

Accepted: 2/17/2016

Voted: 3-0-0

**MEETING MINUTES OF ASHFIELD FINANCE COMMITTEE
7:00 PM, January 6, 2016 at Ashfield Town Hall**

Members Present: Ted Murray (Chair), Tom Schreiber, Carol Lebold, David Newell. Lindy Gougeon as a recently appointed member of the committee also was present, though not yet officially sworn in.

Absent: None

Also attending: Emily Robertson and Poppy Doyle of the MTRSD School Committee and Chris Lynch, Director of Business Development – New England Division of Matrix Design Group.

Ted called the meeting to order at 7:10 PM, and welcomed Lindy as our newest appointed committee member in replacement of Janet Rogers, who had submitted her resignation. (See Doc 2 for Ted's letter accepting Janet's resignation.)

Minutes

It was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously to accept the minutes of December 7, 2015 (4-0-0) (see Doc 3).

School Budget

Emily and Poppy briefed the Finance Committee on the status of the MTRSD budget, citing various options under consideration to limit the district's overall FY17 budget to a 2.5% increase over the budget for FY16. There still remain about \$600,000 in savings being sought to achieve this target. It was noted that Ashfield's capital assessment for FY17 will be \$56,814, less than our FY16 assessment of \$66,274.

Because differential assessments among the district towns can bog down approval of a budget, David suggested that the School Committee consider calling for a 1-year moratorium on differential apportionment of the assessments, instead making them all the same percentage increase. This was done successfully several years ago.

Broadband

Chris Lynch of Matrix Design Group distributed a handout (see Doc 4) and made a presentation in which he expressed concern that Ashfield's costs for a broadband system would likely be significantly higher than estimates made by either MBI or WiredWest. Factors such as pole counts, road miles, and subscriber take rates would all influence actual costs, and he thought a system for Ashfield would cost approximately \$4.2 million vs. the \$3.71 million estimated by MBI. Moreover, he raised questions about the certainty of funding and follow-through by MBI, particularly in light of the currently strained relations with WiredWest. He indicated the instead of 1) building a system on our own (the Leverett model) or 2) participating in a regional build-out with MBI, we could 3) effect a public-private partnership by working with Matrix. If we did that, he thought we would only be liable for about \$1.2 million in make ready costs with Matrix paying for the actual construction work. Moreover, we would still qualify for the \$770,000 offered by MBI for construction work, so that our net cost would be approximately \$430,000 (and possibly less, based on some different assumptions). Considerable discussion ensued, and in conclusion, the committee felt that Matrix (and other, similar organizations) should be included in any RFIs/RFPs issued by Ashfield.

Separately, David distributed copies of an email he had sent to David Kulp, seeking clarification about WiredWest's governance document (Doc 5)

VEAC Update

David briefed our committee on the structure and recent deliberations of the Vocational Education Advisory Committee, noting in particular that they will be seeking reactions from our committee to some policies being developed in coordination with the MTRSD. He will circulate further background material for our consideration at a future meeting.

Intervener Status with FERC

Ted asked if the committee wished to seek intervener status re: the Kinder Morgan gas pipeline project under consideration by FERC. After discussion, it was agreed that the committee did not have enough information for/against the pipeline to make an informed decision, so the idea was dropped.

FY17 Budget Meetings and Schedule

Ted briefed the committee on the upcoming schedule of budget meetings with the Select Board. He will send info copies of the budget letter and schedule to all.

Mary Priscilla Howes Fund

Ted circulated a copy of his memo to the Treasurer and Accountant about accounting for the income of the Mary Priscilla Howes Fund based on an earlier vote of the committee (Doc 6).

Upcoming Meetings

Mon., Feb 1, 7 PM First of regular budget meetings with SB
Wed., Feb 10, 7 PM Public budget hearing with School Committee (at MTRSD High School)

The meeting was adjourned at 10:03 PM.

Documents

Doc 1 Agenda for 1/6/16
Doc 2 Ted's letter accepting resignation by Janet Rogers
Doc 3 Minutes from FinCom meeting of December 7, 2015
Doc 4 Matrix Design handout
Doc 5 Copy of email from David Newell to David Kulp
Doc 6 Memo re: accounting for Howes Fund income

Respectfully submitted,
Ted Murray