

Town of Charlemont
Joint Finance Committee and Select Board Meeting Minutes
January 25, 2023
Via Telephone and at the Town Hall

Board Members Present: Bill Harker, Valentine Reid

Board Members Joined by phone: Jared Bellows, Lynn Hathaway, Jay Healy, Ron Smith, Rich Filoramo

Absent: Amy Wales

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

Start time - 3:04 p.m.

Sarah Reynolds delivered the Administrator report:

1. Grant Update for Town grants received to date

- There is still money left from a Green communities Grant which has been used for weatherization and lighting of Town Hall and the Fire Station and a new Highway Department furnace. There is some money left over which could go towards replacing the Town Hall furnace. Sarah is working with Green Communities and National Grid to figure out a Town Hall Heating and Cooling system. Rich suggested a whole building heat pump. Sarah mentioned also using an electric water heater instead of the boiler during the summer months. A scoping study is happening now and she will get the results in a few weeks. The furnace at Town Hall is due for replacement.
- Awarded grant for temporary repair of the deck of The Long Bridge. Charlemont was awarded the engineering cost to do Legate Hill Bridge temporary repair and Sarah is applying to get money for permanent fix. Replacing The Long Bridge is part of the transportation Improvement project, but the deck won't make it until then.
- Awarded a grant for the upgrade of two subdivision roads (tried for 3 but one road was not interested) which will create 22 buildable lots, Mountain View Drive and Potter's Road Extension.
- Got a grant which paid 35% towards ambulance (amounting to \$121,000) and other emergency response equipment like the pagers for the fire department (\$10,000) and \$14,000 towards a monitor for the ambulance. The town has 3 years to spend the money.
- Transfer Station New Railing, from Insurance Company \$1850. OSHA requirements \$628.00
- Body Worn Cameras procured by grant, if needed.
- The Road project on 8A North \$720,000. Almost complete, next spring finishing up with paving and landscaping
- The total of grants in place are \$1,629,074 before Sarah
- Sarah was responsible for procuring \$2,495,611.96 in 2022 and 2023
- Rich pointed out that what is missing is a firetruck. Sarah did apply for a FEMA grant but they were not qualified because of a low call volume. Unfortunately the call volume went up especially for mutual aid in firefighting, therefore Sarah was told she can reapply.
- Rich also wondered about the Firehouse. Sarah will talk about it with Capital Planning, there's a way to estimate the cost using square footage. Will present to Capital Planning Committee. Sarah is keeping an eye out for grants to help with that cost.

2. Town growth numbers that affected this years' tax rate

- Tax Growth. The Tax rate went down from \$20.73 to \$20.63. Vacant land got out of Chapter 61 (Warfield Rd;) Single family adjustment got valuated (sheds, deck, outbuildings, adjusted the acreage on single family; new inspections or surveys updating the parcel size. Amounted to \$277, 192. Of growth
- Industrial, the Dam on route 2 near the turn off to Mohawk High School got inspected and brought in \$547,200. That went under the personal property category.
- Commercial, there is a new prefab warehouse at JS Rae property, and the Solar Field in West Charlemont.
- Personal Property, some new Businesses in their first year, (Amongst the Oaks) and increases in other businesses: \$1,829,985.
- Sarah would like to show this at Town Meeting with the admission that budget sheets and projections are a guess. Rich Filoramo agreed that would be good. Val would like to see percentages of growth. Sarah will do that. Sarah reported that she took a DLS course which offered charts and graphs that may be populated with several year worth of budget data. The class was a deep dive on that and Sarah is happy to look at the historical data in order to see the growth and thinks it would be helpful to explain to people.

3. Rec Tax update

- Rec Tax. Unfortunately the proposal for the Recreation Tax went through the third and final reading and did not pass. Representative Natalie Blaise and Paul Mark will refile it. Sarah also notified the Board that Natalie Blaise would like to meet with the Select Board and that when there is a date Sarah will invite the Finance Committee as well.
- There is no need to revote the Rec Tax at Town Meeting. If it doesn't pass one more time they will have to bring it back to Town Meeting. Rich thinks a representative for Paul Mark should also be invited to attend and to add the discussion topic about The Rural Schools Report. Sarah happy to report that Paul Mark hired John Gould who has experience interfacing with Charlemont.

Action Items

1. Review 2024 Budget

- Ron Smith noticed a lot of missing numbers. It's true the assessments are not in yet.
- Sarah Reynolds warned of a 6% Increase in health and life Insurance.
- Val Reid mentions there will be transfer station increases.
- Recycling may cost as much as regular trash soon. The demand for recycling material fluctuates. The cost of transporting the waste continues to go up, last year it was 13,000. Rich Filoramo suggested compacting.
- Sarah is keeping an eye on the situation starting with tracking the money going in and out, and talking to other towns especially Shelburne. Will look out for a DEP grant or draw from the recycling revolving fund. Sarah would like to bring it to Town Meeting to be explained and voted on.
- Val mentioned the audit amount is zero because it is moved into the Warrant Article, wanted to make sure the warrant article is accounted for.
- Charlemont is headed towards being audited yearly, otherwise it would be disqualified from grants. Also, every \$500,000. Received triggers an audit.
- Val wanted to know where they are currently in their spending. Sarah will generate a report.
- Val mentioned the idea of relabeling the headings of the line items in the Budget to be more accurately descriptive of what they are for, so there is no confusion. Sarah is working on it.

Discussion items

1. Capital Planning Committee

- They became a 3 person board, there are 2 members right now: Tony Walker and Ron Smith. Hoping to find another person to serve on the board.
- If there is someone who want to serve, please send an email to the Select Board.
- A lot of items are being added to the capital plan sheet. Highway will need extra time as there is a new Super. Ron suggests keeping Tony invited to the departmental meetings. Sarah will send what she has so far for review and so Ron and Tony can work together to post a meeting. If there is a disagreement with a two person board there will be an issue. February 8th Highway and police are coming to speak about their budgets. On the 15th the Superintendent of the school is coming.

2. The purchase of new tax software for Town taxes.

- “Point” Software has become “QDS.” It is tax and treasurer software and it will cost \$4,500 as a onetime upgrade or phased over three years. Surrounding towns use it. Dave the accountant is familiar with it. He uses Vadar. It has many modules that Charlemont will not use, but can add on if at some point they want to. For example, Rowe uses it to pay the school and there is an online tax payment capability. Annual fees are consistent with Lynn’s “Contracted Services” line item.
- Lynn is hopeful that an IT grant could be gotten for a technology upgrade.

Other Discussion

- Rich also wanted to talk about increasing staff salaries in line with inflation at the next meeting, better to get that on the budget sooner rather than later. Val will add that topic to his Select Board agenda if it’s alright with Jared and Bill, to start the discussion. Jay Healy would support an increase. Rich considered doing a fixed percentage for a few years to stretch it over a period of years.
- Jay Healy suggests seeing what other towns are paying their staff. FRCOG has a FY2023 salary breakdown by jobs from each town of what they pay. Jay wonders if they have cost of living increase to adjust to inflation.
- Sarah mentioned some of raises based on inflation and cost of living and others do raises based on merit. Sarah will email the administrators to see how they are doing it.
- Will be put it on the Agenda for the next Joint Select Board and FinComm meeting on February 8th.

Rich motioned to adjourn the meeting at 3:58, All in Favor.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 8th 2023 at 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted on January 27th, 2023 Star Atkeson, Secretary to the Boards

Documents viewed at meeting:

The Agenda for the January 25th meeting

A grants chart made by Sarah Reynolds

A table with Tax Growth figures with bullet points regarding Tax growth

The current Draft budget