

Town of Charlemont
Finance Committee / Selectboard Meeting
Minutes April 6, 2022
Via Telephone and at the Town Hall

People Present: Rich Filoramo, Lynn Hathaway, Amy Wales, Marguerite Willis, Bill Harker, Dan Girard, Sarah Reynolds, Star Atkeson

Absent: Jay Healy, Ron Smith

Joined by phone: John Hoffman and Cheryl Handsaker

Start time - 4:02 p.m.

Approval of the minutes for 3/23/2022

Moved by Rich, seconded by Amy, accepted by Lynn

Moved by Marguerite Willis, seconded by Dan, accepted by Bill

Report from the Administrator—Sarah talked about last year's revenue numbers

- Update on room tax, shy of last year's total, \$26,221.56 with one more quarter
- Meal tax down, \$5473.18 as of now
- Ambulance \$31,000 taken in so far (can't see March yet, they are behind on billing)
- Transfer at \$23,034.50 can expect similar revenue as last year.
- Sarah will do a comparison report on the transfer station, what they are bringing in vs. taking out, will have the numbers for finance before Town meeting.
- Transfer station bad news regarding the fuel surcharge —the March invoice is large the contract is based on the cost of gas at \$3.20 per gallon, diesel is at \$5.31
- Noting that the fuel surcharge is steadily increasing.
- Apropos of that Marguerite offers to look into the vocational school transportation contract and will report her findings on Monday night.

Discussion of how to deal with Free Cash in regards to capital projects —All capital warrant articles paid out of free cash except ambulance which will require a loan.

- \$20,000 Bridges, \$40,000 infrastructure, \$12,500 Town Hall floor repair, \$500 cemetery.
- Sarah raises question about cemetery, has put as article so can be rolled over. Right now there is \$500 for cemeteries.

Bill motioned to approve capital items be covered by Free Cash— \$73,000. Dan seconded it.

At 4:15 Rich roll calls vote for Capital Items covered by Free Cash

Rich-yes, Amy-yes, Lynn-yes.

Ambulance

- Discussion of ambulance while on topic of capital items, a recommendation needs to be made for town meeting. The cheaper ambulance brought up last meeting does not fit the criteria for the town according to Dana Johnson. Dana should make a document of the facts for the town meeting. Dan recommended having Adam lay out exactly what they need in repairs for the current ambulance, take a picture of the undercarriage and the vehicle, for presentation to town meeting. The ambulance will take 2-4 years to be completed once ordered and the price can rise after it's ordered.
- Marguerite suggested officially asking for it at Town Meeting in case there is a question of legal liability.
- Amy suggested borrowing to fund it. Dan suggested putting money aside every year in case the ambulance is not okayed by the town. Bill agreed with that strategy. Amy pointed out that the town needs to agree to

purchase it, therefore we need to appropriate the funds now, even if it ends up not getting spent. Amy compared it to the broadband borrowing, ordering it now, and waiting the three years it will take to then borrow the money. Rich told Dan that money can be put into stabilization each year but it cannot be earmarked.

Free Cash

- \$520,000 is available. The school budget request is \$1,350,034. There is a \$307,428 increase for Charlemont's share. Rich does not want to use the cash for one time operating costs of the school. Marguerite added that the free cash is the town's E&D, not the school's. Amy said there is no limit to town free cash, but schools are limited to 5%

School Budget

- Because Hawlemont will lose students, it may become prohibitively expensive per attending student. It's already \$34,000 per Hawley student and \$19,000 per Charlemont, according to last year's budget (without the excessive loss of students.) The school is not viable, judging by last year's assessment increase compounded with the loss of students unless the State starts to invest heavily into rural schools.
- This is discussed while still having not received the school assessment and not knowing whether it will be a 2D (2 district) assessment. Rich foresees making a recommendation to oppose an increased assessment, and pointed out necessary expenditures in town like building a firehouse off the flood plain, and purchasing the ambulance. He is waiting for the Rural School Commission to report to see if there will be some relief. Rich proposes that whatever they don't spend of Free Cash be put into stabilization towards Hawlemont for a later date if the assessment is not passed at Town Meeting.
- Marguerite says the school representatives will push for 300,000 this year, but then what will they do the following year. Marguerite remarked that the school budget does not account for State Aid for Education. Marguerite demands that things change at the State level, that regional schools don't work here with the 20 mile radius, it must be changed to include the density factor. Marguerite asked to know if it's possible to level fund it. Last year's school assessment was \$1,042,441. (\$200,000. increase from the previous year.) Marguerite asked if The Board can recommend "level services budget" apply to school budget.

