

West Tisbury Finance Committee

Thursday, March 4, 2020

Approved 5-14-20

A regular meeting of the West Tisbury Finance Committee was scheduled for Thursday, March 4, 2020, at 5:00 PM at Town Hall, State Road, West Tisbury.

PRESENT: Gary Montrowl, Jane Dreeben, Greg Orcutt (Chair), Doug Ruskin, Clark Rattet,

ABSENT:

Also present: Bruce Stone (Town Accountant); Skipper Manter (Board of Selectmen); Kent Healy (Board of Selectmen); Cynthia Mitchell (Board of Selectmen); Matt D'Andrea (MVRPS); Donna Lowell-Bettencourt, Principal, WT School; Holly Bellebuono, ACE MV; Matt Mincone, West Tisbury Chief of Police

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM, and a quorum was declared. Mr. Orcutt provided a brief introduction to the business of the evening, and requested that cell phones be silenced.

BUSINESS

Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting - March 2, 2020

The minutes from March 2, 2020 were reviewed. Mr Ruskin noted that he had edits he would like to suggest, but didn't have the specific changes available to present.

Mr. Orcutt suggested postponing review of the minutes to the next meeting. Approved by unanimous consent.

Review of Article 58 & 59 with Matt D'Andrea representing MVPSD and Donna Lowell- Bettencourt, Principal, WT School

The Committee took up a funding article for a resource Officer at the West Tisbury School (Article #58), and a funding article for expenses related to adding a resource officer (Article #59). Mr. Matt D'Andrea (Superintendent) and Ms. Donna Lowell-Bettencourt (Principal) as well as Police Chief Matt Mincone were present.

Mr Orcutt read Article #58. Mr. Ruskin suggested that the committee consider both articles simultaneously. Approved by Unanimous consent. Mr. Orcutt read Article #59.

Mr. D'Andrea spoke about the general duties taken up by School Resource Officers, that SROs are present in many other island schools, and about how an SRO benefits school and student safety.

Mr. Montrowl asked if an SRO is mandated by state regulation. Mr. D'Andrea said that an SRO should be provided if funding is available, and that it is encouraged. Mr. Montrowl: how has the general concept of an SRO been viewed by parents? Mr. D'Andrea: very little comment has been received about this proposal; however the SRO at other schools has been very well received, and very successful.

Mr. Rattet: Full time position? Mr. D'Andrea: Yes.

Ms. Dreeben: Why two articles? Mr. Stone: This is a police position that is funded by the school. The end effect is that 70% of the total cost of the officer is borne by West Tisbury – and that's Article #58. The second appropriation will add funds to the police budget for the additional costs for

taking a police officer away from regular rotation.

There was some discussion related to the impact of the position on the regular police department budget.

It was noted that the current funds an officer, stationed at the airport, for 26 weeks out of the year. There was discussion about related expenses for adding the position, including insurance, OPEB, etc.

There was continued discussion related to how the appropriation would ultimately balance out. Chief Mincone noted that there is a current police officer, ready and trained, who would be qualified for the position.

Ms. Mitchell asked about a specific job description. Mr. D'Andrea noted that a general job description exists, and would like be adapted for this position.

There was some discussion about the potential areas to be included in a Memorandum of Understanding for the position.

Mr. Ruskin noted his request for school meeting minutes related to the issue, and for a job description for the position, as well as his research into the benefits of an SRO, and state requirements related to same. Mr. Ruskin, noting that the topic of an SRO had been discussed as early as 2013, why is this being brought up now? And why is this not regular budget line item?

Mr. Alex Salop, Up Island School Committee, noted that the topic had been brought up 'organically' as part of recent discussions, and was seen as a benefit to the school. Mr. Salop noted that a state template for an MOU exists, and has been used as a starting point for this position.

Mr. Salop: Why is this a warrant article, and not a budget line? Mr. Salop noted that this is a sensitive topic, and deserved public discussion.

Mr. Richie Smith (MVRPS) noted that there was significant response on-island after Sandy Hook; each Town has responded differently, on different schedules. This is something that has been a topic of discussion for some time; there is some sensitivity related to the proposal.

Chief Rincone: I've promoted the idea of a constant police presence in the school for some time, and continue extol the benefits.

