

TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of Meeting Held February 21, 2012

Present: J. Prager, G. Green, J. Crowley, P. DiFranco, R. Hargraves, V. Jenkins (Accountant, recording), P. DuFresne (Accountant in Training)

Absent: S Webber, M Flynn

Guests: Selectman Peter Cunningham

Documents available at the meeting: FinCom Member P. DiFranco's analysis of Police response data

The meeting was called to order by the Chair at 7:03 PM. The minutes of meetings held on January 31, 2012 and February 11, 2012 were approved unanimously, as submitted, after a motion from Mr. Hargraves and a second from Mr. Crowley.

A draft of the warrant for the Spring Annual Town meeting is not yet available; the agenda item for general review of the warrant is tabled until a future time.

The FinCom reviewed the following departments' budget requests with the goal of assessing whether further meetings would be needed with department managers prior to taking a position on the budget submissions:

DPW and Land Use Divisions: The FinCom agreed that no further information or meetings were required.

Fire Department: The FinCom is satisfied with the information submitted. However, at the request of Mr. Webber who is absent this evening, Mr. Prager noted Mr. Webber's concern that increasing the Fire Department's full time staff may lead to a perception that the Department is moving toward a full time 24/7 operation and that this would cause concern among the call firefighters. Mr. Green noted that he has met with Lt. Daly and Chief Bosselait and he does not believe that the request for more staff should be viewed as a move to eliminate the call members, but more an attempt to resolve unmet needs. He suggested that the FinCom could clarify that they are supporting the single instance of one full time firefighter, and that this support does not indicate approval of moving to a 24/7 full time department. The Committee concluded that there is no need to meet further with the Chief regarding operations. There is some interest in considering the land as a site for the new Fire Station (see below, under Country Club).

Conservation Commission/Community Preservation Committee: The FinCom is aware of an application from the Conservation Commission for CPC funds in the amount of \$150,000. They would like to meet with both groups to discuss the need to move funds into an account that already has more than \$600,000.

Police Department: The FinCom would like to meet with Chief Palma again, in order to clarify staffing issues. It is acknowledged that there is a need for more management level staff and to that end, the Committee is inclined to support the promotion of one current patrolman to sergeant level. However, the need for an additional patrolman is less clear. Mr. DiFranco's analysis of several years of statistics provided by the Chief appears to document more activity, rather than an increase in incidents. Mr. DiFranco notes the increased levels of traffic stops and building checks, suggesting that this increase is due to the addition of more officers in past years—"more staff = more activity". Incidents of crime,

however, seem to have remained relatively low in number. Mr. Prager indicated that there is no information regarding the number of hours required to handle activities or incidents, suggesting that low crime numbers might in fact take several hours, days or weeks to resolve. The FinCom expressed praise for the Chief’s professional and complete presentation on February 11, 2012 but would like to see the Chief one more time.

Library: The FinCom would like to meet with the Library Trustees and the Trust Fund Commissioners to review the requirements and plans for use of trust funds for the benefit of the Library. Mr. DiFranco noted that Library Trustees have indicated that their largest trust, the Robbins Library Fund, has an expendable balance in excess of \$500,000, that growth is relatively good, and that there are no large demands on the fund in the foreseeable future. This leads him to believe that continued expenditure of approximately \$60,000 a year is not a hardship. Mr. Green is in favor of using more Town funds, but agrees that requests for more specific plans for use of trust funds have not produced any written information and he would like to see that.

Country Club: The FinCom does not want to meet with Mr. Whalen again. Mr. Prager cannot support a budget that includes capital support when there is no clear plan regarding how that added support will impact the Club’s operation. Mr. Green would like to support the Club, but agrees that the lack of a plan is not helpful. Mr. Prager further notes that the Club is not open to everyone; fees for use can be beyond the ability of some to pay. He does not agree with taxpayer support of a facility only open to a few. Other members are interested in the affect on operations if the Club was open to all one afternoon or evening. It was noted that the Town owns an asset that is currently used as a recreation facility, but that other uses are possible. There was discussion of the possibility of a non-binding ballot vote for continuation of the Club; there was discussion of the possibility of closing the Club and using the land to build a fire station. The FinCom has requested that the Board of Selectmen take both these issues under advisement; as well as providing some guidance about their own wishes concerning the continuation of the Club. Mr. Green remarked that Mr. Whalen currently manages the Club with the intent to be revenue neutral. He would like to see an alternative plan that would 1) maximize the use of the facilities by Groton’s citizens and 2) maximize revenues, realizing that maximizing use will affect the ability of the Club to take in revenues.

Information Technology: The FinCom is awaiting a plan requested on February 11th. The plan should prioritize resolving the issues with the Town’s website and in addition produce a time-phased expenditure plan to accomplish other tasks noted last year at this time. The FinCom’s sense is that at least one full time additional staff member is required as well as temporary contractors to move projects forward. The FinCom would like to support this, but needs to see the plan. The IT Manager is requested to meet again with the Committee to discuss these issues.

Next Meetings: The Committee agreed to meet again on: Wednesday February 29 at 7:00 PM

Wednesday March 7 at 7:00 PM

Location of each meeting, as well as an agenda for each will be forthcoming.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM by unanimous vote after a motion from Mr. Hargraves and a second from Mr. Green.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Jenkins, Recording Secretary