

Approved 12/11/13 (5-0-0)

**Ashfield Finance Committee
November 6, 2013, 7 PM
Conference Room, Town Hall**

Attendance: Present: Ted Murray (Chair), David Newell, Janet Rogers, Tom Schreiber; Absent: Ricki Carroll

Call to Order: Meeting called to order at 7:12 PM

Approval of Minutes: It was **moved, seconded and voted to approve the minutes of June 19, 2013 (4-0-0), June 24, 2013 (4-0-0), and July 8, 2013 (4-0-0).**

Vocational Education & Transportation: David updated the committee re: transportation arrangements for vocational education students. He noted the need to closely monitor billings from the bus company and eventually the need to establish a properly authorized local school committee to ensure continuity of oversight for voked transportation. It is likely that town counsel will need to be consulted to ensure the legality of this oversight. Soon Mohawk District will be putting out to bid a contract for the next 5 years of transportation, and negotiations are likely to ensue (as well as probable cost increases).

School Maintenance Projections: Schedules of projected costs for repair and maintenance of Sanderson Academy and Mohawk Middle/High School [**document 1**] were distributed and discussed. The implications of these estimates seemed difficult to interpret so Ted will inquire of Emily Robertson their significance.

Handicap Lift Inspections: Ted distributed a background data sheet re: lift inspections, currently required on an annual basis by the Commonwealth [**document 2**]. The frequency and cost of inspections seem disproportionate to the limited use of the lifts, so after discussion, it was moved, seconded and voted (4-0-0) to send a letter to legislators recommending modification of current regulations [**document 3**]. In an effort to economize on future lift inspections, it also was moved, seconded, and voted (4-0-0) to request of FRCOG that Ashfield be added to their next group contract for future lift inspections and maintenance services [**document 4**].

Financial Audit: Review of the town's financial audit [**on file at Town Hall**] disclosed an unfunded actuarial accrued liability of \$689,938 for Other Post Employment Benefit costs (primarily health care related) and a \$502,622 unfunded actuarial liability for Pension Plan costs. In light of recent articles in The Beacon, it was thought that we should look into establishing and contributing to specific reserve funds to address these unfunded liabilities. In the audit's accompanying Management Letter, it was recommended that the town develop a financial policy manual. After discussion, Tom agreed to draft such a document, using Amherst's as a model.

Grader Purchase: Ted briefed the committee on the bids submitted for the highway department's new grader [**document 5**] and the Select Board's intention to accept Tom Poissant's recommendation to accept the lower of the two bids. Because of a saving of approximately \$62,000 from what had been authorized at last May's Annual Town Meeting, **it was moved, seconded, and voted (4-0-0) to recommend to the Select Board that the town pay for the new grader by raising and appropriating \$80,000, transferring \$55,000 from Free Cash, and borrowing the balance of the purchase price (\$88,206) via a debt exclusion of two years duration.** This recommendation will be forwarded to the Select Board in anticipation of our November 18 meeting with them.

Compensation Survey: Via email, Ricki reported that the Personnel Committee is now turning

to the process of gathering information about town employee pay rates in communities comparable to Ashfield, such as Buckland, Shelburne, Conway, Williamsburg, and Deerfield. Other communities thought to be relevant were Colrain and possibly Chesterfield. Ted will pass these suggestions on to Ricki.

Ashfield House: An income statement for Ashfield House for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2013 with notes was distributed and discussed [**document 6**]. No improvements in their financial performance were noted or thought likely in the near future, but it was noted that the recent refinancing had enabled needed renovations to the building.

Regionalization: Ted reported on a regionalization conference he attended recently. For any combination of police departments among neighboring towns, one facilitating factor seems to be a vacancy in one or more of the chief positions involved.

Upcoming Meetings: We plan to meet with the Select Board on November 18 to discuss the purchase and financing of the new grader. Ted will solicit meeting times for an early December meeting to review a draft of a proposed policy manual for the committee.

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 9:03 PM.

Documents and Handouts Used at the Meeting:

1. Projected repair and maintenance costs for Sanderson and Mohawk Schools
2. Data sheet re: lift inspections
3. Letter to Joint Chairs of Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security
4. Letter to FRCOG
5. Bid summary for highway grader
6. Income statement and notes for Ashfield House

Respectfully Submitted by Ted Murray