

THE MINUTES OF THE WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING May 8, 2002

Chairman Widmer called the meeting to order at 7:39 PM.

Members absent :P. Brusch

Also present: School Committee Member Scott Stratford in place of K. Miller, Selectman Paul Solomon, Assistant to the Town Administrator Joyce Munro, and Town Meeting Member Rosemary Burke (Precinct 2)

Discussion of FY2003 Budget

Vice Chairman Widmer gave the floor to Selectman Brownsberger to update the changes made from the Monday (5/6/02) meeting of the Board of Selectmen. There were some differences from the Warrant Committee's recommendations in the Town Clerk area, as well as a few other small other ones. However, most restorations are similar to what the Committee said last week. The Board of Selectmen put back \$75K in sidewalks and \$53K back into the Capital Budget. The Library accounts of "Maintenance of Buildings" and "Books" have also been restored. Ms. Munro reviewed how the Budget spreadsheet (Handout 4) is laid out:

- Selectmen's Option A - severely reduced budget without override
- Selectmen's Option B - incorporates the restorations in Handout 2
- Restored Option B - tells every single account that sees a bump up in Option B over Option A

Member McCormick questioned the Assessors budget (Handout 4 page 11). Under the Restored Option B, it does not have an amount. Ms. Munro stated the restorations are already in both Option A and Option B.

Member Flewelling asked if the Selectmen Option B column assumed the \$2.4 million override, and it was answered "Yes." Mr. Stratford also noted both options also included the McLean Tax Capacity.

General Government Member Morley brought up the Treasurer's salary (Handout 4 page 12) noting it was not restored or increased in either Option. She discussed similar Town Treasurer's salaries were in the low to mid \$60's range. The DMG range's mid-point for this position is actually \$70,777. The practice for management employees in the Town is they have a range from minimum to maximum with a mid-point. From minimum to mid-point, management receives step raises plus cost of living (7% total). From mid to max, salary increases are merit based. As far as a starting point for Treasurer Freiner, Members Morley and McCormick think \$67K would be a better starting salary. The minimum for this position is \$58.9K (the salary budgeted for FY03), with the maximum around \$82K.

The Committee thoroughly discussed salary increases for the Town Treasurer and Town Clerk. The discussion involved the practices of prior position holders and reasoning regarding Committee Member's recommendations.

Member Curtis noted elected officials do not run because of the salary. Member Hofmann asked Ms. Munro what the Personnel Committee recommends on this topic. He has a hard time giving the same amount of money to the Town Treasurer and to the Town Clerk, because that creates a fairness issue since the Town Clerk has been a Town employee much longer than Ms. Freiner.

Member McCormick clarified a discussion from last week regarding the Town Clerk's 4% salary increase request. She really should be thinking of 7% (3% cost of living plus a 4% step increase) since she is not yet at the mid-point of her salary range for a Step 18.

Member Morley agreed the Personnel Committee should come in to give recommendations in this issue.

Member Heigham stated since this discussion is over a few thousand dollars, why not make the Treasurer's salary \$65K. Also, giving an elected official such as the Town Clerk a 7% increase would give some people the wrong impression during this tight fiscal budgeting time.

Member Hilgenberg noted the Town Treasurer receives an additional \$6K in stipends from Parking (\$3K) and Retirement (\$3K).

Member Heigham moved a motion, Member Oates seconded said motion and it was agreed by majority to recommend increasing the Town Treasurer's salary to \$65K.

In Favor: Selectman Brownsberger, Member Hofmann, Member Flewelling, Member Clark, Member Curtis, Member Heigham, Member Hobbs, Member Morley, Member White, Member Widmer, Member Oates, and Member Schafer

Opposed: Member McCormick

Abstained: Mr. Stratford and Member Hilgenberg

Member McCormick believes Ms. Freiner ought to be given the credit for the time she has spent on Town Committees. Also, since bringing a 7% raise to Town Meeting would be a difficult thing to do, then why not make the Treasurer's salary \$67K now instead of going to Town Meeting with an additional salary increase. He would urge the Committee to reconsider the salary for \$67K. Member Hobbs stated she is willing to give her credit for time with the Town, but since she is not so experienced in Town finances, she would still recommend the \$65K.

