

**Joint Finance Committee-Selectboard
Meeting Minutes
April 4, 2023
Town Offices
Open Hybrid Session via Zoom
6:00 pm**

The open hybrid session of the Town of Whately Finance Committee and Selectboard was called to order on April 4, 2023, at 6:00 pm by Paul Antaya. Also present were Committee members Jim Kirkendall, Tom Mahar, Dan Kennedy, Donna Wiley, and Brenda Doherty. Selectboard members Fred Baron and Julie Waggoner were present, as well as Joyce Palmer Fortune via Zoom. Town Administrator Brian Domina and Administrative Assistant Amy Lavallee were present. Police Chief James Sevigne, Fire Chief John Hannum, Fire Department member JP Kennedy, SCEMS director Zoe Smith, Transfer Station representative Fran Fortino via Zoom, and Highway Department representative Keith Bardwell were also present.

1.To review and vote to approve the meeting minutes from February 21, 2023

Motion made by Tom to approve the minutes from February 21, 2023. Dan seconded. All in Favor. Donna-yes, Brenda-yes, Tom-yes, Dan-yes, Jim-yes, Paul-yes.

2.To discuss the fiscal year 2024 operating budgets

Chief James Sevigne discussed with the Board and Committee that the Police Department expenses are mostly level funded. The main change in the budget is a request to add an additional full-time officer that will partially offset by a decrease in the part-time officer line item. Chief Sevigne stated that the police reforms laws are resulting in a sharp decrease in the availability of part time officers, so the switch is necessary.

JP Kennedy and Chief John Hannum discussed with the Board and Committee the Fire Department's mostly level funded budget with a \$638 increase over FY23 at \$75,410.00. There is a recommendation from the Personnel Committee to increase the Chief salary that is not yet reflected in the budget.

Zoe Smith discussed with the Board and Committee that the South County EMS budget for Whately's share is \$4,000 more than FY23 at \$115,228 due to an increase in the number of calls for service and rising costs of supplies. Zoe explained the capital request for a new ambulance and discussed the burden of the mutual aid system on South County EMS.

Fran Fortino shared with the Board and Committee that the Transfer Station budget request for FY24 is \$63,731 which is a \$5,577 increase from FY23. The increase is mostly attributable to increases in tipping fees and fuel costs for the hauling company.

3. To schedule the next joint budget meeting for a date TBD the week of April 10th in order to discuss the recommendations of the Personnel Committee and CIPC

Board and Committee agree to meet on Tuesday April 13, 2023, at 6:00 pm to discuss the Personnel Committee recommendations.

4. Items not anticipated

Brian discussed with the Committee the need for a Finance Committee member to be a part of the Exit 35 redevelopment committee. Brenda agreed to volunteer.

Brenda requested that the Committee discuss a letter from Lynn Sibley. The Committee agreed to acknowledge receipt of the letter and to include the letter in the meeting minutes.

5. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn. Motion seconded. Meeting adjourned at 7:35 pm.

Next Meeting: April 13, 2023 & April 18, 2023

Documents

Meeting Minutes, February 21, 2023

FY24 Police Department budget

FY24 Fire Department budget

FY24 SCEMS budget

FY24 Transfer Station Budget

FY24 Personnel Committee recommendations

Electric F-150 specs

Dear Finance Committee and Selectboard Members:

I was not able to sign into the meeting on March 21, but I was able to view the Joint Finance Committee/Selectboard meeting. I would like to address many of the inaccuracies presented at the meeting.

