

Minutes
West Tisbury Finance Committee Meeting
March 15, 2011
Public Safety Building

Present: Sharon Estrella – chair, Greg Orcutt, Jonathan Revere, and Joe Gervais.

Guests: Skipper Manter and Cynthia Mitchell, BoS; Jen Rand, Town Administrator; Dr. James Weiss, MV Superintendent of Schools; Donna Lowell-Bettencourt, Acting Principal, WT School; Sean Mulvey, interim Asst. Principal, WT School; Susan Stevens, Principal, Chilmark School; Roxanne Ackerman, UIRSD committee member; Peggy Stone and Cheryl Lowe, Parks & Rec. Dept.; Gary Montrowl, citizen.

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m.

UIRSD

Dr. Weiss opened by suggesting Donna give an overview of the UIRSD educational model.

Donna proceeded to explain that the two schools in the UIRSD are schools of full inclusion. This means all students, regardless of any disability, are fully integrated into the classroom setting and are helped to reach their full potential. Dr. Weiss added that all Vineyard schools are fully integrated. An inclusion rate of 82.1% in the UIRSD far exceeds the state average of 56.8%. In comparison to the other island schools, two are similar while the others are lower. Full inclusion requires there be an aide in each classroom where there is a SPED student. In addition to full inclusion, the UIRSD also has smaller class sizes.

Dr. Weiss addressed financial differences by explaining that WT and Chilmark are committed to taking students out of the school for field trips, on island and off, and incorporate individual hands-on programs. He said the other island schools are not able to do this. Financial differences in comparison to off-island schools reflect the instance of higher degree levels and more years of experience and longevity of island teachers. Island teachers tend to be older and more stable in their living status than off-island teachers, in part because of the closed parameters of living on an island. Statewide fewer than 50% of teachers are at the top step, whereas 56-57% of island teachers, and higher for WT teachers, are at the top step. Teachers here stay here.

Another financial consideration is the fact that the down-island towns have agreements with their respective town for plowing, rubbish pick-up, etc. Lacking that arrangement, the UIRSD has to contract out for these and other services.

Greg asked what savings there were by being in the district. Dr. Weiss said the state reimbursement for bus transportation was the main financial benefit. It has ranged anywhere from as high as 75% to as low as 32% and is at the whim of the state. Greg followed by asking if there was any room to move the budget down. He would like to see the cost per student more in line with the other island towns. Dr. Weiss explained the process of arriving at a total budget figure. Since it is a given that salaries and insurance will go up, they must look at maintenance and service for any cuts. Doing this, they came to as close as 0% as they could get. The need for a new classroom for K-1 in Chilmark increased the budget by 2.9%. To get it back to 0%, services would have to be re-

duced. Dr. Weiss noted that the budget was up by \$169k. If 2/3 of the voters at the ATM voted for a reduction to \$100k, the UIRSD would have to abide.

Sharon raised the possibility of combining all “regional” students so that the maximum would fit into the least number of individual classes. Donna responded that the residents of each town have the right to choose the school in the town they live in first. Susan added that the new K-1 classroom in Chilmark would have only Chilmark residents, not WT. Donna and Susan work together to determine school choice. UIRSD students are given top priority, then other island students if there is room. Once a child has been accepted as a student for school choice, that student can finish out their elementary education in that school.

Skipper commented that the actual expenditures are up \$280k. He added that initially, the Chilmark School was a two-room school and that WT was overburdened. Now, the situation is one of growth in Chilmark and decline in WT. He feels some reductions could be made.

With more than \$1.5 million in capital improvements in the immediate future, Greg would like to see some belt-tightening without affecting the quality of education.

Donna provided performance data for 2010 including numerous accolades for accomplishments of the WT students and MCAS scores. She noted that the UIRSD has kept an active arts program while other schools have not. At the MVRHS, district students are more likely to be in the top classes and perform better than students from the other towns. These students do well at MVRHS and beyond, and they come back to serve their community. Greg commented that 40 years ago WT students were doing well without the district. He feels the reason might be that WT is more supportive of education. Donna went on to explain that WT is superior in its MCAS scoring. Overall, the WT school is 13th out of 318 schools in the state and the 8th grade is the best statewide. WT is pretty significantly higher in all categories.

Sharon said the WT students have always done well, and have done well at the MVRHS. The issue remains that for 11 years the FinCom has been asking for clear data and it has never been supplied. Greg added that in his three years on the FinCom there have always been unresolved budget questions. Jonathan felt it too late in the year to make any recommendations for changes, but Joe disagreed. He would like to make a recommendation to voters to reduce the assessment by 1%. Cynthia pointed out that the assessment is based on the school population and as such, is random. Greg suggested it might make more sense to reduce the expenses line. Susan noted that last year \$22k needed to be cut to make room for an increase in insurance, and another \$20k later in the year, resulting in the reduction of one teaching position.

Sharon feels frustrated that the school committee doesn't seem to consider or understand what the FinCom is trying to do. She thinks the problem lies with the school committee. Greg added that the school committee has stewardship for both the educational and financial aspects of the district - they have done well with the educational, but not with the financial.

