

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes November 13, 2007

Present: Al DeVito - chair, Richard Knabel, Sharon Estrella, Brian Athearn and Ann Nelson.

Guests: Bruce Stone, Town Accountant; Thad Harshbarger and Peter Palches, Oak Bluffs FinCom members; Skip Manter.

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m.

Paying for MVRHS: OB FinCom proposal:

Thad Harshbarger and Peter Palches of the Oak Bluffs FinCom came before the WT FinCom seeking support for a proposal they had drawn up to make payment of the MVRHS budget more equitable amongst all six towns. The present system, established in 1956, is based on the number of students attending from each town. It is felt that this is an unfair formula that favors the wealthier towns. The proposal would be to have a flat tax whereby each town would pay the same rate.

During discussion, it was pointed out that Edgartown and Chilmark would be hard to convince since their taxes would be raised substantially to accommodate this system. Also noted was the problem of getting the island towns to think as one, rather than as each individual town.

Thad stated that they were hoping for support from the WT FinCom and a sense that they were headed in the right direction – that all should pay the same. The OB selectmen stand firmly behind their efforts.

There was support for the theory, but reservation about the success of the proposal in the face of the probable lack of interest by some towns.

Schools Budgets:

The high school budget is up 10%.

Ann talked about Mike Halt's outstanding presentation of his budget at a UIRSD meeting. He explained that most of what drives his budget are fixed costs such as salaries/benefits on contractual basis, plant costs, state mandates, ELL, etc. Mike is trying to rework the budget by eliminating some positions. The new Facilities Manager position being proposed by Dr. Weiss is an added cost. This position, however, will free Mike up for more administrative duties, rather than dealing with facility problems.

It was noted that there are a lot of high step level teachers at the WT School. Also, that the SPED program is quite large. Why is our SPED program so much larger than elsewhere in the state?

Al stated the need to start soon with the school budgets. Also, that discussion of all budgets needed to get underway. Sharon thought it would be good to review budgets in a shorter time-frame to get info out earlier. Bruce recommended reviewing large budgets yearly, small ones every other year. Richard felt time would be used wisely if the focus was on the larger issues.

Other Business:

Sharon informed the members that she had heard from people about town that the voters should have had the opportunity to approve the transfer of \$12,000 for the Town Assessor and that the FinCom had made an error in approving the transfer. Also, that if there is an article on the April Town Meeting warrant to move money in reserve to replenish the fund, that it will be adamantly voted against.

Minutes of the October 9 meeting were approved.

The next meeting is Tuesday, December 11 at 4:30pm.

There being no other business, a motion for adjournment was made and seconded.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:18.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy Rogers, Administrative Clerk