

TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 1/4/11

Present: J. Prager (Chair), M. Flynn, J. Crowley, T. Sangiolo, P. DiFranco, R. Hargraves. V. Jenkins (Town Accountant, recording), P. Dufresne

Guests: Representatives from the Board of Library Trustees

Documents Available: Draft line item budget for FY 2012

Mr. Prager called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM. It was noted that Mr. DiFranco has no departments assigned. He was asked to assume responsibility for the Library budget and the Parks Department budget, and any others that have not been assigned if the need arises. Mr. DiFranco agreed.

The FinCom began review of the FY 2012 budget, as submitted by the Town Manager. Mr. Prager noted that while the budget recommendation appears to show fairly tight appropriations in general, FinCom members have taken a "first pass" at the individual request and some require more information or need explanation. There is a general feeling that with no increases in population or students in the district school systems, and with the economy not in full recovery, taxes should not continue to rise. The following areas were discussed, in no particular order:

- It is disappointing that the FY 12 budget does not include a request from the district schools; Mr. Haddad has provided an allowance of 2.5% over last year's appropriations, but it is doubtful that this will be the final number. Mr. Hargraves will attempt to get more information from at least Groton-Dunstable.
- The Library budget shows an increase based on both union-mandated wage escalation, which was expected, and decreased support from Trust funds, which requires a discussion. Ms. Allen of the Library Trustees noted that the Library Trustees made the decision not to ask for as much support as previous years due to a concern that the trust fund principal amounts would be impacted. The FinCom would like to discuss this with the Trust Fund Commissioners and Ms. Jenkins was asked to invite representatives to the FinCom's next meeting on Jan 18th.
- Labor costs continue to rise due to union contracts and attempts to control the escalation should be considered. However, history would indicate that unions are unwilling to help solve the problem. Mr. Prager noted specifically the Library Trustees attempt to replace shelvers, lost through attrition, with senior work program volunteers, but the idea was blocked by the union. In addition, other members of the FinCom noted that, even though Social Security payments have not increased in two years, the unions have shown no willingness to concede on either step increases or COLAs.
- There are specific plans to provide increases for non-union employees, including a 10% increase for the Town Clerk and an incentive program, based on performance, for department managers.

The FinCom acknowledges that the latter idea came originally from a suggestion made during last year's budget development; however, more detail about the process of evaluation is needed, especially concerning the concept of "prudent fiscal management". Mr. Hargraves expressed his concern that such rewards to management staff, or individual increases at the level of 10% will be particularly difficult to explain to taxpayers.

- There is more money allocated for dues, memberships, travel and training than the FiCom would like to see across the departments as a whole. The Committee noted the difference between a planned training program to replace the retiring Town Accountant and the allocation of dues for each member of a five member board. The Veteran's Officer was also praised for paying for his own dues rather than expecting the taxpayer to do so.
- Several questions arise regarding the purchase of software, hardware and computer support plans. The FinCom would like to review the IT plan and the placement of costs in various areas of the budget with the IT Manager.
- The Municipal Buildings budget is exactly the same as last year, with the exception of increases in wages. The Committee remembers Mr. Delaney asking for time during FY 2011 to assess the budget, which was new to him, and his commitment to provide a more detailed and different budget in FY 2012; because the numbers are exactly the same, the Committee would like further information.
- There are still outstanding questions regarding consolidation of services between towns, in general, and for the contract with Boxboro in specific. Ms. Jenkins will attempt to get more information regarding post-retirement costs for the Boxboro issue.
- Regarding the budget document itself, the Committee would like detailed labor information from Fiscal Year 2011 to compare to Fiscal 2012; it is currently difficult to judge why costs are rising. While the increases may, in some cases, be due solely to step increases, in other areas the increases exceed a reasonable estimate of step increases alone. The FinCom would also like the line item budget electronically.

The Capital budget has not yet been reviewed in detail by the FinCom.

The FinCom reviewed its need to talk with specific departments during two Saturday meetings. The Committee had already identified Fire, Police, Dispatch, Library, and DPW and tentatively scheduled those departments for January 22nd. The Committee added Land Use, IT/GIS for Feb 5th, and the Trust Fund Commissioners on Jan 18th. With the exception of the Jan 18th meeting which will include only the Trust Fund Commissioners, the FinCom is aware that each Saturday agenda may not be exactly as tentatively scheduled. Ms. Jenkins will consult with Mr. Haddad and inform the FinCom as soon as possible of the confirmed scheduled. Each Saturday agenda will be at 9:00AM.

The minutes of the meeting held 12-8-10 were approved by a vote of 5 in favor, none opposed, and 1 abstention, upon a motion from Mr. DiFranco and a second from Mr. Sangiolo.

The minutes of the meeting held 1-3-11 were approved unanimously upon a motion from Mr. Crowley and second from Mr. DiFranco.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM by unanimous vote upon a motion from Mr. Sangiolo and a second from Mr. DiFranco.

Next meetings: 1/18/2011, 7:00 PM First Floor Meeting Room Town Hall
 1/22/2011, 9:00 AM First Floor Meeting Room Town Hall
 2/5/2011, 9:00 AM First Floor Meeting Room Town Hall

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Jenkins, Town Accountant, Recording