Greg made a motion, seconded by Jonathan, to not approve the UIRSD budget. The motion passed 4-0.

Sharon went on to say that she hoped they were being heard and that people would consider their concerns.

Dr. Weiss then asked what number would go into the town warrant. Jen explained that the warrant must include a number from the FinCom. After some discussion concerning the appropriate amount, Cynthia suggested the FinCom recommend level funding.

Joe made a motion, seconded by Greg, to recommend level funding for the UIRSD budget. The motion passed 3-1.

Beaches budget #632

After the meeting of the Parks & Rec. dept., they decided to reduce the lifeguard staff by one.

Jonathan made a motion, seconded by Joe, to approve the Beaches budget. The motion passed 4-0.

Parks & Recreation budget #620

Peggy's request for additional hours still stands. Bruce and Kathy ran the hours Peggy has been putting in and they are 8-10 hours a week. Peggy added that she regularly puts in more than the 8-10 hours she has been clocking.

Joe made a motion, seconded by Jonathan, to approve the Parks & Recreation budget. The motion passed 3-1.

Greg left the meeting at 6:50.

Selectmen's budget #122

Jen is requesting an increase to \$45k in legal services so that she doesn't have to request reserve fund transfers to cover legal bills.

Jonathan made a motion, seconded by Joe, to approve the increase to the Selectmen's budget. The motion passed 3-0.

Reserve Funds Transfer Request

Jen made a request for a \$10k transfer from reserve funds for legal bills. She explained that the bills right now exceed what she has left in her account. She indicated that she might need to make another request before the end of FY11.

Jonathan made a motion, seconded by Joe, to approve the reserve funds transfer of \$10k. The motion passed 3-0.

Article 3: Raise and appropriate such sums of money as may be necessary to defray Town Charges and Expenses for FY12.

Jonathan made a motion, seconded by Joe, to recommend Art. 3. The motion passed 3-0.

Article 36: Appropriate the sum of \$10k from Community Preservation Historical Resources reserve, supplemented as needed from the Undesignated reserve, to preserve the town's historic property records by converting them into microfiche format as required by state regulations.

Jonathan made a motion, seconded by Joe, to recommend Art. 36. The motion passed 3-0.

Article 34: Vote to authorize the Board of Selectmen to acquire by purchase for open space purposes the approximately 1.3 acres of land known as "The Field Gallery" and to grant such easements and restrictions as may be required by G.L.c.44B and further to see if the Town will vote to appropriate a total of \$685K for the purchase thereof.

Cynthia requested the FinCom vote to take no action, noting this had been done in the past if awaiting a final figure, or if all members were not present. Jen added that there could be a vote of no action, and then explain at the ATM that discussion followed the close of the warrant.

Sharon felt this last minute rush indicated the BoS had not done the necessary work to finish this article.

Jonathan made a motion to recommend Art. 34. There was no second.

Cynthia explained that the BoS had approached the Maleys at the end of the calendar year and have been working earnestly on it since then. She went on to outline the following details:

- There may be an amendment to reduce the price to \$625k.
- The purchase would include the field and the gallery.
- This purchase qualifies for CPA money.
- The CPC gave approval for \$275k from reserve funds and \$40K from 2012 funds.
- Remainder to be borrowed against 4 years of future CPC funds
- and against future revenue from the gallery.
- 5-year lease will be extended to Chris Morse from the Maleys.
- Town will inherit the lease.
- No new funds will be needed.
- If CPA revoked, tax surcharge will be levied to cover cost.

Joe asked if there would be any new buildings or parking. Cynthia said no new buildings, she wasn't sure about parking. Skipper said it has to have a Conservation Restriction, so there would be no new parking.

Sharon asked if all the money would come from the CPC to which Cynthia answered that \$510k would come from CPC funds and \$175k would come from the lease of the gallery. She added that the \$685k would be reduced by whatever interest and fees were incurred.

Skipper said he had been in favor of the purchase until he found out about the loans. He would rather have a one-year spike to raise and appropriate then to pay bond and interest fees.

Jonathan pointed out that the CPC money for open preservation has been building because there have been no other projects. If not used for this, it will just continue building. Sharon doesn't feel the town should be dealing in real estate and taking land off the tax rolls. It is not the town's purview and would not have been considered if not for CPC funds. Cynthia responded that since it will be partially used commercially, taxes would be paid, and agreed that it is a purchase that would not have been considered if it would do other than take from existing funds.

Jonathan made a motion, seconded by Joe, to recommend Art. 34. The motion passed 2-1.

Other Business:

Sharon presented a bill in the amount of \$625 from Lynn Christoffers for the taping of meetings for MVTV.

Jonathan made a motion, seconded by Joe, to approve payment of the bill. The motion passed 3-0.

Minutes

Minutes of the February 22 meeting were approved with corrections. Minutes of the February 23 meeting were approved with clarification. Minutes of the March 1 meeting were approved. Minutes of the March 8 meeting were approved with an addition to Joe's question regarding the Library addition.

Future meetings

March 22 at 4:30 at the Public Safety Building. Discussion of possible handout at ATM.

There being no other business, a motion for adjournment was made and seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 6:24pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Nancy Rogers, Administrative Clerk