Member McCormick and the Committee discussed the management level of salary increases and elected official raises. Member Oates expressed her aggravation in giving 7% raises when other budget items are being severely cut. Ms. Munro informed the Committee that in 2000, the Town conducted a compensation study in which the positions of Town Clerk and Town Treasurer were voluntarily involved, not mandated, to be in this study.

Member Hilgenberg remembered prior to this compensation study, the Town Clerk and Town Treasurer received salaries more than a grade 18. She believes there needs to be an off-line discussion about this and whether those positions should even still be elected.

Member McCormick made a motion, Member Hofmann seconded said motion and the Committee was opposed by majority to bring Town Clerk's salary to the mid-point of \$70,777.

In Favor: Member Flewelling, Member Hofmann, and Member McCormick

Opposed: Selectman Brownsberger, Member Clark, Member Curtis, Member Heigham, Member Hobbs, Member Morley, Member Hilgenberg, Member White, Member Widmer, Member Oates, and Member Schafer

Abstained: Mr. Stratford

Selectman Brownsberger does not support the increase to mid-point in this tight fiscal year. Member Oates agrees with Selectman Brownsberger. Member Schafer agrees a 6% raise is unacceptable

Member Hilgenberg made a motion, Member Oates seconded said motion, and it was voted by majority to keep the Town Clerk's salary at \$68,941 with the caveat the Warrant Committee will keep ongoing discussions regarding elected officials.

In Favor: Selectman Brownsberger, Member Clark, Member Curtis, Member Flewelling, Member Heigham, Member Hobbs, Member Morley, Member Hilgenberg, Member White, Member Widmer, Member Oates, and Member Schafer

Opposed: Member Hofmann and Member McCormick

Abstained: Mr. Stratford

Public Safety

Vice Chairman Widmer clarified the number of positions in the Police Patrol Services budget were 52, but this involves a cut to the overtime account. This cut in overtime is going to be very hard for them to manage since the Police have already spent the same amount of money in this current fiscal year by February. The proposed Patrol Staff numbers include: 50 under Option A, and 52 under Option B. There is a collective bargaining issue regarding the number of patrol personnel on the graveyard shift. If that could be changed, then savings could be better reached. Vice Chairman Widmer recommended the Warrant Committee be consistent with the Board of Selectmen. If there are any openings (i.e., through attrition), the he suggested the Committee recommends they do not fill those positions until a review has taken place.

Member White questioned if cutting the overtime is a realistic option. Selectman Brownsberger agreed it was since some of the programs can be done during the normal shifts. Also, Vice Chairman Widmer noted it is good to test the system on this issue. Member Hilgenberg agreed they have to face some cuts just as other Departments are required.

Member Schafer questioned (Handout 4 page 21) the number of crossing guards involved in the cut/restoration. Mr. Stratford said this is a full restoration of crossing guards. Member Hobbs reminded the Committee an additional \$6K needs to be found to fund the additional Town Treasurer's salary increase.

Member Hilgenberg noted in Fire Suppression (Handout 4 page 26), the overtime account may not be realistic.

Mr. Stratford informed the Committee on the Education section (Handout 4 page 29). The School Committee's budget hearing is May 21st. They did vote School Choice by 5-1. They can elect to not cut any staff due to School Choice. Vice Chairman Widmer informed the Committee the State House has voted to restore Chapter 70 money to level funding. There is, at least, now some possibility of getting an additional \$350K, however it will not be determined until July.

Member Hofmann informed the Committee he called each of the Water Commissioners to set up a meeting regarding increase the water rates. Vice Chairman Widmer will ask Chairman Bruschi how voting on the budget without having the increased water rates set was done last time.

Other

Member McCormick informed the Committee the Assessing Administrator is working 40 hours per week for the Town. He has learned that he works not necessarily five 8-hour days, sometimes it is more on one day, less on another. Part of the Assessing Administrator's deal when he came to Belmont was to continue his involvement with the International Association of Assessing Officers. He is the National Chairman for Education, as well as a Senior National Instructor. This work necessitates him to be away two weeks a year plus a couple of other days for this National Association.

Vice Chairman Widmer reminded the Committee the Subcommittee Reports need to be submitted to the Clerk by this Friday, with the final deadline is May 17th. Since the Report will be issued before the override vote, it needs to be written highlighting the differences if an override occurs. If there are substantive issues, please raise them with Vice Chairman Widmer and he will discuss them with Chairman Bruschi.

Member Hofmann made a motion, and it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristina E. Frizzell

Interim Recording Clerk