Town of Rutland

Finance Committee

Minutes: February 13, 2020

Meeting Opened: 7:06 P.M.

Attendance:
Board Members Present: Iain McKinlay, Edward Purcell, Dave Lussier, Carol Martens, Karen Nahrwold, Peter O’Malley, Thomas Ruchala
Board Members Absent: None
Staff Members Present: Mike Nicholson (Town Administrator), Tomeca Murphy (Secretary)
Guests: Peter Craine, Anita Carlson

**Please note the meeting was recorded live for broadcast on Rutland Community TV and YouTube.**

Votes:
Motion to approve the meeting minutes of November 7, 2019 & November 14, 2019—Motion made by Karen Nahrwold, seconded by Peter O’Malley; vote unanimous at 7:07 P.M.

Motion to close the meeting—Motion made by Dave Lussier, seconded by Carol Martens; vote unanimous at 8:13 P.M.

New Business

Finance Committee Bylaw: Proposed Changes
Peter Craine, chairman of the Ad-Hoc Bylaw Committee, was in attendance to discuss the proposed changes to the bylaw. The Committee is in the process of updating numerous bylaws with the goal of having some amendments ready for Town Meeting. A large percentage of the changes are for style, such as having uniform font, numbering, layout etc. throughout the document. The FinComm bylaw was redone 2 years ago, but they have since learned that the bylaws need updating due to changes in MA General Law and case law.

Karen Nahrwold shared that she had looked at the most recent agendas for the Bylaw Committee and the discussion of the FinComm bylaw had not been on any of them. Peter explained that, up to this point, they hadn’t been specific on which bylaws they were working on. However, moving forward, there will be more detail added to the agendas. Karen also stated that she did not see any minutes posted where the FinComm bylaw was discussed, however, Anita Carlson (Town Clerk) confirmed that the minutes were posted to the town's website. Karen expressed that she would have liked the FinComm to have been included in the discussion of the bylaw prior to that evening's meeting. Iain clarified that the purpose of the discussion that evening was to provide Peter with feedback to then take back to the Bylaw Committee. None of the proposed changes have been reviewed by legal as it's still the beginning of the process. During the discussion, it was also re-iterated that one of the roles of the FinComm is to opine on every article put up for a vote at the Town Meeting. The Committee will see all proposed bylaw changes for other departments/boards prior to Town Meeting and will present a stance of voting favorably, unfavorably or no action.

One of the proposed changes was to remove section 3A regarding the duty of the board to consider expenditures and create the budget, which prompted Karen Nahrwold to ask why it had been removed. Peter clarified that there was a misunderstanding as to whose role it was, as the Bylaw Committee had thought it was the duty of the Town Administrator. However, Mike Nicholson confirmed that is not the case and Peter said it would be put back in. Another proposed change is to Section 2A regarding Town Meeting warrant articles. Peter
explained this will be moved to the Select Board bylaw as this falls under their purview. Karen Nahrwold and Tom Ruchala both disagreed with this amendment, but both Peter and Anita Carlson stressed that it is appropriate to put it in the Select Board bylaws. Also in section 3A, there was a proposed change in wording from “shall” to “may” when referring to departments/boards providing the previous year's budget and expenditures. Karen would like it changed back to “shall” so that there is no question that the prior year's numbers need to be provided. Peter argued that if it were a new line item or department, prior year numbers wouldn’t exist. So, by using the word “may” instead of “shall”, it gives the board freedom for such a unique circumstance.

Tom Ruchala brought up the existing bylaw wording that states that if any board member is absent for 5 consecutive meetings, other than illness, then their seat is deemed to be vacant. The board agreed that there are other viable reasons why a member may be absent and would like to change the wording so there's more flexibility before someone loses their seat. Tom also questioned section 1A that states the appointment of Committee members is ratified by the Select Board. He would like to add wording that says the appointment can't be reasonably withheld. Peter and Mike Nicholson both felt that fell under the state statute and would have to be verified by KP Law. Carol Martens had a question regarding the 3 year term limit for appointed members because some had changed previously in different time frames. Mike Nicholson clarified that the confusion may have arisen because seats were being filled for members who left before their term had expired, so therefore, the terms were renewed when the original member's term was due to expire. There was also a discussion regarding section 2A that states the Finance Committee sees all warrants set to be voted on prior to Town Meeting. It was clarified that the final warrant is drawn once the board votes and gives the go ahead to post it, which takes place 2 weeks prior to Town Meeting. Peter O'Malley asked if the relevant sections of MA General Law are referenced in the bylaw. Mike Nicholson said that is not usually the case because copying and pasting from the MA bylaws is not recommended due to the ability for it to change at the state level. This would then necessitate the need to re-write the bylaw at the town level, which would be a great deal of work. Iain recommended that the members review all of the proposed changes and e-mail him their feedback. He will then pass on their comments to Peter and the Bylaw Committee.

