

**West Tisbury  
Finance Committee Meeting  
Howes House  
January 12, 2016**

**Attendance**

**Committee:** Katherine Triantafillou – Chair, Gary Montrowl – Vice Chair, Sharon Estrella, Greg Orcutt, Doug Ruskin

**Guests:** Jennifer Rand – Town Administrator, Bruce Stone – Town Accountant, Richard Knabel – Selectman, Cynthia Mitchell – Selectman, Jerry Gallagher – Personnel Board Chair, Brent Taylor – Tax Collector, Ben Retmier – Tri Town Ambulance, Joe Tierney – Inspector of Buildings and Zoning, John Christensen – Emergency Management Director, Richard Olsen – Superintendent of Streets, Don Hatch - Martha's Vineyard Refruse District Manager, John Powers – West Tisbury Health Agent

The Chair called the meeting order at 4:00pm. A quorum was present.

**Approval of Minutes of Previous Meetings:**

**December 9, 2015** – Greg moved to approve the minutes as submitted and Gary seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Old Business**

None

**New Business**

The Chair began the meeting by citing the law regarding the purpose of the finance committee. M.G.L. Chapter 39, Section 16 and 1977 Town By-Law establishes the Finance Committee and its duties. In essence, the finance committee is tasked with making sure the Town finances are in good shape and keeping the tax payers well informed regarding revenues and expenses.

The Chair asked Bruce Stone, Town Accountant, to give a brief overview of the budget. Bruce presented highlights of the budget and stated that once again, it will be a challenging year with the total increase currently estimated at 5.5%. The 5.5% increase includes a wage increase of 0.55%, and preliminary numbers for the schools, which will not have final numbers until the end of the month.

Bruce stated that the tax levy cannot increase more than 3.5% without invoking proposition 2.5, with the 3.5% comprised of new growth and a 2.5% increase.

**152 Personnel Board – Jerry Gallagher, Chair**

Gary asked about the formula used to determine the wage increase. Jerry Gallagher informed the committee that the Personnel Board looks at a few indices including the Employment Cost Index. The PB also ran an average of all towns in Massachusetts that had reported by the end of December. All information used includes the social security increase, Island town wage increases, CPI-Northeast Urban Wage Earners & Clerical Workers, and CPI All Urban Consumers Boston-Brockton-Nashua. Changes in the data brought the PB's preliminary wage increase recommendation of 1.7% down to the current recommendation of 0.55%.

Gary asked if changes could be made to the methodology so the PB could make a recommendation earlier. Jerry informed the board that using the most current data is necessary for accuracy.

The Chair asked why there was a wage adjustment at this time when in November voters passed a different wage adjustment as a result of a study that reassigned duties, redefined jobs and adjusted wages. Jerry responded that this wage adjustment is nothing more than a recognition that the cost of living is going up and the PB is recommending an adjustment based on that.

The Chair then asked how the wage adjustment percentage recommendation is calculated. Jerry responded that the PB uses published statistics. The PB starts with the social security increase which is 0%. The PB also uses the Economic Cost Index which is 1.8% and looks at Island towns where the wage adjustment numbers are known with Chilmark = 0%, Tisbury = 0.6% and Oak Bluffs = 2.5%. Other indexes used are the CPI All Urban Consumers Boston-Brockton-Nashua = 0.6% and CPI Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers = -0.6%. The PB evaluates and comes out with something that is close to average. According to Jerry, nobody uses the same formula.

When Katherine asked why there would be an increase when wages were recently adjusted based on the personnel study, Jerry informed the Committee that the study was performed by a consultant in January, 2015 and therefore the data is already a year old. It was the first study performed in five years as dictated by the charter and bylaws. Also, this "new" wage adjustment in actuality represents a COLA. He didn't know why it is called a wage adjustment.

The Chair summed up by thanking Jerry and noting it was helpful to know the cost is going down from the preliminary estimate of 1.7% to 0.55%. Jerry commented that it was a particularly difficult year to analyze the data.

