

Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

March 25, 2025

7:30 PM

Acton Town Hall – Room 204

Present: Jason Cole (Chair), Dr. Gang Chen, Dave Wellinghoff, Allison Jones, Corinne Hogseth, Christi Andersen, Greg Jarboe, Steve Noone, and Roland Bourdon

Mr. Cole called the meeting to order.

1. Citizen's Concern

Ms. Terra Friedrichs - Would like to comment on the Citizen Petitions regarding the Citizens Library. Mr. Cole commented Alex Lenz is the appointed person to these Articles, could not attend tonight, recommend to defer conversation and to talk with Mr. Lenz first.

Ms. Friedrichs stated she will do that and may oppose this Article, but would like to review the Article first. In the meantime, discussion of expanding the number of Board of Trustees, concerned it will control the Citizen's Library. Town Labor council is involved in discussions, which is taxpayer's money. State Law controls most of these issues, therefore should be in front of a Judge.

Mr. Cole acknowledged no language at this time and, therefore, will await.

Ms. Friedrichs inquired about Habitat for All - Will FinCom take a position tonight?

Mr. Cole will welcome Ms. Friedrich to comment at that time.

Rob Parenti - Representing WRAC as a member. There will be an outreach meeting in late May on Stormwater topic. Would like to be placed on FinCom agenda in April.

Mr. Cole recommended first meeting in May for WRAC to be on the FinCom Agenda as an item.

2. Minuteman Regional TVHS Update

Representing the Minuteman Regional TVHS was Heidi Driscoll, Pam Nourse and Nikki Andrade

Ms. Driscoll - Budget reflects values of the School. Gave a summary 83 students from Acton representing all 19 vocations. Currently, 13 Seniors and 2 Juniors on the Co-Op program.

Ms. Andrade - Presented statistical information:

- \$3,538,654, a 1.73% decrease from FY25 of 3,600,903

- For Acton, total assessment 2.99% increase from prior year; average 2.79% assessment increase to all member towns
- FY26 Operating Capital has decreased by 21.20% from FY25
- 3% CBA increase
- Supplies of materials (i.e. metals, wood) experienced significant increases
- Significant increase in insurances
- New bid for transportation, over 5%
- Increase to OPEB of \$300,000
- \$950,000 contribution to capital stabilization fund
- 669 total students - For Acton: 25 Seniors, 18 Juniors, 24 Sophomores, 16 Freshmen

Mr. Bourdon - Questioned the HVAC repairs for a relatively new building?

Ms. Driscoll - Opened Fall 2019, closed shortly thereafter due to Pandemic, HVAC didn't run to capacity for a year and a half, which caused issues.

Ms. Andersen - 5.5% increase. Town taxes can only go up 2.5%, Ms. Andersen strongly suggested Minuteman to look at its numbers. Ms. Driscoll acknowledged Ms. Andersen's comment.

Mr. Noone - Did he hear correctly, that health care is level funded?

Ms. Andrade - School is part of the "Mass Health Care Trust" with other Schools which is doing very well with its claims.

Mr. Noone - What is the year of OPEB to be fully funded?

Ms. Andrade - 2040

Mr. Jarboe - Regarding percentage of students going to College/pursuing higher education. But, going into Trades, so why College? Or, is this an old theory?

Ms. Driscoll - Going to College/pursuing higher education, they teach to college and career. For example, architecture as a career, need to attend College.

Mr. Wellinghoff - Of the \$25m budget what percentage is salaries and benefits?

Answer - 80%

Mr. Wellinghoff - CBA average increase per FTE?

Answer - 2/3 of staff are at top step and lane. Range is 3% - 5%

Mr. Wellinghoff - How many unions? When are they up?

Answer - One union, up next year

Mr. Cole - Pre-purchase anything as result of tariffs?

Ms. Driscoll - No

Mr. Cole - Two years ago, informed no room left at the building, needed to add another wing. This was met with anger. Entertaining this notion again? Also, the issue of the financial disadvantage for those who chose to stay in the District?

