

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

May 27, 2008

Present: Al DeVito - chair, Sharon Estrella, Brian Athearn and Ann Nelson.

Guests: Bruce Stone, Town Accountant; Skipper Manter, Dianne Powers and Richard Knabel, Selectmen; Jen Rand, Executive Secretary.

The meeting was called to order at 4:14 p.m.

FinCom met alone prior to meeting with the BoS to vote on the new FinCom member. The FinCom voted 4-0 to appoint Greg Orcutt to fill out the term vacated by Richard Knabel.

Minutes of the March 25 and May 15 meetings were approved 4-0.

Meeting with the BoS and the FinCom was called to order at 4:30.

Jen informed the FinCom she will be needing a transfer to pay her May and June bills. She has had unexpected costs pertaining to the Annual Town Meeting, architectural and legal work. After some discussion about the procedure for requests for access to counsel, it was determined that Jen will make the request in July.

Al presented Greg Orcutt to the BoS to fill out the vacant seat on the FinCom until the next election. Brian moved to accept Al's recommendation with a second by Ann. The motion was approved 7-0. (3 BoS, 4 FinCom.)

The primary focus of the meeting was to have the FinCom brainstorm with the BoS on attaining an understanding of the budget of the UIRSD.

Al presented a sheet from Dan Cabot with possible breakdowns of the UIRSD budget. There was a question as to whether or not Amy Tierney would be able to do this breakdown with her program.

Richard reviewed the history of talks between the FinCom and the school committee, noting the fundamental problem being that the superintendent's office controls the school committee, not vice versa.

Discussion ensued around the superintendent's portion of the school budget. The superintendent's budget cannot be extricated from the school budget. It is the first budget to be approved (by the All-Island School Committee) and once approved, becomes an assessment on the other budgets island-wide. Planning the town budget cannot begin until the superintendent's assessment is given.

Skip said the only way to have an impact on the superintendent's budget was to attend the All-Island School Committee meetings in September and October. That committee is the body that can vote to adjust the superintendent's budget. (The All-Island School Committee consists of the School Committees of each town: WT - 5; VH, OB and Edg., 3 each.)

Jen added that the All-Island School Committee has to hear from the towns that the budget is not OK. She suggested the All-Island FinCom send representatives to the July meeting of the All-Island School Committee in order to have an effect.

Al shifted to the lack of clarity of the UIRSD budget and asked for ideas to make it more understandable.

Brian recommended asking for regional costs rather than separate for WT and Chilmark. It might be easier to get a breakdown of the whole. Jen added that it is difficult to assign costs per school. If info for the region can be accessed, then a more detailed breakdown might be attainable later. Dianne suggested using AI's categories, but by region, not by town. Later, ask for a split by town where possible. There was agreement that the concern was in gaining information to understand the budget, not necessarily to cut it. There is no interest in micro-managing the school committee.

Skip feels that the driving force behind the budget is one of philosophy, not simple economics. Philosophy decisions include things like an aide in everything classroom, number of students per classroom, etc. Decisions made based on overall philosophy can't be garnered by looking at the budget.

Bruce stated that the categories AI is recommending are similar to the MVRHS where the instructional cost is 80% of the budget. He thinks it is probably lower in the UIRSD.

Dianne recommends reaching out to the new members of the school committee to get their assistance.

The meeting ended with Skipper suggesting another meeting with the school committee.

The next meeting is Tuesday, June 10, 4:30pm.

There being no other business, a motion for adjournment was made and seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 6:07pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Nancy Rogers, Administrative Clerk