

Approved: 5/7/2016
Voted: 4-0-0

MINUTES OF THE ASHFIELD FINANCE COMMITTEE
7:00 PM, April 11, 2016 at Ashfield Town Hall

Members Present: Ted Murray (Chair), David Newell, Carol Lebold, Tom Schreiber

Also Attending: Tom Carter, Chair Select Board; Kayce Warren, Interim Town Administrator; Buz Eisenberg, Town Moderator

Absent: Lindy Gougeon

Ted called the meeting to order at 7:13 PM.

Minutes: It was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously (3-0-0) to approve, with minor editorial corrections, the minutes of March 22, 2016. [Tom arrived after the vote.] (Doc 2)

Review of Budget and ATM Warrant

The budget and warrant were reviewed for the purpose of making recommendations re: the various warrant articles in preparation for Annual Town Meeting.

It was moved, seconded, and voted by unanimous consent (4-0-0) to recommend FOR the following ATM warrant articles: 1-4, 12-14, 18-27, 31-32. (Doc 3)

The remainder of the articles were held out for further discussion and voted as follows:

Article 5: FOR (3-1-0) – David opposed; he was skeptical of the need for a Proposition 2-1/2 override, citing the decreased costs of Vocational Education for FY17 as well as some increase in School Transportation revenues. He argued that Ashfield taxes are already high relative to neighboring towns, and passage of Article 5 would increase them further. If the override fails, what would be the consequences? The most likely items to be changed and/or eliminated would be some combination of: Broadband Development (\$60,000); backhoe purchase (\$40,000 of the \$70,000 total proposed); transfer station improvements (\$50,000); library renovations (\$12,500). We also examined the implications for the town's financial stability. From the Long Term Financial Planning Sheet, Total Reserves were calculated to be \$548,242, or 11.5% of the total budget of \$4,874,074 (Doc 4). This percentage is identical to last year's measure, and within the desired 10-15% range per our financial policy.

Article 6: FOR (4-0-0) – This action conforms to the recommendations of the DLS Financial Management Review.

Article 7: FOR (3-0-1) – David abstained; he questioned the implications for the school budgets if the Proposition 2-1/2 override failed. In that case, if Article 7 passed, he thought there would NOT be any ability to reconsider school budgets.

Article 8: FOR (4-0-0) – This serves to implement some of the recommendations of the School’s Long Range Planning Committee.

Article 9: NO RECOMMENDATION (4-0-0) – The committee thought it did not have enough information to adequately assess the financial consequences for the town of Ashfield.

Article 10: FOR (3-0-1) – Tom abstained; though the intention of the article is a welcome loosening of the strictures of the current regional agreement, it leaves intact an ability for any one town to negate any proposed closure of its elementary school.

Article 11: FOR (3-0-1) – David abstained; though the need for a backhoe seemed clear, funding so much in FY17 as proposed in the budget was of some concern.

Article 15: FOR (3-1-0) – David opposed; though the need for a backhoe seemed clear, funding so much in FY17 as proposed in the budget was of some concern, and the need to maintain two police cruisers seemed unnecessary. For both lines, the term “Capital Fund” was replaced with “Purchase Account” to clarify that these amounts were not being put into any type of stabilization account.

Article 16: FOR (4-0-0) – It was thought that a stipend for the Firearms Clerk should not be subject a 2% COLA, and the Select Board may subsequently delete the account because the duties of the Firearms Clerk are now subsumed within the duties of other officers.

Article 17: FOR (4-0-0) – Discussion about the library’s “Paving Fund” caused it to be re-titled as “Renovations” to allow for the possibility of changes in the priorities of work currently underway at the library.

Article 28: FOR (3-0-1) – David abstained; there was a question about how essential it was to use a Proposition 2-1/2 override to fund broadband development at this time when there already had been authorized \$2.3 million in borrowing for that purpose. In addition, the phrase “Special Purpose Stabilization Fund for Broadband development and installation” was replaced with the term “Broadband Development Account.”

Article 29: FOR (4-0-0) – The word “Fund” was replaced with the word “Account.”

Articles 33 and 34: The committee took no action because neither of these articles appeared to have relevant financial consequences for the town. Moreover, it was suggested by Tom Carter that these two articles might be withdrawn from ATM and re-visited in a STM sometime in June.

Public Hearing on April 25

It was confirmed that there will be a public presentation of the warrant and discussion of the budget on April 25. In preparation, we will be guided by the two emails offering suggestions from Lindy and Carol. **It was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously (4-0-0) to introduce these two emails into the public record.** (Docs 5 and 6)

MTRSD and Voc Ed Update

David briefed us on the work of the BEST Committee on which he serves. Along with Superintendent Buoniconti, it will address various configurations of 4th, 5th, and 6th grade classes. Voc Ed enrollments are now established and seem stable for the coming school year, although there remain some transportation routes to be finalized.

Broadband Update

Ted's recent conversation with David Kulp led to the conclusion that MBI continues to temporize with respect to plans for moving ahead with broadband. As a consequence, there may be a need to either put more pressure on MBI for action or seek a more independent way forward if we are to fulfill our mandate from Ashfield residents. Options such as a less expensive wireless system or working with a private company such as Axia or Matrix may need to be explored further.

It was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously (3-0-0) to adjourn the meeting at 9:09 PM. [Tom had to leave at about 9 PM.]

Respectfully submitted,
Ted Murray

Document List

1. Agenda for 4/11/16
2. Minutes from 3/22/16
3. ATM Warrant – Draft 6
4. Long Term Financial Planning document dated 4/11/16
5. Email received from Lindy Gougeon on 4/8/16
6. Email of 4/10/16 from Carol Lebold