Ms. Driscoll - District was in a painful situation, had the remaining communities to pay for the new building. On the other issue, there is no plan to add another wing.

Mr. Cole - Anything done by the state to rectify the District fee issue?

Ms. Driscoll - no conversation at this time, but if community wanted to rejoin a District it would owe back money.

Ms. Andrade - Minuteman charges per pupil out-of-District fee.

Ms. Jones - What is the out-of-District fee?

Ms. Andrade - Tuition set by state which is \$21,000. Two types of capital fees are added: either Type A \$8,000, Type B \$6,000

Ms. Jones - \$43,000/student?

Ms. Andrade - average is in the \$30,000 range

Ms. Jones - She was including debt, hence the difference

Ms. Hogseth - What is tuition compared to comparable Vocational High Schools?

Answer - Minuteman is highest per pupil cost. 3 major reasons: staff costs, strong number of students with special education needs, and geographic location of the school associated with transportation costs.

Mr. Wellinghoff - Have they visited other member towns and how are they experiencing the Assessment?

Ms. Driscoll - Very well received by the other member towns.

Mr. Wellinghoff - What recourse does a member town have regarding Assessment?

Mr. Cole - Can vote down budget, goes to District, if majority voted in favor, it would have to be paid.

3. FY26 Budget Hearing

Mr. Cole reported out on the FY26 budget for the Town, Acton Boxborough Regional School District and the Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical High School.

Ms. Hogseth - What is increase in School budget if they weren't retiring debt?

Mr. Cole - Reiterated the 3.12%, ABRSD % change without excluded debt.

Dr. Chen - What were the changes since Budget Workshop?

Mr. Cole - ABRSD Assessment went up about \$100,000; reduce town operating budget by \$130,000 but due to health insurance a total of \$290,000 cut; capital \$175,000 decrease, free cash reduced to match capital spending; adjusted \$130,000 in excess levy capacity, reserved when reviewing State Aid, reduced debt exclusion revenue and expense estimates related to DPW facility

Mr. Noone - Moving on to the FY27 - FY30 budgets and the "monkey wrench" the School Committee threw in of 6.33% increase. Take 4.5% increase from town, come up with about \$28m deficit. Believes town can get through FY27, however don't believe town can get through FY28 without an operating override. Concern if FinCom commits to DPW building, is it 10 Teachers, 5 Police Officers, etc?

All agreed that Mr. Cole should do an Acton TV taped message regarding FinCom's stance on the FY26 budget.

Dr. Chen - 3.81% cost drivers for the operating override. Looking at tax increase, suggest town space out overrides. Otherwise, override fatigue.

Mr. Jarboe moved to close the Budget Hearing, Mr. Noone seconded
Passed Unanimously 8-0-0

4. Warrant Article Considerations

Mr. Mangiaratti - there are 5 to 6 Articles added since last iteration. Article 12 is a placeholder.

Article 1: Choose Town Officers

Mr. Jarboe moves to Recommend, Mr. Noone seconded

Unanimous to Recommend, 8-0-0

Article 2: Receive and Accept Reports

Mr. Cole moves to Recommend, Mr. Noone seconded

Ms. Friedrichs - We receive the Annual Report day of Town Meeting. Urge people not to recommend if haven't yet reviewed. She may say something at Town Meeting. Ms. Friedrichs recommends defer.

Unanimous to Recommend, 8-0-0

Article 3: Budget Transfer

Mr. Noone - Recommend defer due to possible transfer before Town Meeting

Article 4: Appropriations for Municipal Operating Budget

Mr. Cole moves to Recommend, Mr. Bourdon seconded

6-2-0 to Recommend

Article 5: Appropriations for Town Capital Equipment and Projects

Mr. Noone - What is "sale proceeds"? Answer: Kennedy Landscaping building

Ms. Andersen requested to breakout, hold A2 and I for further discussion:

A2) Ms. Andersen – Considers both A2 and I as not necessary. Also, child care was supposed to be federal subsidy. Mr. Mangiaratti - library is most heavily-used facility, bathrooms and carpet need to be replaced. Future library vision is being discussed now. Discussion ensued regarding Library renovations.

