

Town of Bedford Finance Committee

January 19, 2023

Minutes

Finance Committee Members in attendance: Karen Dunn, Clerk, Ben Thomas, Stephen Steele, Elizabeth McClung, Erica Liu, Abigail Seibert, Ron O'Brien and Tom Rowan

Others in attendance: David Castellarin, (Finance Director); Heidi Porter, Director of Health and Human Services, Tony Fields, Planning Director, Library:, Richard Callaghan, Director
Assistant Director: Noreen O'Gara

Member Dunn calls the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.
Reads Remote Meeting Guidelines
Calls the Roll of Committee Members in attendance.

I. REGULAR BUSINESS

1. Public Comment

None

2. Review/Approve Minutes

Motion to approve the Minutes of the Meeting on September 8, 2022, as amended by Member Steele.

Second by Member Thomas

Roll call of Members in attendance

Vote: 5-0-3

Motion carries

Motion to approve the Minutes of the Meeting on September 22, 2022, as amended by Member Steele.

Second by Member Thomas

Roll call of Members in attendance

Vote: 5-0-3

Motion carries

3. FY24 Board of Health Budget

Heidi Porter, Director of Health and Human Services appears for the Board of Health.

Ms. Porter provides brief financial summary. Refers to being level funded

Member Thomas asks how the Funds are doing.

Ms. Porter says they are doing well. Also discusses COVID vaccine costs.

Member Thomas asks about increase in salaries number.

Ms. Porter says not general increase. Just one person.

Member Thomas asks if they are struggling on anything.

Ms. Porter states not really struggling. Just post pandemic angst.

Ms. Porter reviews list of grants.

Member Seibert asks if there are other grants out there.

Ms. Porter states there are and where it is appropriate we are seeking funds. Discusses what is being sought and on what topics. Refers to being grant hungry.

Member Seibert asks what you would like to do if you could.

Ms. Porter states that they are well set up and happy to be responsive.

Member Rowan asks if any other accounts are available.

Ms. Porter states yes. Some emergency funds. Fluctuates by year. Did use Cares Act. We are generally well funded for what is needed.

Member Steele comments on bid safety costs.

Ms. Porter responds affirmatively.

Member Steele asks whether FY24 budget includes Merit.

Ms. Porter states no.

Member Steele asks about regional health as against local health in various towns.

Ms. Porter discusses state survey of this and grants involved. Regional grants have allowed contract people to provide services not previously offered. Also discusses Cummings Grant.

Ms. Porter discusses large increase in Bedford Pantry usage.

Member McClung asks about stipends.

Member Dunn offers the Committee's thanks to all Board of Health personnel. Very much appreciated.

4. FY24 Library Budget

Richard Callaghan, Director, will provide presentation.

Mr. Callaghan states that the budget that has been submitted to the Finance Committee meets the Finance Committee guidelines. Also meets the State aid requirements as outlined.

Mr. Callaghan explains individual line item increases.

Member McClung asks about any changes due to COVID.

Mr. Callaghan explains the changes that have occurred and how some adverse changes are starting to change for the better. Starting to get back to a more normal mode of operation.

Member McClung asks if the funds were available, would you hire added staff.

Mr. Callaghan states possibly. Also notes that in his long time as Director, he has never seen such a dearth of applications for available jobs.

Member Seibert asks about cost of living increase and its effect.

Member McClung asks about availability of volunteers.

Mr. Callaghan states that they do have volunteers available for certain jobs.

Member Liu asks about weekend use of the library.

Mr. Callaghan describes how the numbers are coming back. Getting people to work on Sunday require 4s time and a half and have that now.

Member Thomas asks about available funding for various projects.

Mr. Callaghan discusses ongoing projects.

Member Thomas asks about the issue of security with respect to the library.

Mr. Callaghan states that issue is of prime concern. The library will be working with the same vendor the Town will be using.

Member Seibert asks if funds were available, what you would do.

Mr. Callaghan responds briefly.

Member Steele asks how much lockers cost

Mr. Callaghan states \$30,000 to \$35,000.

Member Steele asks about security policies in place.

Mr. Callaghan states there have been very few instances where security was an issue.

Member Thomas states that, even so, it is very important to have policies in place.

Member Steele notes that there should be town wide policies in place.

Member Dunn expresses the thanks of the Finance Committee for all that you and your staff do the Town.

5. FY24 Planning Board Budget and Town Meeting Articles

Tony Fields, Planning Director will provide the presentation.

Mr. Fields states that the proffered budget meets the Finance Committee guideline. Budget is mostly salaries with two changes to expense accounts.

Mr. Field explains the need to change the manner in which public hearings are advertised. Across the state, many small. Local newspapers which carried such notices have shut down. This leaves only the large newspapers which charge substantially more for such advertisements\.

Efforts are being made to eliminate the current requirement for physical posting in printed newspapers. Looking to have a listing in a Bedford Citizen on line publication which will be much less expensive.

Mr. Fields explains the second budget increase sought with respect to securing available software for community engagement. Allows for citizen participation. Would allow for larger audience to engage. The funds sought are for a review of available software.

Member McClung asks whether such surveys would be taken anonymously.

Member Seibert asks if such software could be purchased for use by multiple towns.

Member Seibert asks if money were not an issue, what the Planning Board would look to do.

Mr. Fields discusses the Comprehensive Plan which is a big ticket item to complete. Currently looking into this now. Looking into what other towns are doing as far as an updated comprehensive Plan

Member Steele asks about the yearly costs for these programs.

Mr. Field notes that the requested \$5,000 here would be for yearly program participation in just one current program.

Member Dunn asks for any further questions.

Member Steele asks about the Planning Board effort to reorganize the Zoning Bylaw.

Mr. Fields notes that this is for a reorganization of the Zoning Bylaw not for Bylaw changes. Currently are using an outside consultant and have received \$40,000 from Town Meeting for this.

Mr. Fields also discusses the Planning Board's effort to change the Zoning Bylaw with respect to the allowance of two family dwellings... Notes the 2019 Housing Study recommended such an expansion. Explains current two family dwelling zoning. Explains that proposed change would allow two family dwelling be built in all zoning areas in the town.

Mr. Fields explains what is currently being built as far a residential construction in Bedford. Explains what the proposed zoning would allow. Surveys have shown that other towns that have done this have not experienced a large number of two family units being built.

Member Liu asks what the effect would be on tax revenues and school population increases.

Member Thomas believes this effort raises numerous issues that should be considered before such changes are put in place. Suggests that this effort should be put off until a later time.

Mr. Fields notes that Planning Board public meetings will begin soon.

Member McClung questions this effort.

Members Steele and Thomas also question this effort.

II. RECURRING BUSINESS

1. Meetings Attended

Member Thomas discusses Select Board meeting dealing with budget and discussion of potential structural changes for Town Meeting which would allow for increased attendance.

Member Seibert discusses School Committee meeting where it voted its budget.

Member Dunn discusses next scheduled meeting.

2. Finance Committee Adjourns

Motion to adjourn by Member Thomas.

Second by Member Steele.

Roll call of Members in attendance.

Vote: 8-0-0

Motion carries

Time: 9:30PM

John B. Connarton
Recording Secretary

DOCUMENT LIST

Agenda for January 19, 2023 Meeting

Minutes for Finance Committee Meeting for September 8, 2022

Minutes for Finance Committee Meeting for September 22, 2022

Board of Health Budget Presentation

Library Budget Presentation

Planning Board Budget Presentation

FY24 Model 1-19-23

