

**West Tisbury Finance Committee Meeting
Howes House
November 14, 2017**

Attendance

Committee: Gary Montrowl – Chair, Greg Orcutt – Vice Chair, Chuck Hodgkinson, Doug Ruskin, Katherine Triantafillou

Guests: Michael Colaneri – BOA Chair, Dawn Barnes – Assessor, Dan Waters – Town Moderator, Skip Manter – Selectman, Bruce Stone – Town Accountant

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:30pm. A quorum was present.

Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

Greg moved to approve minutes as submitted. Doug seconded the motion which passed 4-0-1 with Chuck abstaining.

Old Business

Chair Term and Selection Process

This topic was not discussed due to time constraints.

New Business

Town Meeting/Budget – Dan Waters, Town Moderator

After declaring it was almost April, Dan Waters, Town Moderator, explained that the budget is a separate document from the warrant in West Tisbury. Dan then cited Carlisle, MA as an example where the budget is part of the warrant and therefore posted at the same time and locations as the warrant.

Dan explained he would like for the budget to be posted where the warrant is posted and he asked for support from the Finance Committee.

There was a discussion about different ways to get the budget to voters including a different printed format with larger font, presentation of the budget by the Finance Committee at town meeting, a mailing or mass email to voters, a public meeting before town meeting and a broadcast on MVTV.

Greg moved to draft a letter to recommend the budget be included in the warrant as part of the document and posted alongside the warrant. Doug seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Assessors Presentation – Michael Colaneri, Board of Assessors Chair, Dawn Barnes, Assessor

Michael Colaneri said the Board of Assessors just finished a triennial valuation in which numbers changed, values changed, reporting and state laws changed. Michael explained the BOA finds it to be appropriate to apprise the Finance Committee of changes.

Dawn Barnes explained when the tax rate is set, Gateway software from DOR is used to create a four page document known as the recap sheet and ultimately, the Assessors are responsible for the document which is signed off by the town clerk.

Dawn further explained the final step is a class hearing by the Selectmen in which they vote on the following four choices:

1. Selectmen can vote to shift the minimum residential factor and shift some of the tax burden from the residential class to the commercial/industrial class. If the Selectmen vote a factor of one, it means they are voting for one tax rate. In Massachusetts, some towns have two tax rates.
2. An open space exemption exists, but West Tisbury does not use open space classification codes with the DOR so this exemption is not available to the Selectmen.
3. A small commercial exemption exists in which a commercial entity that occupies and has less than ten employees and has a value greater than \$1.0 million, can have up to 10% of that value discounted which shifts the tax rate upward. Only two of 2,810 parcels in West Tisbury qualify for this exemption. Therefore, the Selectmen do not traditionally allow this exemption.
4. The residential exemption gives a percentile of the average residential home value as a discount to homeowners who have a primary residence in West Tisbury.

Dawn said the BOA has recommended the residential exemption for the last several years and that exemption could range from 10% to 35%. Dawn noted that of 351 communities in Massachusetts, 13 communities participate including Vineyard Haven, Nantucket, and Manchester by the Sea. Dawn said the reasons the Selectmen have listed for not voting for the exemption are the fact that secondary homeowners don't have children in the school system, the largest segment of the budget, secondary homeowners can't vote on the budget and secondary homeowners don't create an extra cost.

There was a discussion regarding whether secondary homeowners created additional cost, if there was push back from secondary homeowners in Vineyard Haven, whether the Finance Committee views its role as one for all taxpayers or resident tax payers, and the impact on taxpayers if this exemption were used.

When asked if the BOA was looking to the Finance Committee to support or not support the residential exemption in the meeting with the Selectmen, Michael Colaneri responded the BOA is looking to inform people in the community and if people want to support the exemption, that's great.

Town Meeting Date

The Chair asked the Committee if it would like to draft a warrant article to move the date of town meeting to two to four weeks later in the year. The Committee discussed how smoothly the budget and warrant process was last year. The Chair suggested that unless the Committee runs into difficulties, it leave the process as is for now.

Foundation Budget

The Chair informed the Committee that he contacted Superintendent D'Andrea and learned that in 2017 the Foundation Budget to educate a student was \$3,991 per student, but the UIRSD spent in excess of \$25,000 per student. The Chair explained that to change the formula to reflect the realities of the cost of education would cost the state an additional \$1.0 billion. Gary added governor Baker did sign a \$20 per student increase.

Katherine volunteered to speak to people in the state legislature on the Foundation Budget. The committee supported Katherine in this.

Debt Service

No report.

Finance Committee Budget

Bruce listed the items in the FY17 budget as filming of six Fin Com budget/warrant hearings, dues for Mass Municipal Association membership and administrative assistant hours.

There was a discussion about advertising for an informational budget meeting for voters and mailing of a flyer to voters regarding the budget.

The Chair said he would present a draft budget at the next Fin Com meeting.

Review of AIFC Meeting on October 26, 2018

The Committee discussed the fact that presenters (CORE/First Stop, Center for Living and ACE MV) were better prepared than in the past. Suggestions made included fewer presenters at one meeting and conducting the meeting later in the year so that final budget numbers were presented.