Ms. Lowell Bettencourt: The cooperation with local police has been excellent up to this point. We've had semi-regular support from local police for some time; a regularly-assigned officer would be a potentially significant benefit. Local residents and students have 'warmed up' to the presence of uniformed police at the school on a daily basis.

Mr. Robert Lionette, Up Island Regional School Committee: To be clear, we are punting this to you. We have not taken a position on this. We are looking for Town Meeting opinion and/or support. An MOU is not drafted, nor has one been reviewed. However, nothing is certain in relation to this proposal.

Ms. Mitchell: What is to be presented to voters? A money article? Or just the idea of a position?

Ms. Lowell-Bettencourt: There is a draft MOU presented to Chilmark; however, the MOU was determined to need of more work.

Mr. Montrowl (to Ms. L-B): what are you hearing from parents? Ms. L-B: I've had people asking for an SRO for a while. Some concerns include whether there will be arrests in the school, whether there will be "policing" or investigations in the school. General support, but requests for details.

Mr. Montrowl (to Mincone): How have SROs been received in other schools? Chief Mincone: Other than one specific issue, it's been very successful, very well received.

Mr. Salop: We should have documentation by the time of Town Meeting to describe this position –

we will need to have it if we're going to support this request.

Mr. Ruskin noted that he had a 'fairly cynical view' of the proposal. Feedback about the proposal from school professionals largely consisted of "it depends" on the training and qualifications of the individual in the position, with concerns about misuse of authority for what might otherwise be considered simple childish behavior. Mr. Ruskin noted that he was wary of reacting out of fear, and introducing something that might better be handled another way. Aside from these points, Mr. Ruskin noted that the article didn't seem ready for prime time, as it seemed to lack sufficient information, and may suffer for that on Town Meeting floor.

Mr. Montrowl: The primary motivation is protection and safety for kids. What will come out through the MOU will likely answer to everyone's concerns.

Mr. Orcutt: While safety is a significant concern, we don't have an idea as to what this will look like.

Ms. Jenn Rand (WT Town Administrator): Is it the finance committee's role at this point to adjudicate the job description? To determine what the officer will do?

Mr. Orcutt: We don't know what the officer will do – and we're being asked to approve something – with money attached to it – based on just an idea.

Mr. Ruskin: We trust the judgment of appointed and elected boards and committees. However, the school committee has not come to a conclusion on this. We're being asked to approve a budget for something that is not yet defined. If the School Committee has not yet agreed on the role of an SRO, we shouldn't recommend it.

Mr. Salop: I believe we (the school committee) should have an opportunity to clarify our request without having an up or down vote by the Finance Committee whether or not to recommend.

Mr. Rattet: has the school committee not made a recommendation for this? Is this something that is in the works, and might be finalized over the next week or so? If we get a recommendation from the School Committee and the Selectmen, we will be better enabled to adjudicate the request. When will that happen?

Mr. Salop noted that the School Committee will be meeting on the 16th.

Mr. Rattet: From what I'm hearing from the parties, I don't have a problem with the concept, but want to see approvals before we recommend or not.

Mr. D'Andrea: Our original thought was simply to ask the town to weigh in. However, if the Town approved the concept there would be no funding for a further year, so we forwarded a warrant article that asked for the appropriation. This is protection offered to high school students, but not to elementary school students at this time. In the world we have to live in, this is short money.

Mr. Stone: If this is approved by the towns, will further action by the school committee be required?
Answer: Absolutely yes.

Mr. Montrowl: I also agree that not having school committee recommendations in front of us is odd.

Mr. Salop: is that the litmus test? To have School Committee recommendations first?

Mr. Rattet: wouldn't the Town Meeting want to know the school committee's recommendation? It makes more sense for the Finance Committee to have a recommendation from the School Committee and the Selectmen first.

Mr. Montrowl: We are being asked to recommend this, while the School Committee hasn't yet decided.

Mr. Salop: I would hope we would come out of the meeting on the 16th with a better understanding.

Mr. Manter: perhaps voting to take no action on this, with a recommendation given on Town Meeting floor. Ms. Mitchell concurred.

