

Recommendations of the Finance Committee For Consideration by the Annual Town Meeting April 14, 2009

The role of the Finance Committee is to review the financial matters of the Town and give you our recommendations as to what is in the Town's best interest. We have met from the beginning of January until Town Meeting to review the Town's budget and the warrant articles we will be voting on tonight. The results of our deliberations are listed below. Before we present our recommendations, we'd like to summarize our view of the Town's financial situation.

The budget for this coming year, FY2010, as initially proposed, is down by \$57,006, or .44%, from the budget for FY2009. However, a closer look at the budget reveals that the lion's share of the decrease is due to proportionally fewer West Tisbury students being enrolled in our schools. This relative decrease of West Tisbury students has meant a reduction in our assessments for both the Up-Island Regional School and the High School; this decrease totals \$278,283. You should know that, since the operating budgets of both schools have increased, had the number of West Tisbury students remained the same proportionately, the Town's budget would have increased by at least \$221,277 (1.69%).

We are reminded daily that we are living in difficult economic times. Many have seen their retirement nest egg decrease by a third or more. Some have lost their jobs. Some have had to move off-Island. No one can predict when prosperity will return, but we must continue to manage our affairs with a view of the long term benefit of the Town. The Finance Committee strongly supports those articles which continue to invest in the future by appropriating money today so that we can most economically meet our obligations in the future.

Recommendations

The Finance Committee is charged with making recommendations as to passage of warrant articles that come before the Town citizens assembled in a Regular or Special Town Meeting.

Here are our recommendations for the Annual Town Meeting to be held on April 14, 2009.

Article 1 – Town Election

The Finance Committee took **no action**.

Article 2– Town Reports

The Finance Committee took **no action**.

Article 3 – Cost of Living Raise for Town Employees

The Finance Committee voted 4 – 1 to **not recommend** this article for passage. We will be amending this article to ask for a 2% raise.

The Committee appreciates fully the work that Town employees perform on our behalf. However, at this time of severe economic stress when people are losing jobs, it is not appropriate for Town employees to receive a cost of living increase on the order of 3.6%. The Finance Committee Recommendations 1 Annual Town Meeting April 14, 2009

cost of living has not increased by that amount over the past year and it appears unlikely that it will do so in the coming year.

The salary structure of the Town provides for step increases for the first seven years of employment. These step increases represent an approximately 5% annual raise for each employee. Should this article be approved as written, each employee will receive a raise of over 8%. We do not believe that this is the right thing to do in these very tough economic times. Two towns on the Vineyard have proposed a cost-of-living-raise of 0%. The Personnel Board has said that the average for the other five towns on the Island is 1.7%. We believe 2% is fair to the Town and its employees.

Article 4 – Town Budget

The Finance Committee voted 4 – 1 to **not recommend** this article for passage. The budget should be amended to reflect the 2% cost-of-living raise proposed in Article 3.

Article 5 – Fix Lambert’s Cove Road Bridge

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. This bridge needs work so that it will continue to be of service. We note that this article is part of the Town’s Capital Improvement Plan, which will enable us to better plan for the future.

Article 6 – Compensating Balances

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. This is a housekeeping article that enables the Town to conduct banking business.

Article 7 – Conservation Restriction

The Finance Committee voted 2 - 1 to **recommend** this article for passage. This article enables the use of the Town’s affordable housing lots in Stoney Hills Farms that were approved at the 2008 Annual Town Meeting.

Article 8 – Upgrade Town’s GIS Maps

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) allow the visualization and analysis of geographic (spatial) data. Such systems can be used by many Town departments (e.g., Assessors, Tax Collection, Zoning, Planning). This upgrade will improve the use of the system for Town departments, as well as enable the Town to take advantage of an advanced GIS which the county will make available to the towns.

Article 9 – Transfer to Reserve Fund

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. This is a simple bookkeeping article which replenishes the Town’s Reserve Fund.

Article 10 – Transfer Dog License Fees to Library

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. This is a ‘housekeeping’ article to comply with state law.

Article 11 – Provide for Written Ballot at Town Meeting

The Finance Committee voted 4 - 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. This will give all voters the opportunity to register their opinion in complete confidence that their vote on crucial matters will be confidential.

There are some issues that can divide friends and families. For example, the issue of who to vote for in a particular election is such an issue; in this case we have a written ballot. In a small town, such as West Tisbury, some people are so concerned about being seen to be on the

opposite side of an issue, that they do not come to some Town Meetings or do not vote their conscience in this public venue. Adoption of this article will lead to issues being decided more on their merits than on who is advancing an issue.

Article 12 – Support for Dukes County Regional Housing Authority

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage provided an error is corrected in calculating the formula. We understand that this article will be amended to appropriate \$33,353. This appropriation pays for a portion of the operating costs of the Housing Authority.

Article 13 – Repair Headstones in Cemeteries

The Finance Committee voted 4 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. Over the past few years headstones in the cemeteries have begun to lean over. They should be straightened.

Article 14 – Pay a Past-Due Bill

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. The Town should pay its valid bills. This is a valid bill.

Article 15 – Repair Town Roads

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. These funds come from the state and will enable necessary maintenance of our roads.

Article 16 – Bylaw Amendment

The Finance Committee took **no action**.

Article 17 – Petition for Special legislation for School Department

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. This is the first step in what will be a fairly lengthy process to find alternative quarters for the office of the Superintendent of Schools. Should this article be approved by all six towns on the Island, the Town will have the opportunity to vote on subsequent actions with regard to new quarters.

Article 18 - Transfer funds within the Fire Department budget

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. These transfers will allow the Fire Department to perform necessary maintenance and also acquire needed equipment.

