

Town of Charlemont
Joint Finance Committee and Select Board Meeting
Minutes March 22th, 2023
Via Telephone and at the Town Hall

Board Members Present: Lynn Hathaway, Bill Harker, Jay Healy, Rich Filoramo, Valentine Reid, Ron Smith, Amy Wales

Board Members Joined by phone: Jared Bellows

Others present: Sarah Reynolds (Administrator,) Star Atkeson (Secretary)

Rich Filoramo called the meeting to order, 4:36.

ACTION ITEMS:

Review/ Approve Meeting Minutes from 3/08/2023.

- **Rich Filoramo made a motion seconded by Jay Healy to approve the 3/08/2023 Minutes as written. All in Favor.**
- **Valentine Reid made a motion to approve the Minutes as written, Bill Harker seconded it. All in favor.**

Administrator's Report

1. FY24 Cherry Sheet numbers update

- Cherry Sheet numbers did not change. Ambulance is a bit less; Transfer Station is less \$3000 than last year, the final number will depend on the next few months. Sarah is going to keep track and look for trends and see if they can offset the slow months with staffing for example and with composting, and possibly a paper and cardboard compactor. Sarah will review with Thorne to see what's going on. Rich and Ron questioned whether it was about the change from bags to stickers. Since the returnables shed is overflowing, Sarah asked the select Board permission to buy a returnable bin, and to use the proceeds for schools.
- The budget lines are filled in and where it is an estimate, Sarah went high (a 6% increase in property insurance) and any other lines where the assessments weren't in yet. The highest estimated payment for financing was used on the Broadband line.
- On whether to raise and appropriate or transfer the Broadband number, Sarah suggests talking to DLS about it. Draft 4 of the FY2024 budget shows Broadband raising and appropriating and reimbursing the General Fund, the reimbursement shows up in income. Amy said the local receipts will be on the recap.
- The Broadband is self-contained and will not affect tax rate. The debt is paid from Broadband fees. Sarah points out that this should be clearly explained on Town Meeting Floor.
- Hawlemont is up \$281,000. That will require an explanation on Town Meeting floor. Sarah points out that a warrant article is needed for that budget amount. Amy Wales pointed out that it was the wrong number in FY23.
- Line 100 on Draft 4 FY 2024 Budget Worksheet, Hawlemont regional operating Assessment needs a Warrant Article to appropriate the full amount.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

1. FY23 Budget shortage; Vote on whether to take money out of Free Cash instead of end of year transfer.

Rich Filoramo made a motion which was amended by Amy Wales to read: **A motion to recommend a Warrant Article to fund FY2023 (the school 2 ½ appropriation) from Free Cash. It was seconded by Jay Healy. All in Favor.**

Valentine Reid motioned to add the aforementioned Warrant Article to those which will be introduced to Town Meeting this year. Bill Harker seconded it, All in favor.

- If the recommendation to pay from free Cash is rejected, they will try to get money back from departments. Sarah went over department costs, thus far 2 lines are overspent because of fuel. Val suggested sending the departments a “formal ask” to the Town Departments to defer spending where they can because there won’t be very much Free Cash next year. Val asked Sarah to add the formal letter to the departments to the Select Board agenda.
- Board members discuss that the Department of Revenue didn’t pick up on the Override error, that there was no computer check in place for that. Val is doing a report on what happened, and then will take it to the DoR. Lynn said Carlene Hayden has contacts at the DoR that would be receptive to feedback.

2. Updated FY24 Budget

The Boards went through the budget as a group.

