

TOWN OF BEDFORD FINANCE COMMITTEE

September 28, 2023

Minutes

Finance Committee Members in attendance: Ben Thomas, Chair, Abigail Seibert, Vice Chair, Karen Dunn, Clerk, Mark Bailey, George Lee, Ronald O'Brien, Tom Rowan and Philip Prince

Others in attendance: David Castellarin, (Finance Director), Michael Seibert, John Fisher, Police Chief; Paul Sheehan, Interim Fire Chief, Bob Dorer, Chair of Energy and Sustainability Committee

Chair Thomas calls the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

Calls the Roll of Committee Members in attendance.

I. REGULAR BUSINESS

1. Public Comment

Karen Wilson speaks in favor of Warrant Article 15.

Chris Gittens speaks in favor of Warrant Article 15.

2. Review/Approve Minutes

None.

3. STM Draft Warrant Review/Votes

Chair Thomas moves to Article 7 Citizens Petition – Alternative Location for Fire Station

Chair Thomas recognizes Michael Seibert

Member Seibert states that she will not participate in this discussion although she has determined that there would be no conflict should she do so.

Mr. Seibert provides commentary with respect to this Article.

Chair Thomas asks for any Member questions or comments.

Member Rowan notes that he is not in favor of this Article.

Member Lee questions the wording of the Article and notes that he is not in favor of it.

Member Prince states he has no questions or comments.

Chair Thomas notes that he is not in favor this Article.

Chair Thomas asks for a motion.

Member Bailey moves not to approve this Article.

Second by Member Dunn

Chair Thomas calls Roll of Members in attendance and notes for clarification that a “yes” vote will note disapproval of Article.

Vote: 7-0-1

Motion carries

Chair Thomas moves to Article 4 Appropriate Funds for the Police Officers Association Collective Bargaining Agreement FY2024 – FY2026

Chair Thomas recognizes John C. Fisher, Chief of Police.

Chief Fisher explains details of the proposed collective bargaining agreement. Somewhat more expensive than what was initially set aside. Notes that part of salary increases is being made up by people who have left. Also explains schedule for new hires.

Chair Thomas asks about FY 25 numbers.

Chief Fisher notes that the he expects the numbers to increase but unsure of amount at this time.

Chair Thomas asks for any Member questions or comments.

Member Seibert inquires about the 3 year contract total percentage increase.

Chair Thomas asks for a motion.

Motion to recommend approval by Member O’Brien

Second by Member Dunn

Roll call of Members

Vote: 8-0-0

Motion carries.

Chair Thomas moves to Article 5 Civil Service Changes – Removing Patrol Officers from Civil Service System

Chief Fisher notes that this Article would allow the removal of patrol officers from the Civil Service System. He provides the reasons for seeking this change. Also notes that a number of abutting towns are doing this same thing. This would allow for a more efficient process.

Chair Thomas asks for any Member questions or comments.

Member Seibert asks what the town’s patrol officers think about this potential change. Notes that generally one thinks that Civil Service status provides certain protections to employees.

Chief Fisher states that the patrol officers are in favor of this move. He explains how removal from Civil Service would work and provide benefit to the patrol officers and how it would benefit the Police Department hiring procedures.

Member O’Brien states that he agrees with Chief Fisher’s opinion of value.

Member Rowan confirms that is his understanding as well. Asks about correlation between Civil Service Test scores and actual performance as police officer.

Chief Fisher provides his response from his experience.

Member Prince states that he understands the concept and agrees with it.

Chair Thomas asks what we would lose from this.

Chief Fisher states not much. Actually will also cost less than with Civil Service.

Chair Thomas asks for a motion.

Motion to recommend approval by Member O’Brien

Second by Member Dunn

Roll call of Members

Vote: 8-0-0

Motion carries.

Chair Thomas moves to Article 6 Home Rule Petition – Fire Department Civil Service Changes to Age Limits

Chair Thomas recognizes Paul Sheehan, Interim Fire Chief.

Chief Sheehan introduces himself and provides a brief summary of his professional experience.