Mr. Ruskin suggested that a motion to not recommend might be in order, with Mr. Rattet agreeing. Mr. Montrowl suggested that the committee take no action at this point, with the opportunity for a verbal recommendation.

Mr. Ruskin: We are talking about a single SRO? What about Chilmark School?

Ms. Lowell-Bettencourt described some of the history of the matter, but confirmed that funding for a single SRO was being requested at this time.

It was MOVED by Montrowl, SECONDED by Dreeben

To take no action on Article #58 and Article #59.

VOTED: 5, 0, 0.

Review of Article 21 with Matt D'Andrea representing MVPSPD and Theresa Manning for the MV Youth Task Force

Mr. Ruskin read Article #21.

Ms. Theresa Manning (MV Youth Task Force) addressed questions that had been posed:

- The program has been in place for 15 years, largely funded by grants.
- Last year was the first year asking for help from the Towns.
- The MV Youth Task Force is an independent non-profit, and is working on building a donor base to support programs, as well as regular research grants.
- A major grant may be available on September 1, but is still not a certainty. If the grant is funded, the requested appropriation would be returned to the town.

Mr. Rattet: have other towns been asked? And have the requests been recommended? Ms. Manning: Yes, and yes.

Ms. Dreeben: How will this be used? Ms. Manning: support for salaries of administrative staff, primarily.

Ms. Manning described some of the organizations partnerships and recent programs, and the efforts to collaborate and stretch dollars.

Mr. Ruskin: Total budget? Ms. Manning: \$200,000, with \$100k coming from towns.

Mr. Ruskin: Where is the overlap with the County Substance Abuse Programs? Ms. Manning described some of the work undertaken by the program, including work done by the organization that is not undertaken by other organizations.

There was some discussion related to how the organization works, how it serves island schools generally, how survey data is used, and the organizations responses to emergencies or significant areas of concern. There was further discussions related to building relationships with local police, including creating training opportunities for local law enforcement.

After further discussion, it was MOVED by Rattet, SECONDED by Dreeben

To recommend.

VOTED: 5, 0, 0.

Review of Article 56 with Matt D'Andrea representing MVPSPD

Mr. Ruskin read the article.

Mr. Matt D'Andrea described the intention: to replace the original, failed dust collection system, which will free up space, and allow for easier use of the shop. \$25,000 in the school budget will pay for engineering; \$200,000 total project cost. A \$100,000 grant is anticipated, with a 1:1 match

required.

Mr. Ruskin noted that a central dust collection system is the best option for a wood shop. However, the school has been plagued by maintenance and infrastructure issues; a \$22M plan for repairs and maintenance has recently been considered. Mr. Ruskin noted that the problem can be solved with separate machines, one per piece of equipment on the floor, at a far lower cost (\$600-800 each) with one or two exceptions. The end goal (dust collection) can be done with the existing budget.

Mr. D'Andrea: One of the concerns is the dust in the facility. The expectation is that this system will be more effective than separate systems. Portables are more band-aids.

Mr. Ruskin: Dust collection is never 100%. Kids should be wearing dust protection, regardless.

Mr. Stone: The school committee has heard this opinion, and has voted to recommend.

Mr. Mark Freedman spoke about the 'puzzle' of maintenance and upkeep, and described the grant opportunity as a good 'fit' for this particular use.

It was MOVED by Mr. Rattet SECONDED by Montrowl:

To recommend.

VOTED: 3 (MONTROL, RATTET RUSKIN), 2 (DREEBEN, RUSKIN), 0.

Review of Article 12 with Holly Bellebuono for ACE MV

Mr. Ruskin read the article.

Ms. Bellebuono briefly outlined the history of ACE MV, and the programs offered.

Mr. Montrowl: Towns have chosen to fund this, or not; with no consequences to the residents to the towns. Will there be any consequences to the towns that choose not to fund ACE MV?

There was some discussion related to the question, and some history of the requests (and towns responses to same).

Mr. Montrowl: Could we explore a system that allows for a reduced cost for residents of Towns that choose to support the programs?

Ms. Bellebuono spoke to the question, and suggested that an island-wide benefit results from the training.