FY21 Department Budget Review

Town Administrator/Select Board

Mike Nicholson presented the Committee with the first draft of the FY21 budget. Mike explained that he had asked all department heads to prepare their budgets as if the town had reached a population of 10,000 so that they aren’t cut off guard when the time comes, which isn’t projected to happen until the year 2026. He then asked them to submit their budgets based on the current population, which is approximately 9,200 residents. He noted that the Fire Department and Library will be eligible for grant funding once the town reaches a population of 10,000, but the financial impacts won’t be seen until the year 2030. Grant requests came in at $22,741,675.04. Projected total revenue is $22,083,978, which includes the use of $150,000 free cash. The long term goal for 2030 will be to use less free cash. With the free cash policy, they are looking to cut $481,033.39 from the budget, which includes the school budget. All unions have completed negotiations with the exception of the Rutland Regional Dispatch Center, which is going through this process right now. The contracts for Becky Tuttle (Treasurer/Collector), Police Chief Nick Monaco, Fire Chief Seth Knipe and Dispatch Director Mike Moriarty have all been approved and signed by the Select Board. Some of the most notable changes include the moving of funds to different line items or departments, such as moving the Administrative Assistant’s salary from the Select Board budget to the TA's budget. This was done because Laura Paradise is now working hours during the normal business day rather than in the evenings while attending meetings. Other notable changes are with the DPW budget being more specific and putting expenditures under the proper line items, which Chief Buckley will present at the February 20th meeting.

The Chrome books have arrived, so Mike will be able to e-mail the budgets to everyone in addition to their binders.

Looking at the cherry sheets, Governor Baker's budget numbers are up this year. The town took a big hit on the
veteran's reimbursement due to not have a Veteran Service Officer for 8 months out of the year. The town has since hired Sara Wyman, who is currently working with 2 veterans who qualify for the benefits. The current reimbursement is down to $4,500, so Mike has asked Senator Anne Gobi and Rep. Kim Ferguson to please add an increase to their budget amendments. Sara was unable to attend the meeting due to a prior work commitment, as she serves as the VSO for other surrounding towns.

Select Board
There is a 57.9% decrease in the budget since the Administrative Assistant's salary was moved to the TA's budget. There is a $1,500 increase in purchase services. This is in part due to the Wachusett Watershed Recycling Center assessing a 15.4% increase for the town. There is a $500 increase for the secretary position because they haven't yet had a secretary position for a full year. Peter O'Malley asked if it's possible to get comparable budgets from other towns to know if the numbers are in line or not as he wants to ensure things aren't over or under funded. Mike Nicholson said he would work on that for the Committee.

Town Administrator
Mike added 2 new line items, one for the Administrative Assistant's salary (with a 2% COLA increase) and an intern position because he was asked about this opportunity many times during the year. However, he doesn't intend to fund that position. The purchase services number remained flat and the “other charges” are largely work related mileage and receipt reimbursements. There was an overall increase of 30.28%, which is largely due to Laura's salary. Mike did also note a free cash warrant article to be prepared in the event that he leaves his current position with the town. He is currently running for the office of Mayor in the City of Gardner and the outcome will determine his future with the town. The election is the Tuesday before Town Meeting and no one would take office until the Saturday following Town Meeting.

Inspectional Services
The Building Commissioner, William Cassanelli, was unable to attend the meeting due to a personal matter so Mike presented on his behalf. The only increase is representative of a 2% COLA for full time staff only. Karen asked if the 2% has been approved by the Select Board and it has not because they wanted to see the budget first.

Veteran's Affairs
They thought about adding a supplies or purchase services to the budget, however, they decided against it because the work is mostly done online. The “other” section pertains to mileage reimbursement, however, Sara primarily meets with veterans at the Town Hall. Since beginning her position, Sara has found one additional veteran that qualifies for services, bringing it to a total of 2 for the town. Sara reached out to the American Legion to try to find qualifying individuals in town. Carol asked what criteria is used to consider eligibility and Mike said there are many different types. He stated that the Federal government sets the mandates, but the bulk of the funding comes from cities and towns with a 75% reimbursement from the state.

Other
Mike also discussed that the line item “town phones” had hit its mark halfway through the fiscal year and it should not have happened. He explained that at Town Meeting, it was voted to get a new phone system with Crocker Communications. The goal was to end their service with Verizon on August 1, 2019, however due to issues with Crocker, it didn't cut over until December 15, 2019. As of right now, the article has not run out. There was a $5,000 budget with $6,342 spent by December. Since then, however, money has been moved around to prevent a deficit. The town's fax lines are still with Verizon, but Mike is looking into a fax to e-mail option. View Point is also being used by all departments with the Select Board projected to go live next month.

Respectfully Submitted,
Tomeca Murphy, Secretary