#### **146 Tax Collector – Brent Taylor**

Brent Taylor began by asking what it was the finance committee wanted to know as it seemed to her that her budget was self-explanatory. She explained that in 1985 the Personnel Board completed its work and submitted a plan because there were three elected positions that were not covered and that the Tax Collector position should be slated with the Town Accountant and the Principal Assessor. There were 11 grades and the three positions, including Tax Collector, were slated at grade nine. Since that time, the Tax Collector wages have kept in step with the Town Accountant wages. Brent Taylor also pointed out that she received the 6% longevity increase.

When Gary asked about which formula Brent used to recommend her wage increase, Brent Taylor explained she uses the wage scale, grade 8, step 8 plus longevity. Gary asked about municipal lien certificates being paid to the tax collector and if that is incorporated into determining Brent's recommended wage adjustment. Brent replied that she does not include it, because it fluctuates. When Gary asked if it's considered over time compensation, Brent responded no.

Doug pointed out that he was surprised municipal lien certificate revenue was paid directly to the Tax Collector and also asked details of the Tax Collector's responsibilities since the billing and collection is outsourced. Brent explained the Tax Collector must determine when the bills go out, be at Town Hall to receive tax payments and deal with angry taxpayers and pull all of the strings.

Katherine asked if elected officials are governed by the Personnel Board. Brent responded no, but she uses the wage scale as a guideline to keep level with the Town Accountant and Principal Assessor

positions. When Katherine asked if keeping level with the Town Accountant and Principal Assessor was codified, Brent responded no.

Katherine cited a study in which it was recommended that the Treasurer and Tax Collector positions be combined. Sharon pointed out that when that was recommended, the Town voted it down. Sharon also apologized to Brent for the Finance Committee asking her to meet with them stating she was embarrassed they were asking so many questions. Sharon pointed out that the wage increase Brent recommended for her position was well within her guidelines. Katherine stated that if a narrative was provided with the Tax Collector budget, perhaps the Committee may not have had questions.

Doug took responsibility for having brought up the compensation topic and felt it was the fiduciary responsibility of the FC to do so. Doug then explained that it was not personal, but that an 8.8% wage increase is a large increase and he wanted to understand why it was necessary.

**231 Tri Town Ambulance** – Ben Retmier, Tri Town Ambulance Chief, Cynthia Mitchell – Selectman  
Greg asked how income is projected. Ben explained that when the budget is submitted, 11 months of revenue have already been collected, so only one month is estimated. Ben pointed out that revenues are up partially due to a new administrative assistant that has experience with insurance companies and is helping to track down revenues.

Gary asked about staffing two EMTs in the off season. Ben explained that allows TTA to put one crew in West Tisbury and one crew up island which provides better coverage and response time.

Greg asked about the mechanic function. Ben said that historically the mechanic function was absorbed by the Chief, but that it is a difficult task to take on while running the department and the TTA board agreed it would be better to find someone else to serve the mechanic function.

Katherine asked about new employees. Ben said that he is interviewing a new deputy chief and new paramedic. If a new paramedic is not hired, TTA will need to request help from down Island more often. At some point the up Island selectmen would be approached about being charged for this.

Doug asked Ben to justify the wage increases for EMTs. Ben explained they have not had an increase in five years and have been paid less than other towns. Greg confirmed that he had heard other towns were poaching EMTs.

Sharon asked if the EMTs are still considered volunteers since they receive a stipend. Ben explained that they are working to change from a stipend to a per diem. Sharon asked if the EMTs would become permanent to which Ben responded he is trying to keep the budget down and did not expect that to happen for several years. When Sharon suggested that full time employees replace volunteers and per diem, Ben responded that he can adequately staff with per diem.

**241 Inspector of Buildings and Zoning** – Joe Tierney

Greg asked about the new position. Joe explained that hiring someone with knowledge of the code gives him more time for inspections and planning reviews. Gary inquired about whether Joe would keep the facilities maintenance work. Joe explained he would keep it and that he has only had time to dedicate 2 hours instead of 10 hours per week.