Discussion of EMD salary line 90

- Marguerite feels they deserve more, she wants to invest in the people that are already in their positions to keep them. She believes 3% salary increase is low. The social security rate is 5.9% as well as an increased medicare charge for seniors.
- After a thorough discussion about salary increases and after comparing other towns' salaries: (Colrain \$1,829., Conway \$2,000., Hawley \$1,050., Northfield \$2,000.) it was agreed that the salary could be \$2,000. for the Charlemont Emergency Management position.

Rich moved to recommend \$2000., for line 90. Lynn seconded. Roll Call vote— Amy, Lynn and Rich all vote in favor.

Police

- Dan will have meeting with Jared on Thursday April 7th, there will not be a police chief, instead Jared will recommend which officer to make "interim officer in charge with stipulations." The officer will get a stipend for the 6 month trial period. Jared must choose and train officer in state federal documents as he is only one with clearance and certified to do so.

Votech Transportation

- Marguerite says that votech transportation page 13, line 104 is \$53,000. This year, that will need to be more than doubled because of the additional students and the gas surcharge, she is predicted \$120,000. She will email after the votech meeting. She wants to be upfront with the town about the costs instead of \$50,000 or \$75,000 being a surprise later. There was discussion about joining the regional votech as a member but may be out of reach because part of the cost would be backpay for the buildings..

Important dates:

- April 25 deadline for warrant articles, they need to be signed and posted May 17th
- Ballot Items must be no later than April 19
- Last Wednesday in April would be good as Rich will be back and can discuss Omnibus Budget
- Amy ask for confirmation from Kathy, early May for numbers?
- FinComm/ Selectboard Meeting scheduled for next week, April 13th at 4 PM

Discussion Town Meeting vote on debt excluded warrant article regarding the ambulance

- Sarah asked specifically about ambulance borrowing. There is time issue. Amy says that borrowing several years into the future will require an override. The ambulance delivery time is unknown at this time. Dan is hopeful for 2-3 yrs
- Rich is concerned that debt excluded warrant article will be voted down at town meeting. Discussion about prop 2 1/2 override with the increase in votech and school assessment increase. Want to be prepared with 2 1/2 override after town meeting. Need 30-60 days to get on ballot. (April 19 deadline for ballot.
- Ballot article prop 2 1/2 borrowing debt exclusion. Warrants close on Saturday, April 23rd which is before the 27th. Need to recommend how ambulance will be funded, if debt excluded, still needs to be in warrant article even if not on ballot. There are many unknowns about budget, the timing of the ambulance is unknown
- Discussed different strategies on how to deal with ambulance and school budget issue. Amy said need to talk to lawyer about what needs to be said at town meeting —a warrant article would need to say debt exclusion, so the town will know there is another opportunity to vote.
- Rich mentions putting the Free Cash prop 2 1/2- into stabilization. Force 2 1/2 override —is that legal?
- Legal advice required.

Important dates and closing plans

- Meeting scheduled for next week, April 13th at 4 PM meeting (push Broadband off till 5)
- Sarah and Amy to finalize omnibus
- Sarah will email town council to get their opinion “on all scenarios”
- Marguerite asked how big stabilization should be. Amy responded that it is low compare to other towns. It could be 2 or 3 times more than what it is. Marguerite asked how much is in stabilization. Lynn responded \$378,888.

5:25 PM Amy made Motion for finance committee to adjourn, seconded by Rich.

Dan made motion for select board to adjourn, seconded by Bill.

The next meeting is scheduled for April 13, 2022 at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted on April 11, 2022

Star Atkeson
Secretary to the Boards