Article 19 – Amend Zoning Bylaw (Multi-Family Housing)

The Finance Committee took **no action**.

Article 20 – Amend Zoning Bylaw (Roads District)

The Finance Committee took **no action**.

Article 21 – Amend Zoning Bylaw (Swimming Pools)

The Finance Committee took **no action**.

Article 22 – Amend Zoning Bylaw (Wind Energy Conversion Systems)

The Finance Committee took **no action**.

Article 23 – Mowing Cemeteries

The Finance Committee voted 4 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. Additional funds are needed to mow the cemeteries for the remainder of the current fiscal year, i.e., to June 30, 2009.

Article 24 – Appointed Town Clerk

The Finance Committee voted 2 – 1 to **recommend** this article for passage. This article makes it possible for the Town to hire a Town Clerk who is not a resident of West Tisbury.

Article 25 - Appropriate CPA Reserves

The Finance Committee voted 4 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. These funds will be available for suitable projects to be approved by the Town in the future.

Article 26 – Transfer funds to Community Preservation Undesignated Reserve

The Finance Committee voted 4 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. This is a housekeeping article to return unused funds to the Community Preservation Undesignated Reserve.

Article 27 - Appropriate \$100,000 from CPA Funds to Support Town Hall Debt Service

The Finance Committee voted 4 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. The decision to support the financing of the Town Hall restoration was made at last year's Annual Town Meeting. It was decided to appropriate from CPA funds the sum of \$100,000 a year for five years. This is the first year of this commitment.

Article 28 – Appropriate \$30,000 from CPA Funds for Studies re Restoration of First Congregational Church

The Finance Committee voted 4 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. This is an historic building that is in need of maintenance. The building is used by a number of groups in Town. This appropriation will be combined with funds from the church to create an engineering and architectural plan for such maintenance.

Article 29 – Appropriate \$55,000 from CPA Funds to Construct a Brick Sidewalk in Front of Town Hall

The Finance Committee voted 4 – 0 to **not recommend** this article for passage. The committee felt that the proposed work was not in keeping with the traditional character of the Town and that more in-depth planning was required.

Article 30 – Appropriate \$10,000 from CPA funds to Organize Cemetery Records

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0, with one abstention, to **recommend** this article for passage. Over the past few years volunteers have worked at organizing the cemetery records, which are in a state of disarray. A more focused effort is needed to complete the task. These funds will finance this more focused effort.

Article 31 – Appropriate \$66,000 from CPA Funds for Rental Conversion Program

The Finance Committee voted 4 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. These funds will be used to fund part of the successful Rental Conversion Program and will enable West Tisbury residents to obtain affordable rental housing.

Article 32 – Appropriate \$170,000 from CPA Funds to Reduce the Price of 2 Units at 250 State Road

The Finance Committee voted 4 – 0 to **not recommend** this article for passage. The Town appropriated \$400,000 for this project at the 2008 Annual Meeting. Since then, the developers of the project have decided that the price of two of the properties should be reduced by a total of \$170,000. The Finance Committee believes that the Town should not bear the complete cost of this reduction in the selling price.

Article 33 – Appropriate \$50,000 from CPA Funds to Support Energy-Efficient Construction of Affordable Housing

The Finance Committee voted 4 – 0 to **not recommend** this article for passage. It is the understanding of the committee that the affordable houses which have been built recently and that are being built today are very energy-efficient without the need for such a grant.

Article 34 – Appropriate \$5,000 for an Aquatic Study of Mill Pond

The Finance Committee voted 4 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. The Mill Pond is a vital water resource. These funds will be used to ensure that it continues to be of value to the Town.

Article 35 – Reauthorize Revolving Accounts

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. These revolving accounts enable a more economical, orderly and current management of funds.

Article 36 – Triennial Revaluation

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. The Town is mandated by the Commonwealth to conduct a reevaluation of all personal and real property every three years. These funds enable the Town to comply with this mandate. The appropriation is somewhat higher this year due to the need to evaluate personal property.

Article 37 – Cut Down Dead Trees

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 1 to **recommend** this article for passage. The trees are a safety hazard.

Article 38 – Establish Fire Equipment Stabilization Fund

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. A fire truck is very expensive. This fund will enable the Town to start saving for a purchase of a new truck some years in the future.

Article 39 - Fund Part of the Integrated Pest Management Control Program

The Finance Committee voted 5 - 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. The County is unable to fully fund this program any longer, yet the need for the program continues and West Tisbury benefits from this program.

Article 40 – Fund Part of the Vineyard Health Care Access Program – Level Budget Projection

The Finance Committee voted 5 - 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. The County is unable to fully fund this program any longer, yet the need for the program continues and West Tisbury benefits from this program.

Article 41 – Fund Part of the Vineyard Health Care Access Program – Current Level of Service

The Finance Committee voted 5 - 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. The County is unable to fully fund this program any longer, yet the need for the program continues and West Tisbury benefits from this program.

Article 42 – Training New Town Clerk

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. The current Town Clerk is retiring. A new Clerk will likely require some training.

Article 43 – Other Post Employment Benefits Stabilization Fund

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. The Town established this fund at the 2008 Annual Town Meeting as a means of meeting its substantial future obligations for health insurance and other benefits for retirees.

Article 44 – Reduce the Tax Levy

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. This will reduce our taxes for FY2010.

Article 45 – Establish OPEB Trust Fund

The Finance Committee voted 3 – 0 to **recommend** this article for passage. Establishment of this pooled trust fund will reduce administrative costs.

Respectfully submitted,

West Tisbury Finance Committee

Al DeVito, Chair

Ann Nelson, Vice Chair

Brian Athearn

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