Ms. Andersen made motion Not to Recommend, Ms. Wellinghoff seconded

4-3-1 Not to Recommend

I) Started as ARPA, was supposed to be federal funding

Mr. Bourdon - what is the Child Care and Transfer Station breakout?

Mr. Mangiaratti - \$10k Transfer Station, remainder Child Care

Mr. Cole - rational for putting two disparate topics under same topic?

Mr. Mangiaratti - both serve family needs

Mr. Bourdon - recommends separating the two topics

Mr. Cole recommends defer until Select Board discusses to split this into two separate topics

Ms. Hogseth - Commented about her concern of adding new positions after an override. Also concerned about electrification of Town Hall.

Mr. Jarboe - commented town went from requesting 6 new to 3 new positions, one of them being revenue generating

**Mr. Noone moved to Recommend, Mr. Bourdon seconded with exception of A2 and I
Unanimous to Recommend, 8-0-0 with exception of A2 and I**

Article 6: Borrowing for Town Capital Equipment and Projects

Ms. Andersen requested to breakout, hold A and B for further discussion:

A) Electrification: Ms. Hogseth would like to see more of lifecycle analysis and options available to move forward. Mr. Mangiaratti can provide more information before next FinCom meeting.
Defer until next meeting

B) Complete Streets and Sidewalks: Ms. Andersen - Not building sidewalks at the moment is an easy one to defer. Also culverts are in need.

Mr. Cole - includes culverts and miles? Answer: When complete streets are done, culverts/drainage is also done; miles will be put into the summary.

Defer until next meeting

F) EQ Tank: Mr. Noone - Is debt service paid out of users? Mr. Mangiaratti - Yes

Defer vote on full Article until further information is gathered and presented

Article 7: Authorizing Borrowing for Construction of new Public Works Facility at 14 Forest Road

Mr. Jarboe - Summarized status of project

Mr. Mangiaratti- encouraged Board to wait until final number is presented

Defer vote on Article until further information is presented

Article 8: Acton-Boxborough Regional School District Assessment

Ms. Andersen moved to Recommend, Mr. Bourdon seconded

7-1-0 to Recommend

Article 9: Minuteman Regional School District Assessment

Mr. Noone moved to Recommend, Mr. Bourdon seconded

Unanimous to Recommend, 8-0-0

Article 10: Appropriate Community Preservation Funds

Defer until next meeting where CPC will be presenting

Articles 11: Approve Home Rule Petition Related to Acton Memorial Library

Defer until able to read legislation

Article 12: Placeholder

Article 13: Authorize Real Property Disposition - 13 School Street
Mr. Mangiaratti summarized the Article
Mr. Jarboe moved to Recommend, Mr. Noone seconded
Unanimous to Recommend, 8-0-0

Article 14: Authorize Collective Bargaining Agreement with Fire Department
Defer as we get closer to Town Meeting

Article 15: Authorize Collective Bargaining Agreement with Police Patrol Officers
Defer as we get closer to Town Meeting

Article 16: Authorize Collective Bargaining Agreement with Police Superior Officers
Defer as we get closer to Town Meeting

Article 17: Authorize Revolving Fund Budgets
Mr. Wellinghoff requested to review each item. Building Revolving \$90k represents the new Fire Prevention Officer; Stormwater Revolving includes a utility feasibility study.
Ms. Hogseth inquired what Food Service represents: food establishment inspections
Mr. Wellinghoff moves to Recommend, Mr. Jarboe seconded
Unanimous to Recommend, 8-0-0

Article 18: Commuter Lot & Station Maintenance
Mr. Wellinghoff summarized the current status of the Commuter Lot
Defer to next meeting

