

DRAFT minutes
Town of Brattleboro Finance Committee

December 9, 2015
4:00 p.m.

Minutes by Paula Melton, Recording Clerk

Attending

Paula Melton, Recording Clerk
Franz Reichsman, Chair
John Wilmerding

One guest: Peter Elwell, Town Manager

The meeting opened at 4:05 p.m. and adjourned at 6:04 p.m.

Deliberations

- The committee discussed the police & fire facility projects at length with Peter Elwell, questioning and clarifying information provided at public meetings.
 - Franz stated the opinion that the FY17 Town budget is relatively non-controversial, though Peter emphasized that it still contains important issues relating to curbside waste removal and capital improvements.
 - Paula asked why there was not a placeholder in the FY17 budget. Peter said he wanted the public to view the operating budget and the expense of the police & fire projects as two related but separate sets of decisions.
 - John felt this was a good idea, so people could make a clear decision without conflating this year's operating budget with any new bond payments we would be choosing to make as a long-term plan.
 - We clarified that the operating budget for FY17 already includes payments on the existing bond for the prior police & fire project that was placed on hold.

- Franz and Paula asked Peter to quantify the benefits of going beyond the “minimum prudent” plan. Peter said it was difficult to put into dollar amounts because the main benefits would come from improved morale and improved service.
- Franz requested a list of deferred costs that are likely to be incurred if we don’t adopt a plan beyond the one labeled “minimum prudent.” Peter said the main ones would come from missing the boat on cheap financing because the Fed is talking about raising interest rates any day.
- Peter also said some things are still under review, such as the life-cycle cost of maintaining two facilities for municipal services and the police department instead of just one.
- John asked if it made sense to separate the police and fire projects into two separate budgets and two separate votes. Peter didn’t think it would serve a clear purpose since they’ve been considered as one project for so long.
- Paula asked of West Brattleboro needs a fire station. Peter said that had been studied very recently and answered in the affirmative, though he didn’t have the details at his fingertips.
- Franz announced to former member Kathryn Turnas II had resigned from the committee.
- We discussed our calendar for developing our recommendations for Representative Town Meeting as well as the WSESU annual meeting.
- We discussed the lifetime of police cars. Franz’s research suggests that they last different amounts of time in different areas, but he wants to see some numbers on the cost of buying new cruisers vs. maintaining those with more miles on them, as well as on the necessity of constantly idling.
- Paula shared some early drafts of charts explaining school budgets. She said she would continue working to understand which aspects of the school budgets are directly mandated, indirectly mandated, and not mandated. Franz said he would like to understand the school budget process better.

Action Items

- Franz will send a reminder to Peter about getting an analysis of police staffing.
- Paula will catch up on all information regarding police and fire facilities.
- Paula will continue to pursue a printing deadline for the BUHS annual report.
- Franz will continue research on police cars.
- Franz and John will come to the January 8 meeting with proposed Town budget recommendations.
- Paula will come to the January 8 meeting with proposed school budget recommendations.

Decisions

- The committee accepted the November 11, 2015 minutes as submitted.
- John withdrew his motion from the October 15 meeting regarding separation of the police and fire projects.
- The committee agreed to meet on January 8, 2016, to work on report drafts and again on January 12 to finalize our reports.
- The February meeting was scheduled for February 10, 2016.