Katherine asked Joe about the equipment supplies, education supplies and phone/internet. Joe explained that office equipment is required for the new position, new code and books are \$800/set and the cell phone is so that he can be reached in the field.

Katherine asked why a new position is required. Joe explained that his current assistant is not qualified because four years of field experience are required to be an inspector.

Doug commended Joe for keeping expenses down, but noted payroll is the biggest line item and there is a 7.3% increase for the Inspector position. Bruce Stone explained that for the most part that is a step increase and a slight change for putting the position on a new wage scale.

#### **291 Emergency Management – John Christensen, Emergency Management Director**

Greg asked about the cost of professional and technical seminars going up. John explained that as his assistant trains and get more credentials, he'll be able to move into the Director position. Increasing credentials will also allow the team to increase the professional approach to pre-disaster mitigation and response and allow them to produce better plans for the town so West Tisbury can be better prepared.

Gary asked what adding the new position will allow John to do. John explained that some towns will roll the Emergency Management position into other jobs, but he believes you need another person who can identify and obtain resources.

Doug asked about the fact that the new position has been included in the budget since 2015. John confirmed that was true, but the position was only filled in the spring.

#### **421, 422, 423 Superintendent of Streets, General Highway Funds, Snow & Ice Removal – Richard Olsen**

Doug Ruskin asked about a 20% jump in personal services. Bruce Stone explained the Board of Selectmen has taken the initiative to raise amount over two years and this is the second year. Cynthia Mitchell, Selectman, added that the same is being done with the Emergency Management budget. Cynthia also noted that other towns have a Department of Public Works with substantial paid staff.

#### **439 Martha's Vineyard Refuse District – Don Hatch, MVRD Manager and John Powers, WT Health Agent**

Greg asked about a newspaper article about the MV Refuse District. Don responded that it was regarding the restructuring of the new residential dump off area which dates back to July, 2014. At that time the MVRD board of directors elected to go out to town voters to obtain financing for the restructuring. Two towns had their fall annual votes and the other two went to spring votes in 2015. In the MVRD bylaws, once the board of directors voted to borrow money, the MVRD is to require the towns to vote within 45 days. Even though the towns approved, the MVRD was not able to borrow the money because the towns did not vote within 45 days. In order to borrow, the MVRD board will have to revote and then obtain town votes within 45 days or receive a legislative act.

Gary asked if the project was essentially going to be the same project that was presented to the Finance Committee last year. Don confirmed it is essentially the same, but working on details like the berms and shrubbery.

Gary pointed out that budget numbers do not appear to be going up. Don noted they have not gone up in ten years. Don explained the cost of recycling has increased. MVRD used to receive \$15/ton for recycling and now pays \$40/ton. The current cost for trash is \$60/ton. There is less demand for recycling with the price of oil low.

**Scheduling and Correspondence**

The Chair led a discussion about voting on the individual budgets citing that in the past, the Committee has reviewed and preliminarily voted on budgets as they were presented. Given the numbers have now changed, based on the recommended wage increase, perhaps the Committee should wait until the end of the process. Doug added that more time for the Committee to deliberate would be helpful.

Jen Rand pointed out that in the past, it was a courtesy to the department head/committee chair to approve or disapprove in a timely fashion. Bruce Stone added that in the past, the thought was that although the Committee may approve of a budget, it does not possess all of the information including warrants and the tax levy to make a decision.

The Chair asked Bruce Stone if he had any sense of the dollar amount of the warrants. Bruce listed building maintenance, the Highway building, and a new truck as possible warrant articles. He also said that there was an expectation of several school warrants, but those items may be included in line items of the school budget.

To accommodate everyone's needs, the Chair suggested that the Committee take a vote on the budgets presented today at the beginning of the meeting on January 19, 2016. Greg agreed that was fine, as did Gary.

The Chair shared a brochure from Tallage, a tax and title assignment company.

**Adjournment**

Gary moved to adjourn. Greg seconded the motion which passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:16pm

Respectfully Submitted,  
Margo Urbany-Joyce, Administrative Assistant

Approved: 1/19/16

Vote: 5-0