Article 19: Approve Septage Disposal Enterprise Budget
Dr. Chen summarized the current status
Dr. Chen moves to Recommend, Mr. Noone seconded
Unanimous to Recommend, 8-0-0

Article 20: Approve Transfer Station Recycling Enterprise Budget
Dr. Chen – Inquired about the increase in FY25
Defer to next meeting

Article 21: Approve Sewer Enterprise Budget
Dr. Chen moves to Recommend, Mr. Jarboe seconded
Unanimous to Recommend, 8-0-0

Article 22: Approve Ambulance Enterprise Budget
Defer to next meeting

Article 23: Transportation Enterprise Budget
Dr. Chen summarized
Dr. Chen moves to Recommend, Mr. Jarboe seconded
Unanimous to Recommend, 8-0-0

Article 24: Authorize Easements
Dr. Chen summarized the Article
Dr. Chen moves to Recommend, Mr. Noone seconded
Unanimous to Recommend, 8-0-0

Article 25 - 29
Defer until Mr. Alex Lenz, who is assigned to these Articles, is present

Article 30: Amend Zoning Bylaw: Accessory Dwelling Units
Ms. Jones not prepared to discuss
Mr. Mangiaratti commented language may change
Defer to next meeting

Article 31: Amend Zoning Bylaw: Open Space Residential Development
Ms. Jones not prepared to discuss
Defer to next meeting

Article 32: Approve New General Bylaw: Leaf Blower Control
Ms. Hogseth moves not to Recommend, Mr. Jarboe seconded
Mr. Cole - not appropriate for town to pursue, not core responsibilities of a town.
Ms. Andersen – What are the associated costs? Ms. Hogseth did not receive an answer
Mr. Jarboe - commented about the EDC not supporting this Article, it does have a negative economic impact
Not to Recommend, 7-1-0

Article 33: Approve New and Amend General Bylaws – Tree Protection Bylaw
Defer to next meeting

Article 34: Affirm Home Rule Petition for Checkout Bag Minimum Charge
Defer to next meeting

Article 35: Affirm Home Rule Petition for Public Safety Residency Radius Requirement
Mr. Jarboe moves to Recommend, Mr. Noone seconded
Unanimous to Recommend, 7-0-0 (Mr. Wellinghoff left the meeting before this vote)

Article 36: Acceptance of the Municipal Modernization Act Amendment of 2016
Mr. Mangiaratti summarized, purpose is to stay in compliance with current language with the Acts of 2016
Mr. Noone moves to Recommend, Mr. Jarboe seconded
Unanimous to Recommend, 7-0-0

Article 37: Citizen Petition Citizens Library Expenses 1
Ms. Friedrichs - would like to speak on this topic, Mr. Cole recommended to work with Mr. Lenz who emailed Ms. Friedrichs for next meeting
Defer to next meeting

Article 38: Citizen Petition Citizens Library Expenses 2

Ms. Friedrich - would like to speak on this topic, Mr. Cole recommended to work with Mr. Lenz who emailed Ms. Friedrichs for next meeting

Defer to next meeting

Article 39: Citizen Petition Citizens Library Expenses 3

Ms. Friedrich - would like to speak on this topic, Mr. Cole recommended to work with Mr. Lenz who emailed Ms. Friedrichs for next meeting

Defer to next meeting

Article 40: Citizen Petition to Hold Workshop (traffic light at Hayward and Main Streets)

Mr. Cole was assigned this Article.

Defer to next meeting

Article 41: Citizen Petition to Conduct Impact Study

Ms. Jones was assigned this Article.

Defer to next meeting

5. Finance Committee Business

Meeting Minutes Review:

None

Liaison Reports:

Economic Development Committee - Mr. Jarboe announced the town has hired the new Economic Development Director, very impressive resume.

Ms. Andersen

Based on length of next meeting, recommend to start at 7:00pm

Next meeting: April 8, 2025, 7:00pm

Dr. Chen moved to adjourn, Mr. Bourdon seconded. Passed Unanimously.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

Draft Warrant