- First page, general government. It was noted that Town Wide fuel is the biggest increase, they discussed the price of fuel and the pros and cons of purchasing fuel at a fixed rate versus paying market rate.
- Lynn points out that the Veterans benefits could be reduced to 9,000.
- Lines 55-65, Lynn confirmed that it was a one-time expense for the tax collection software.
- Regarding election expense. Val wonders whether postage required for an election should be separated out for a truer cost. Amy said that Schedule A breaks things out in certain ways to report it to the state. So, it would be good to separate it out to be aware.
- Lines 66-74
 - Fire Chief Salary. Val discussed looking ahead to Fire Chief’s retirement. The Chief is required to retire at a certain age but can apply for an extension which will add a few years. Val talked about trying to figure out how to recruit someone and how to make it a full-time job position. Thinking about adding EMT to Fire Chief Position. Another option would be to join other towns—with Rowe and Charlemont “regionalized,” they could look for a third town to join to make the Fire Chief position full time. They could look to adopt a town or be adopted by another set of towns. Shelburne is small enough, but they have said no in the past. Val suggests posting the job in May, but money will be required to recruit. It won’t be to increase current hours worked, rather to look for a new person, which could take anywhere from 6 months to a year.
 - Fire and Ambulance have said that there are not enough hours allotted to take care of the administrative side of the position. Rich suggested combining fire and ambulance positions when Dana retires as that would be more useful to the town. Jay thinks it is possible, down the line and with Dana’s advice, that a full time Rowe and Charlemont Fire Department could possibly absorb the Ambulance.

- Sarah spoke of a study carried out by a consulting firm where the end result was to hire a full time Chief in Ashfield. (It was the Fire Chief from West Barnstable that reviewed the department and made the recommendation)
- They are looking to hire a Fire Chief for Rowe and Charlemont. One town would pay benefits and the other would reimburse.
- Val said that the next step was to draft a warrant article on the increase.
- Rowe will meet with Sarah and Jared to discuss partnering.
- Lines 75-83. Ron Smith asked if there were no trucks being requested. Bill Harker confirmed no trucks this year, the trucks are running.
- Lines 84-99. The animal inspection is going up because of the cost of mandated rabies testing. The hope is to get an animal inspector but must still pay for rabies testing out of this line. The FRCOG assessment for the regional animal inspector went down.
- Line 93 Transfer Station. the hauling number is the worst-case scenario. Sarah wants to figure out the trends with the sticker usage to be able to understand the shortfall.
- Lines 100-105. The boards support the 3.96% increase for Hawlemont. It's noted that there is no capital assessment. They discuss that Hawley's assessment went down, possibly due to population. Rich said his kids went to combined grade classes and that it can be done. He will wait to see the population. If there continues to be a small population, they need to handle it differently.
- Sarah noted that larger communities like Buckland are asking schools to bring it down.
- Val had a question about whether they should have an enterprise fund for Southern Sewer District at Berkshire East. Sarah said the attorney is looking into it. An enterprise fund will be to ensure that it has stabilization over time.

3. Warrant Articles to be finalized at April 5th meeting, (will need a list from Ron.)

- The \$231,958 2 ½ Override amount from FY23
- \$40,000. for roads
- \$20,000 for bridges
- \$15,000. for an audit
- Funds for Fire Chief recruitment
- 5% payment (\$37,500.) for Fire Engine if \$750,000. grant is received.
- Funds for 1 of 2 Police Cruisers requested.
- @\$50,000-100,000 for municipal building project manager
 - Val added the \$50,000-100,000. (\$50,000 for a period of two years) for a municipal building planner/ project manager. To qualify for funding for the building project you need a project manager from the beginning. There will be a committee to find a site for the municipal building complex, possibly on Avery Brook Road. Val suggested moving Fire, Police and Ambulance out from their current location. There could be a safety complex on Avery Brook Rd. Sarah is going to get some other town's project manager costs to compare and make sure they use the right number. Val asked that they prepare a "crisp" reason for Town Meeting for the ask for the project manager cost.

Rich Filoramo motioned to adjourn the meeting at 5:54, Lynn Hathaway seconded, all in favor.

*****SELECT BOARD VOTE AND APPROVE**

1. Memorandum agreement for school zone speed signs

Valentine Reid made a motion to approve the school zone speed signs. Bill Harker seconded it, All in favor.

Valentine Reid made a motion to adjourn 5:57, Bill Harker seconded it, All in favor.

The next meeting is scheduled for April 5th, 2023, at 4:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted on March 30th, 2023, by Star Atkeson, Secretary to the Boards.

Documents viewed at meeting:

The Agenda for the March 22nd meeting

The Minutes for the March 8th 2023 meeting

Cherry Sheet info

Draft 4 of Budget FY2024

Draft 4a of Budget FY2024 without Broadband totals

Memorandum of Agreement with MassDOT regarding speed signs.