

## **Finance Committee Meeting Minutes December 4, 2020**

Meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm. Present included members John Redeker and Deborah Andrew and Chairwoman Jackie Walsh.

### **New Business**

#### **1. Writing a letter to the School Committee re MTRSD FY'20 and FY'21 transportation costs and other school spending**

The committee decided to hold off on sending a letter to the School Committee about spending on buses that are not moving this year. The School Committee recently voted to continue to spend 70 percent of the normal costs of having those buses run. Committee members felt the issue may be moot because the vote is not changeable. But they did not rule out sending a letter in the near future expressing their need for more information and objection to spending that much money on buses that aren't moving.

#### **2. Hosting a joint meeting with other finance committees from Mohawk Trail Regional School District towns**

The committee will reach out to the other Finance Committees for MTRSD towns to see if there is interest in holding a joint meeting in January. Issues that we'd like to discuss include:

Transportation spending

The school budget in general, which amounts to 50 percent of the Shelburne budget

This year's fiscal picture

Issues the other committee members would like to discuss

Jackie will contact the chairs of the other committees to see if they are interested. She will propose these dates:

Thursday, Jan. 14

Friday, Jan. 15

Thursday, Jan. 21

We are free other times, too.

#### **3. Recruiting two members of Finance Committee**

We only have three members currently, as Chairman Kristian Whitsett and member Daniel Lieberman have left the board. We will miss them both. The members agreed to compile lists of possible candidates and send them to each other (so we don't ask the same people). We are aiming to get two more people by mid-January.

#### **4. Liaisons to School Committee/Senior Center -- reports**

Jackie reported on the Senior Center Expansion Committee and Shelburne study group for the West County Senior Services District Document. The expansion committee is working on document that creates a separate group with buying/selling power, which it needs in order to buy and renovate the Masonic Building on Main Street in Shelburne Falls, where the senior center is now. Jackie is on the study group, and they met in early November. She said the document will not take power away from the

towns and the townspeople -- it is a technicality that needs to happen in order to buy the property, and the townspeople will be asked whether or not to spend the money on the project two Mays from now. In a recent meeting, the Expansion Committee approved a working timeline to hear from all the towns -- the selectboards, the Finance Committees, and the townspeople -- before May votes on whether or not to create the new committee.

Jackie noted that she would like an addition of a bathroom or two at the Senior Center before the building project as they are very much needed. Currently, there is only one bathroom, and the renovation project might not happen for a few years, she said. Deb suggested the staff use the bathroom on the bottom floor of the library, which is just yards away across a parking lot, to help keep the existing Senior Center bathroom freer for seniors at the center.

Deb reported on the School Committee's hiring of the company TN Solution Inc. The company is filling the gap left by the recent and sudden resignation of the school district's budget director. Deb is happy the two partners of the company have a background in teaching and education. She noted that it will cost less to use the company than to have a budget director. They are also working in Greenfield, and Greenfield has a much clearer, reader-friendly, and thoroughly-explained budget document than Mohawk. She is so far pleased with the hiring of the company.

Deb noted that the next School Committee Budget Subcommittee meeting is at 5 p.m. on Wed., Dec. 9. The full School Committee meetings at 6:30 that night.

Deb would like to be on a capital planning subcommittee being created for the School Committee. Jackie is going to let the School Committee chairwoman know.

#### **5. Discussion of Finance Committee 101 workshop by FRCOG**

Deb kindly sent the committee members slides from the recent workshop, which all three of us attended via Zoom. We agreed to look through them and bring to our next meeting anything we see in there that we think will be useful for our committee. We all would like more professional development about how to serve the community well as a Finance Committee.

#### **6. What the town bylaws say about Finance Committee**

Deb submitted a page from the town bylaws on what our responsibilities are as Finance Committee. It's very short and told us little except that we make recommendations about the annual town budget. She also submitted a report the Buckland Finance Committee made for its Selectboard on its annual budget. We are all going to look at it more closely and consider doing something similar. We have not in the recent past submitted a written report of our recommendations for the budget as we typically meet, discuss the budget, make decisions and then meet with the selectmen and discuss each item in person.

#### **7. Priorities members have for this year**

John said he'd like us to continue working with School Committee members on transparency in the budget and budget process.

Jackie wondered if we should invite the school superintendent and school committee chairman to a meeting to discuss the budget, as we did two years ago. She thinks we should discuss doing that with other Finance Committees.

Deb would like us to meet with our Shelburne representatives to the committee and possibly TM Solution.

Jackie would also like to visit all the town departments, such as the assessors, the highway department, the police station and others. Since we make decisions affecting them, she thinks it would be helpful to visit each. It wouldn't require the entire Finance Committee for each visit.

#### **8. Scheduling/posting Zoom meetings**

Jackie noted that we've had problems with Zoom but she expects it is smoothing out and will become second nature.

The committee agreed to invite Town Administrator Terry Narkewicz to a meeting soon to talk about the budget process.

#### **9. Adjournment -- The meeting was adjourned at 6:50 p.m.**