

DRAFT minutes

Town of Brattleboro Finance Committee

November 11, 2015

4:00 p.m.

Minutes by Paula Melton, Recording Clerk

Attending

Paula Melton, Recording Clerk

Franz Reichsman, Chair

John Wilmerding

One guest: Sharon Couturie

The meeting opened at 4:08 p.m. and adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Deliberations

- The meeting opened with an explanation from our guest, Sharon Couturie, of her attendance at our meeting: "I want to see if I can figure out what exactly representatives do." Sharon has lived here for about a year, and she was expecting the government to be more democratic. She suggested that RTMs should meet with their constituents regularly.
- John requested that we add an item to the agenda: a discussion of the decision to "overstaff" police shifts. It was discussed soon after.
- Franz noted that Jackie resigned from the committee and therefore did not bring a report about the town funds and their purpose.
- Paula reported on her meeting with Frank Rucker and Ron Stahley. She said it was clear from their discussion, which centered around last year's budget and annual report, that the school district and citizens have little control over the cost of educating students because of mandates from the State about what services must be provided and how much the Town must spend per student.
- Paula had also met with Peter Elwell regarding insurance costs. We expect a 2.5% increase in health insurance rates for 2016, but 2017 is unknown.

- The Town is in the process of revamping the entire benefits package for 2018 and beyond to avoid certain federal taxes that come into play if insurance benefits are too generous.
- Franz explained his understanding of the decision to allow “overstaffing” of police officers for each shift. The idea is to help improve morale by taking the burden off of officers who are working overtime to compensate for turnover and training needs.
 - John questioned whether the finance committee should have access to summaries of personnel-related decisions that happen during executive sessions.
 - We then discussed the draft budget from the Town Manager and speculated about why there was no payment of the second bond for the police/fire project built in. It leaves the status of the project in question until after the public meetings and special Representative Town Meeting.
 - It became clear that the prospect of a special RTM would increase our workload a month before the regular RTM.
 - We discussed finding out why we cannot have the Moderator appoint people between meetings. Having lost two members, this is very inconvenient for us. No one could remember whether it was because of the way the Charter is written or because of the way the Article was written on the RTM agenda.
 - We will look into recruiting new members at the special RTM coming before regular RTM.

Action Items

- Franz will call Kathryn Turnas II to find out if she is resigning from the committee.
- Paula will begin trying to chart the school budget to illustrate how much of the spending is mandated by the State.
- Paula will send the committee the PowerPoint on health insurance planning.
- Franz will look into executive session and how the finance committee can interact with that.
- Franz will send a reminder to Peter about getting an analysis of police staffing.
- Paula will get a personal tour of existing police and fire facilities.
- Paula will look at the draft budget and budget message to the Selectboard.
- Paula will write to Frank for draft budgets.
- Franz will talk to Peter about separating police from fire facilities in the building project.

- Paula will figure out all the printing deadlines for school and town meetings.
- Franz will do research on police cars and how long they last.
- Paula will find out whether we can include an article in the RTM agenda that would allow us to find members between meetings.

Decisions

- The committee accepted the October 14, 2015 minutes as submitted.
- John moved that the finance committee recommend to the Town administration and to Representative Town meeting that the modifications, renovations, and/or additions for police and fire department facilities be budgeted for and considered separately from here on.
 - After some discussion, the committee voted to table the motion until the next meeting but to discuss the idea with Peter Elwell to find out whether this would provide desired flexibility to move forward with the \$5 million bond we are already paying interest on.