peter Fitzpatrick School. George Zacharakis commented that he had read an article that indicated that the selectmen were not happy with the walk through. Michael Landino commented that Peter Fitzpatrick School is the town's biggest asset. Alan Leao Jr commented that it seemed to be almost a disappointment that Nissitissit Middle School was built and now not needed. He was concerned what would happen if the town ended up using Peter Fitzpatrick School for something else and then there was another growth spurt.

Upcoming Meetings: Thursday, October 1st 7:00pm (updated to Tuesday, September, 29th, 7:00pm)
Thursday, October 8th, 7:00pm
Thursday, October 15th, 7:00pm
Thursday, October 22nd, 7:00pm

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynne Henderson