Mr. Rattet: have you heard from other towns? Response: Edgartown and Oak Bluffs seem to be favoring funding at our requested levels; Tisbury seems to be looking at supporting a lower level.

There was discussion related to town funding as related to participation by residents from those towns.

Mr. Ruskin: Is there a plan to adjust fees in order to move towards self funding?

Ms. Bellebuono: Yes and No. ACE MV is looking at tuition rates; the mission is to keep classes affordable. Other ACE organizations are embedded within the school system budget, are self-sustaining within the schools. Mr. Manter noted that it was, on MV, at one time. Ms. Bellebuono: Even if we were able to raise our tuition significantly, we would not be able to eliminate the need for town support entirely.

There was discussion related to ongoing cost analysis of each course, and the struggle to create private financial support for the programs.

Mr. Montrowl spoke in favor of the programs provided by ACE MV, with some discussion related to potential future courses of study.

There was some discussion related to the potential to fund at a level proportional to all Town funding.

It was MOVED by Ruskin, SECONDED by Rattet
To recommend.

VOTED: 5, 0, 0.

Review of other articles not requiring call-backs if needed

Article #57: Creation of a Special Education Stabilization Fund

It was MOVED by Montrowl, SECONDED by Rattet
To recommend

VOTED: 5, 0, 0.

Article #61: Authorize MVRSD to borrow to fund a lease/purchase six new school buses

Mr. Ruskin: A lease/ purchase?

Mr.Mark Freedman (Acting CFO, MVRSD): This would be a capital lease/purchase.

Mr. Ruskin: what is the final dollar buyout at the end of the lease?

Mr. Freedman: we will need to check on this.

Mr. Ruskin (To Ms. Rand): Might this change?

Ms. Rand: This has not been voted yet by the MVRSD Committee

Mr. Ruskin: What could change?

Mr. Freedman: POSSIBLY the number of buses. We don't anticipate a change, but since it hasn't been voted.

Mr. Rattet: is net of trade-in value?

Mr. Freedman : We will be 'surplussing' old buses per our standard past practice.

Mr. Rattet: When was the last time we bought buses?

Mr. Freedman: We've been buying buses at a rate of about three per year. This is more of a catch-up interim step.

Mr. Ruskin: How many buses in total? About 33 vehicles in total, with a total of about 22 buses.

It was MOVED by Montrowl, SECONDED by Rattet

To recommend.

VOTED: 5, 0, 0.

Mr. Orcutt thanked the various attendees for their participation.

OTHER BUSINESS

It was MOVED by Mr. Ruskin SECONDED by Montrowl

To recommend Budgets #114 through #197

VOTED: 5, 0, 0.

It was MOVED by Rattet, SECONDED by Dreeben

To approve budget line items #200 through 299.

VOTED: 5, 0, 0.

It was MOVED by Rattet, SECONDED by Dreeben

To approve budget line items #311 through 313

It was MOVED by Rattet, SECONDED by Dreeben
To approve budget line items #421 through 491.

VOTED: 5, 0, 0.

It was MOVED by Rattet, SECONDED by Dreeben
To approve budget line items #500 through 543

VOTED: 5, 0, 0.

It was MOVED by Rattet, SECONDED by Dreeben
To approve budget line items #610 through #692

VOTED: 5, 0, 0,

It was MOVED by Rattet, SECONDED by Dreeben
To approve budget line items #710 through #752.

VOTED: 5, 0, 0.

Mr. Stone noted that corrected the health insurance line item #914-5170 to be \$878,380.

VOTED: 5, 0, 0.

It was MOVED by Rattet, SECONDED by Dreeben
To approve budget line items #911 through #945

VOTED: 5, 0, 0.

It was MOVED by Ruskin SECONDED by Rattet
To approve Warrant Article #3.

VOTED: 5, 0, 0.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Ruskin asked about whether the finance committee wanted to do an op-ed regarding any non unanimous votes. It was generally agreed to discuss it at a later meeting.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for March 17, 2020, 5 PM.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, it was MOVED by Rattet, SECONDED by Dreeben
To Adjourn.

VOTED: 5, 0, 0.

The meeting was declared adjourned at 6:15 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Douglas Finn

*APPROVED BY A VOTE OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE AT A REGULAR MEETING:
5-14-20*