

Town of Charlemont
Joint Finance Committee and Select Board Meeting Minutes
April 10th, 2024
Town Hall and via Conference Call

Board Members Present: Lynn Hathaway, Rich Filoramo, Ron Smith, Jay Healy

On phone: Amy Wales, Valentine Reid

Others present: Sarah Reynolds, Star Atkeson

Rich called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM

ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT:

1) Municipal Empowerment Act update on revenue proposals for room tax and excise tax option

The Municipal Modernization Act has gone to legislature. They are proposing increasing local options: lodging, meals and excise tax. The Select Board had discussed it and decided that increasing the excise tax and meals tax would be too burdensome for Charlemont residents and businesses. They would opt in for the increase in lodging tax. Rich confirmed that if it passed at the State level it would be something that Charlemont would opt in or out of and it would go to Town meeting Floor.

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Review / approve minutes from 3/27/2024

Rich Filoramo made a motion to approve the Minutes from 3/27/2024. Jay Healy seconded the motion. All in favor.

2. Capital Planning Update

Ron said there was a definite need for the proposed items: two vehicles and the audit. The Fire Truck cost will reach 1 million if it isn't purchased soon. The Fire truck water system failed at a recent fire. They can try for earmarks, but the residents need to be told the situation. They have tried for grants 3 times and haven't gotten them. The people need to know the price with or without the earmark or grant.

Ron Smith asked whether they can get a 20- or 10-year loan for a truck. Lynn will talk to her contact at the bank. Sarah will do a sheet with interest. Rich thinks that a 10-year loan is better than 5. Lynn was worried about equipment failure with a 10-year.

Jay thinks that inevitably the fire truck will need to be shared with another town. Currently the plan is to share it with Rowe. A tanker and pumper are required to be able to participate in mutual aid with other towns. Home Insurance rates are based on the proximity to a fire station with a pumper. Sarah suggested sharing the discussion with the Town and telling them what point they were at.

The current truck is 27 years old and only just now started to have problems with the water system. Val said that a community block grant combined with loans could be a way to purchase the equipment, and that he knew of an instance in Fall River where they did that. Sarah will look into it.

The other capital item is the Police cruiser. A Tahoe will cost \$68,000. Rich said he needs to know what the Free Cash number is. Last year the Tahoe was taken out of stabilization. They talked about the use of the current police vehicles.

Sarah talked to Tinky Weisblat of Hawley about the possibility of purchasing a combo mower tractor together. That would be another capital item.

Lynn reported that there was \$393,000 in stabilization last month.

They spoke about procedures that other towns use: they put money aside for bridges, for example. Technically the Capital Planning Committee could put an item on the warrant without the recommendation from the Finance Committee.

3. Budget review

Nothing has changed. They spoke about the reason the Broadband interest is more than the principal. The first year of the loan, the full principal is accruing interest. As it gets paid, the interest will go down and then more of the principal will be paid.

Rich noted that the budget has risen \$66,000. \$44,000 of it is Mohawk, \$22,000 is distributed. Recent numbers show that Mohawk lost 40 kids to tech for next year. Member town kids have priority. Charlemont had fewer get accepted. They spoke about the cost of joining as a member towns vs paying the tech tuition, and the bussing fees. If it becomes more reasonable to join, they will consider it. The transportation rate is so high. When you break out the transportation costs, the Mohawk operating budget has gone down.

Rich noted that HWY increased by \$44,000. They talked about HWY salaries. Rich would like to look into using 3 laborers instead of 4. He thinks someone else could do paperwork and supervise. Sarah noted that the salaries have been underfunded since FY16. They spoke a bit about HWY, about the way it was, and what costs have increased since then, also residents' expectations of plowing have changed. Paperwork requirements from the State to get grants has increased substantially. Rich thinks there needs to be a stopping point; it can't keep going up.

Val noted that the benefits line was fully funded as if every employee took them. The Select Board has already shaved @ \$30,000 off the budget.

The Fire vehicle will need to be purchased soon. It will be \$800,000. The price will only increase the longer they wait.

They acknowledge that most residents are at the maximum of what they can afford.

Higher real estate sales increase assessed values.

4. Budget Presentation for Town Meeting

Sarah let the Board know that the Select Board had combined some budget item lines to be voted at the annual Town Meeting. She will put a guide to Town Meeting in the newsletter having to do with the budget process specifically. Val said they will provide the full sheet on the Town Meeting Floor. Lynn noted that Greenfield had put a condensed version of their budget in the newspaper. Erving put out a budget book ahead of their town meeting, explained department by department. Sarah thinks that could be helpful to do. In future years she could have it online before the meeting and have copies at the meeting.

5. Review of Warrant Articles, including request for Tree Warden budget to be on warrant article

The Board spoke of the as yet unfinished warrant article. Two school articles are on there, the late bus, (Charlemont paying their 1/3 of the cost) and the reverse phone system. The cemetery is on there. The vehicles aren't on there yet.

The Tree Warden had asked if his budget could be a warrant article so that unspent money could be rolled over to the next year. The Board discussed the idea. Rich is not opposed to it but needs to think about it. Others think it may set a precedent for other departments to follow suit. It would affect Free Cash. The Board is happy with the Tree Warden's work saying that he has gotten Verizon and National Grid to do things they haven't done in years. They suggest that the normal trimming occur after winter, (after an emergency trim) and that would be a way to ensure he stays under the \$10,000.

The warrants are due to the Select Board on April 26th, they need to be finalized in April 24th's meeting as far as what they do or do not recommend.

6. Unforeseen in last 48 hours: Consortium of Finance Committees

Jay Healy reported that there is a letter circulating about the consortium of Finance Committees. There is interest in the ten-town region, along with the schools. It is going well. He will keep them posted.

Rich Filoramo motioned to adjourn the meeting at 5:15 seconded by Lynn Hathaway. All in favor.

Next regularly scheduled meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 24, at 4:00 PM.

Documents viewed at meeting:

Minutes of 3/27/2024

FinComm and Select Board Agenda for April 10, 2024