There was a discussion about ACE MV regarding the fact that the towns have said ACE MV should find other funding and not continue to depend upon town support, but ACE MV continues to request town funding. It was also discussed that the down island towns are contributing less than the amount calculated using the 50/50 formula in spite of the fact that down island residents are taking the most courses and therefore benefitting most.

Committee Reports

Community Preservation Committee (CPC)

Chuck informed the Committee the CPC would review applications on November 15. Chuck said he could not be at that meeting, but would send the Committee's comments to the CPC.

Conservation of S.M. Mayhew & Co. Peddler Wagon – MV Museum (\$50,000)

Chuck said he submitted to the WT CPC the legal opinion Chilmark obtained stating the project did not have the public access required to obtain CPC funding. Greg noted the wagon was donated in 1955 and has been stored in an unheated barn for 62 years.

Plaques for Historic Buildings – WT Historic District Commission (\$500)

Chuck recommended this be covered through the Historic Commission's expense budget.

Replacement of the Main Barn Doors – MV Agricultural Society (\$15,000)

Chuck said the CPC requested a formal quote.

Door Replacement at the Old Mill – MV Garden Club (\$18,000)

Chuck explained the MV Garden Club originally requested to use \$3,000 leftover from another project which was not allowed. The MV Garden Club then came back to the CPC with an \$18,000 request.

Accessibility for the First Congregational Church of WT – First Congregational Church of WT (\$40,000)

Chuck explained this would not move forward at this time due to a church and state case in Acton, MA.

P.A.L.S. Program – The Resource Inc (\$82,600)

Chuck said this application was rejected because it did not meet CPA code.

Greenwood Ave – Island Housing Trust (\$100,000)

Chuck explained there is an issue on regional applications because the WT CPC is noticing that regional applications are not always regional. Chuck said that Chilmark CPC received an application for the IHT Kuehn's Way project, but not for the IHT Greenwood Ave project. Chuck said they will discuss this issue at the All Island CPC meeting. Gary added this was also discussed at an All Island Fin Com meeting.

Kuehn's Way – Island Housing Trust (\$35,270)

No discussion.

Funds for WT Affordable Housing Trust – WT Affordable Housing Committee (\$50,000)

Chuck said the new regulations from the Department of Revenue don't like the idea of allocating CPA money to a town's municipal trust without a specific use.

Rental Assistance – Dukes County Regional Housing Authority (\$80,000)

No discussion.

Up Island Regional School District (UIRSD)

Greg reported that contractual obligations alone cause a 3% budget increase. Skip added the contractual increase would be approximately \$1.0 million.

Doug told the Committee it is clear the Chilmark School facility is a significant cost and Chilmark has not even countered with a suggestion for an alternate allocation formula to offset the cost. Doug asked the Committee to consider recommending to the Selectmen a warrant article that would be the first vote to withdraw from the UIRSD if an alternate cost allocation formula is not proposed by Chilmark.

Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS)

Chuck reported the public hearing where the school committee may vote on the budget is November 27, 2017. Chuck said OPEB has not yet been addressed. Chuck estimated that if the MVRHS seriously addressed OPEB, it would cost \$1.8million/year for 25 years. Chuck said West Tisbury's share is 16.7% based on the current assessment. Chuck calculated that when combined with an estimated \$60 million bond for renovations, West Tisbury's assessment for just these two issues would create an annual increase of \$1.0 million and this additional \$1.0 million would be paid for 25 years. Chuck added this does not include other budget increases. Chuck asked for approval to raise these issues to the MVRHS school committee.

Chuck said the MVRHS budget is up 4.3% without shared services or OPEB. Chuck added that the revenue projection from the state is down \$55,000 from FY17.

There was a discussion regarding OPEB, deferred maintenance and the MVRHS kicking the can down the road.

Correspondence/Scheduling

Katherine informed the Committee she would be unavailable on 1/9/18, 1/10/18/ and 1/11/18.

Gary reported that he and Doug attended a meeting regarding the Dukes County Sheriff's Office and the state of the 911 communications system on Martha's Vineyard. Gary said the Undersecretary of Public Safety for Massachusetts and the head of 911 management for Massachusetts were both at the meeting.

Gary reported the dire state of the system which could be taken out by a lightning strike because it still uses a copper backbone. Gary said it would be \$3 million - \$4 million to upgrade. Gary pointed out that Dukes County is one of the few municipalities in the Commonwealth that does not assess residents for this service.

Gary also reported the Sheriff's office is falling behind and Verizon does not have employees trained to work on the antiquated system so other contractors must be hired for repair and maintenance. Gary said additionally, there are areas of the 911 communications system that Martha's Vineyard cannot tie into. Doug added there are times when first responders on Island cannot communicate with each other.

Gary said there are grant opportunities available with an application deadline of May 1, but the state will also expect Martha's Vineyard to apply funds to the system. Gary concluded by saying we have gotten the attention of the state and Dukes County was mentioned along with a few other communities in a presentation to Governor Baker.

Skip said that because the state took over the 911 communications center, they should be responsible for it.

Adjournment

Katherine moved to adjourn. Chuck seconded the motion which passed 5-0. The meeting was adjourned at 6:35pm.

Next meeting is Tuesday, December 12 at 4:30pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Margo Urbany-Joyce
West Tisbury Finance Committee Admin Assistant

Approved 5-0

December 12,2017