1. CPI used for COLA. Many years ago, the Finance Committee insisted that the Personnel Committee find a method to determine the COLA that they would recommend to the Finance Committee and the CPI was suggested. Back then the CPI was low, so it worked in the Finance Committee's favor. Now that the CPI is high, it is no longer recommended. You can't have it both ways. The Personnel Committee didn't just use the CPI to determine the rate they recommended. They used Social Security and took into consideration other towns as well. Unfortunately, during the COLA conversation it was not made clear that there are many things that affect the COLA that a town will use. If pay grades and steps are used, the COLA amount that a town offers might be less. Usually, the difference in steps is 2 – 3% so if a town is giving a 3% COLA, the employee is getting 5 – 6% with the step increase. You need to know if these towns have grades and steps not just COLA. These were points I made last year during the COLA discussion but again were not taken into consideration.
2. Salary Adjustments – It was not made clear that most positions receive no salary adjustments. Only a select few that are more than 4% below median are considered for adjustments.
3. Paul Antaya's salary comparisons over the last 3 years is by far the most inaccurate statement made for the night. The increase was not just due to COLA. There were new hires (Community Development/Asst. Town Administrator for example), increased hours for certain positions, and Police Detail pay included in those figures. Police Detail pay is reimbursed by the company that hires the officers so there is no tax implication to the residents. Detail pay can add up to \$100,000 to salary totals per year. Paul made it sound like COLA is what was driving this increase. Brian Domina can certainly provide how much the COLA added to the budget in those years. I believe that those figures were supplied to the Finance Committee as part of last year's budget discussions.
4. Assessments to Departments: This concept may work in the private sector but can't possibly work in a municipality. Due to state mandated items, we must do parts of the job without any options. For example, the Town Clerk by law is required to do Annual Census, Dog Licensing, Vitals, and most of all, the many new requirements related to Elections along with other mandated items. If the Town Clerk is given only a certain amount of money, how is she supposed to meet the requirements under the law? Take it from her pay? During election time the Town Clerk works 7 days a week with no extra pay as it is, so this option is not realistic.
5. Hysteria – I found the word hysteria, hysterical. We were not hysterical that the Community Development/Asst. Town Admin received such a great job offer. We in no way were comparing the salary given to someone working for Somerville to Whately. We were a little jealous that she was being paid so much to work from home, but no hysteria was involved.
6. Some employees being worth more than others – This was probably the most insulting comment I have ever heard from a Finance Committee member. So... is the Police Chief worth

more than the Treasurer/Collector? There was no “misinterpreting” nor were we “misconstruing” what was said. If you don’t have a Treasurer/Collector, the Town would fail. No money would be coming in and no tax bills going out. No bills would be paid so the town would come to a stop. I would have to argue that the Treasurer/Collector is the most vital job in the town. If we are going to base a person’s payrate on their value, I would suggest the Treasurer/Collector should make \$40 an hour rather than the \$29 she presently makes. Who do you choose as the most valuable employee?

7. Sexism – It appears that only a position held by a male has any value. Over the years, I have noticed and have commented in the past on the sexist attitude of some members of the Finance Committee. The positions that women hold in this town such as the Town Clerk, Treasurer/Collector and Administrative Assistant are critical to the health and management of the town. These positions and the women that hold them are as valuable as the Police Chief, Fire Chief or Highway Superintendent. However, the women that hold these positions are not treated with the same respect as their male colleagues. This was clearly evidenced during this meeting by the dismissal of Amy Schrader’s comments regarding COLA and Amy Lavallee’s attempt to explain the COLA chart from other towns. The difference in pay between the male department heads and the female department heads is staggering for equally responsible positions. For example, if you made the Treasurer/Collector’s position 40 hours and compared it to the Highway Superintendent, the Treasurer/Collector who manages and invests the Town’s \$5.5+ million dollars makes about 25% less than the Highway Superintendent.

Now that I am retired and not at risk of losing my job, I will share with you some of the insulting things that have been said to me by the Finance Committee in the past.

- “My pay is only supplemental to my husband’s pay so I should be happy with what I get.” “You are not the main bread winner of your family” (Confirms the sexism statements above.)
- “If I am not happy with my pay, I can leave.” (I would have but I had so many years of service in retirement by that time, it was not an option.)
- “If you leave, there are people just waiting to take your job.” (It is my understanding that only 5 people applied for the Treasurer/Collector job and only 2 had municipal experience. One of those people took a job in another town. I don’t think people are clamoring for these jobs. Why work for a low salary when you can make so much more in the private sector. The divide between the pay in the private and public sector is only increasing.)

Because we don’t usually hear from other Finance Committee members at these meetings, I would be interested in hearing how other members really feel. I would also hope that the Finance Committee fact checks the statements made by your Chair. You are making decisions that affect the livelihoods of the employees of this town and I would hope that you are using factual details rather than the speculation and the inaccurate and misleading statements made by one person.

Sincerely,

Lynn Sibley
Former Town Clerk, Treasurer-Collector, Town Administrator