Chief Sheehan explains this approval of this Article would allow the town not to comply with the maximum age limits for new hires currently required by Civil Service. He notes that his experience has shown that people seem to make career moves later in life than previously had been the norm. Also notes that current physical and mental tests would still remain in place for all applicants.

Also notes that the Fire Department would still remain in Civil Service if this Article is approved.

Chair Thomas asks for any Member questions or comments.

Member Seibert asks about lateral transfer hires.

Chief Sheehan states that the Civil Service maximum age limit does not apply to lateral transfer hires.

Chair Thomas asks for a motion.

Motion to recommend approval by Member O'Brien

Second by Member Dunn

Roll call of Members

Vote: 8-0-0

Motion carries

Chair Thomas moves to Article 15 General Bylaw Amendment – Municipal Opt-In Specialized Energy Code

Chair Thomas recognizes Bob Dorer, Chair of Energy and Sustainability Committee

Mr. Dorer provides brief summary of Massachusetts base Energy Code and Stretch Code. Looking at energy efficiency. Bedford has agreed to the Stretch Code. Also discusses the Specialized Code. Sits on top of the Stretch Code. Looking to reduce carbon emissions.

Notes that the Specialized Code only applies to new construction. 4000 square feet. Also does not prohibit use of fossil fuels but does provide requirements in such a case. Basically encourages all electric buildings. Requires buildings being built with fossil fuels to be pre-wired for electric conversion. Basically encourages all electric homes. Does not include any additional code requirements except for residential construction over 4000 square feet.

Discusses the fact that all electric homes cost less than fossil fuel homes. Cheaper to operate as well. Discusses study that supports this. All electric homes will improve health as well.

This will not ban fossil fuel use. Several builders in Bedford have built all electric homes.

This will comply with our goals in Bedford with respect to fossil fuel use.

Chair Thomas asks for any Member questions or comments.

Member Seibert confirms that buildings that are already permitted would not be covered by this should it be approved.

Mr. Dorer agrees but has not discussed with Code Enforcement.

Member Seibert asks about any financial incentives here for homeowners.

Mr. Dorer is unaware of any.

Member Lee asks if there are any actual reports which confirm cost efficiency.

Mr. Dorer states yes.

Member Lee asks whether this will increase the cutting of mature trees in town.

Mr. Dorer agrees that might occur.

Member Prince asks about what communities have actually implemented this.

Mr. Dorer states that there are three, immediate to Boston.

Member Prince asks about adverse comments by builders.

Mr. Dorer is unaware of any.

Member Prince confirms that this is only for new construction

Mr. Dorer agrees.

Member Bailey asks about safety issues.

Mr. Dorer responds.

Chair Thomas asks about additions to houses. Should add such information.

Chair Thomas asks if there would be an advantage to waiting to see what experience is of other communities that put this in place.

Chair Thomas asks for a motion.

Motion to recommend approval by Member O'Brien

Second by Member Bailey

Roll call of Members

Vote: 8-0-0

Motion carries

4. FY 25 Guideline Letter

Chair Thomas states that the Guideline letter is in the DropBox. Expect to send this out early next week.

Chair Thomas asks for a motion.

Motion to recommend approval of Guideline Letter by Member Seibert

Second by Member O'Brien

Roll call of Members

Vote: 8-0-0

Motion carries

5. Future Meetings

Chair Thomas states that he suggests that Members further discuss meeting types and decide.

Also notes that he spent 1.5 hours with Town Manager today and .5 hours with Superintendent of Schools yesterday. Town Manager wants to come meet all Members.

II. RECURRING BUSINESS

1. Meetings Attended

Member Dunn discusses Capital Expenditures initial meeting. Discussed potential schedule.

Chair Thomas discusses Select Board meeting.

2. Motion to Adjourn

Chair Thomas asks for a motion.

Motion to recommend approval by Member O'Brien

Second by Member Seibert

Roll call of Members

Vote: 8-0-0

Motion carries

Time: 9:00 PM

John B. Connarton
Recording Secretary

DOCUMENT LIST

Agenda for September 28, 2023 Meeting

Finance Committee 2023-2024 Meeting Schedule

Finance Committee Members List 2023

Draft Special Town Meeting Warrant

Finance Committee – FY 24 Budget/Guideline Allocation 9/28/2023

