

Aquinnah Joint Finance Committee and Select Board Meeting

March 12th, 2021 - Minutes

This meeting was held via videoconference

Members Present: Allen Rugg, Tom Murphy, Mark Foster & Howard Goldstein (alternate member)

Also present: Accountant Emily Day, Town Administrator Jeff Madison, Select Board Gary Haley, Select Board Julianne Vanderhoop, Admin Assistant Sophia Welch, Select Board Chair Jim Newman, DPW Director Jay Smalley, Richard Skidmore, Superintendent Matthew D'Andrea, Asst Supt. Richie Smith, Interim School Business Admin Mark Friedman, West Tisbury School Principal Donna Lowell-Bettencourt, Chilmark Head of School Susan Stevens, Regional High School Principal Sara Dingley, Suzanne Cioffi (High School Finance Dept.)

- Allen called the meeting to order at 9:37am

- Tom motioned to accept the 3/11/21 meeting minutes. Motion was seconded by Mark. The Committee voted 3-0, the motion passed.

- **Cultural & Recreational Facilities: Lighthouse Budget:** Lighthouse Keeper wage line item increase includes 3% COLA; Richard Skidmore explained that the proposed expenses are provisional because there has not been confirmation if the Lighthouse will open this year; expenses include brochure costs (\$1,500 replacement costs for a years' worth but expects expenditure to come under budget), signage (internal signage for public, directional and safety signage), sanitation expenses (cost will need to be discussed depending on opening), interior painting, routine maintenance to the pathway and routine park turf irrigation system maintenance; there was brief discussion concerning the funding for Lighthouse restoration.

- **Education:** Mark Friedman presented the assessment for the Up Island Regional School District (UIRSD): overall increase of 3.67% due in part to Covid related issues and the effects of Covid (e.g., Chilmark School nurse part time status to full time position); Aquinnah's assessment is increasing 2.54%; there are 12 Aquinnah students in the Chilmark School and 26 in the West Tisbury School.

- **West Tisbury School Assessment:** Principal Donna Lowell-Bettencourt outlined the budget: only increase to the budget, aside from contractual obligations, student and building insurance and Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) increases, is the increase in the technology expense (budget is being raised to fit actual needs; technology expense is being split over 5 years (FY'22 being the 1st year).

- **Chilmark School Assessment:** Head of School Susan Stevens explained the two main increases to the budget: the transition of a part-time nurse to full-time (\$33,000) and the hire of a one-on-one assistant for a special needs (ESP) student entering the school (\$29,517.28).

- **West Tisbury School Warrant Articles:** Principal Donna Lowell-Bettencourt reviewed the proposed warrant articles: replacement of the gym roof (this was not included in prior roof replacement project because it was under warranty), elevator/lift from the gym floor to stage is now obsolete and needs to be replaced, outdoor walk-in freezer/refrigerator replacement (used for the regional lunch program); proposed requests include project cost, design fees, owners project manager (OPM) and a contingency line.

- **Chilmark School Warrant Articles:** Head of School Susan Stevens Chilmark outlined the proposed warrant articles: final phase of window replacement (final 32 windows out of 96) and exterior door replacement (this is a safety issue now as the doors do not properly lock); there was brief discussion on why the doors are just now being addressed and whether the schools have a capital plan to address maintenance issues that continuously come before the town; Mark Friedman noted that the schools have just completed one cycle of addressing issues and will begin the next 10 year phase of capital planning;

with the proposed warrant articles, both schools will be in relatively good shape given that both facilities have the most students in comparison to other island schools.

- There was discussion concerning the capital allocation formula and the UIRSD contract/agreement. Aquinnah's share of the Chilmark School window project is higher than West Tisbury's due to the number of students attending the school (per the regional contract 80% is covered by Chilmark and remaining 20% is split between West Tisbury and Aquinnah based on number of students attending Chilmark). Regional contract does not have a minimum on capital assessments.

- **Regional High School:** Principal Sara Dingley outlined the budget and warrant articles: operating budget increased by 2.25% (inclusive of fixed costs, contractual obligations increases and programmatic initiatives); the two warrant articles that are regional/district specific are for the shingling of the superintendent's office and electric buses (used island wide but falls under high school budget); the two high school specific warrant articles are a significant technology upgrade (accelerated because of the current year – cost is less than what the school planned on) and a committed increase to OPEB against the liability; there are 15 Aquinnah students in the High School (4 student increase which represents a 36% increase in the number of students); FY'22 assessment for Aquinnah has increased by 30%; there was discussion regarding the increase to OPEB; OPEB warrant needs to pass in all towns for it to be funded; the programmatic initiatives were discussed (ELS mental health counseling, school-based health center, partnering with ACE MV in education in career pathways and expansion of career and technology education offerings).

- **Building and grounds:** Utilities increase by 10% relative to the increase for general town expenses (rate and usage increasing).

- **Department of the Public Works:** 21.23 % increase to the Foreman wages (increasing hours from 35 to 40hrs, COLA and step increase); Jay explained that the Foreman hours usually increase in the summer and Jay has been utilizing him differently throughout the year (e.g., carpentry work on town buildings); Foreman hours were raised two years ago from 32hrs to 35hrs; there was discussion regarding the \$2,000 cemetery budget which does not cover actual expenses (mowing and light maintenance has been contracted out) and the increase of Foreman hours which should balance this budget; continuing education budget covers first aid certification, OSHA certification and Mass Flagman certification (budget was not expensed in FY'21 due to COVID).

- **DPW Warrant Articles:** \$9,000 for a new lawnmower and \$2,200 for a trailer for the two lawnmowers; Jay informed the Committee that in the past two years he has spent approx. \$6,000 on lawnmower repairs (lawnmower is 9-10 years old) and noted that the trailer will be a more economical and safer way for lawnmower transportation; Jeff noted that it may be imperative to look into purchasing a small tractor instead of a second lawnmower; Jeff will discuss this with Jay.

- Committee reviewed the Lighthouse fencing expense: \$18,000 for the installation of 100-120ft of rubber coated chain link fence; Jay noted that the existing stockade fencing needs constant repair and approx. 50ft has been lost due to erosion and the new fence could be moved if needed.

- Emily noted that there is still the unknown on how COVID will affect operations at cliffs this coming season and research on what will happen in regard to the recreational facilities (parking lot and restrooms) and lighthouse expenses needs to be done by herself and Jeff. This should be revisited.

- Jeff informed the Committee that the assessing contract does cover re-evaluation costs. He also noted that part of the data processing budget increase is due to the online chat service for residents to contact the assessor company from anywhere.

- The following were identified as open issues/budgets to revisit: 3% COLA, Treasurer's hours, Police and Fire Chief contracts, Emergency Manager, Library and Board of Health. The following were identified as a running tally of requested additional hours: Accountant and Accountant Assistant, Town Clerk, Treasurer, DPW Forman and Library.

- Next meetings: March 25th to address open issues and meet with remaining departments, March 26th to review warrant articles and April 2nd to finalize the budget.

- Meeting adjourned at 10:55am.

Respectfully submitted, Sophia Welch