

**Town of Holliston
Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
May 5, 2020**

The meeting was held under the guidelines that were issued because of the emergency caused by the COVID-19 virus. All participation for this meeting was through remote attendance because of the COVID-19 virus. In addition, all votes taken during this meeting were done as a roll call vote.

Mr. Szajda called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. In attendance was Chairperson Ken Szajda, Vice – Chair Benjamin Sparrell, Clerk Vincent Murphy, Daniel Alfred, Tim Maxwell, Sue Nersessian, and Michelle Zeamer.

Mr. Szajda introduced Mr. James Keast, the Town Facilities Director.

Facilities Manager Line Item transfer for Software

Mr. Keast, stated that he would be requesting a line item transfer to move a surplus in the Department's salary budget line to cover software he would like to use for managing the town's capital assets. He will also discuss 260 Woodland Street.

Mr. Keast started his presentation by requesting a line item transfer to purchase software for the facilities department. There is a surplus in the facilities salary line item due to the timing of hiring Mr. Keast. The current surplus in the facilities budget is \$31,855. The software being requested is a centralized database for all facility management activities. The tool will drive proactive activities rather than reactive activities. It would assist in accurate capital forecasting for capital improvements. Mr. Keast and Chris Meo (Town Technology Director) reviewed five (5) different software packages and Dude Solutions was the preferred package. The total initial outlay for the software would be \$30,462 in FY20. This would include labor for asset tagging and training for users. There was some concern that this decision would cut into FY21 free cash. A request will be made by the Chair to the Town Accountant to provide an estimate for FY21 of the free cash balance. It was also discussed that the contract should be all inclusive. Mr. Keast does have a quote from the vendor based on square footage and a copy of the quote will be provided to the Finance Committee. Dude Solutions is a common software tool used across 80% of Massachusetts municipalities. The schools are not included in the current estimate but could be added for approximately \$10k. Long-term there will be preventative maintenance savings. The Dudes software does not currently interface with MUNIS. The town does not have a purchase order system and vendors can still send invoices to the town. The annual cost in the future for the Dude software will be \$11,190. After the initial tagging, the town would be responsible for tagging. The quote was received on March 25th and Mr. Keast will make sure that the vendor will hold to this estimate based on the current pandemic.

260 Woodland Street

Mr. Keast discussed bids received to complete the hazardous waste removal for this site. The bid that the town is going with is for \$40k. The vendor is well qualified. The Select Board voted to use reserve funds to cover this expense rather than waiting until Town Meeting. The DEP has requested this cleanup

be done quickly and prefers the town not wait for Town Meeting approval of funds. The town is paying \$1,000 per month for dumpster storage. The demolition aspect of the project is complete. The Finance Committee will approve bills as they come in and cannot approve a lump sum upfront. The Finance Committee will need the formal line item request as well as an update from the Town Accountant on the reserve fund balance.

Pandemic Update

Chief Cassidy provided an update on the pandemic. There are no new expenses this week associated with the pandemic. Mr. Keast is exploring guards to be used for the town election as well as partitions to be used at Town Hall counters, approximate cost is \$19.7k. Mr. Keast still needs to review the requirements for the library. He is currently not addressing the schools. The Board of Health will provide PPE to town employees. State funds cannot be used to cover the protection at the counters. There may be a significant expense with making buildings safe against the virus. The state will be rolling out additional guidance on protecting town buildings. Occupancy in a safe COVID environment is 30%.

FY21 Budget Discussion

The state is not going to start budget discussions for a few weeks. There was also a sense that there may be another stimulus package in a few weeks at the federal level. In the best scenario, the state would hear from the federal government in a few weeks and then the state guidance would be provided in June. If the Finance Committee needed to present at town meeting on June 15th, a 10%-15% reduction in local aid would be used for their recommendation. The Finance Committee would prefer that Town Meeting be delayed until they have further clarification from the state. If Town Meeting is delayed into FY21 then an interim budget needs to be established. The monthly budget for each interim budget will be 1/12th of FY20 funding per month per department.

Warrant Discussion

The revised warrant was sent out by the Town Administrator. There were minimal changes from the prior warrant. The Finance Committee still wants to have a prioritized list of Capital from the Select Board for FY21. The Finance Committee had concerns about moving the studies to capital. There was also discussion about using part of the \$6M in capital to reduce borrowing for the water treatment facility. Funds to pay back loans are raised by increasing taxes. The Select Board will be reviewing the warrant again. There have not been any votes by the Select Board on the warrant yet.

OPEB Liability

Andrew Powell of the American Federation of Teachers asked the Finance Committee's position to fund the OPEB liability for FY21. The town's liability has increased and the Finance Committee plans to continue to fund. There are benefits already earned. There has not been a vote on this yet. OPEB is not high on the list of reductions for FY21.

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes Approval

Mr. Maxwell made a motion to approve the Finance Committee meeting minutes from March 3, 2020. Mr. Sparrell seconded and the motion was approved 6 to 0, Mr. Murphy abstained.

Ms. Zeamer made a motion to approve the Finance Committee meeting minutes from March 12, 2020. Mr. Sparrell seconded and the motion was approved 5 to 0, Mr. Maxwell and Ms. Nersessian abstained.

Mr. Sparrell made a motion to approve the Finance Committee meeting minutes from March 17, 2020. Mr. Nersessian seconded and the motion was approved 7 to 0.

Line Item transfers and Salary Adjustments

It was mentioned that the line item transfers and salary adjustments should have been on the warrant that Mr. Ritter had provided to the Committee. Mr. Szajda said the salary adjustments would not be on the warrant and were not coming as a line item transfer per town counsel. Mr. Szajda stated that the Town Counsel watched the recoding of the May 2019 Town Meeting and the Town Counsel stated that Mr. Szajda mentioned to the Town Meeting that \$75k was put aside for the Select Board to use for increases to managerial salaries and the increases would be based on the Select Board's review of the Managers. Mr. Szajda said that based on what he said, the Town Counsel said the question of the transfer for the salary adjustments did not need to be brought before the town again.

Mr. Szajda stated he disagreed with Town Counsel's opinion as Ms. Szajda said that when the \$75k was mentioned at Town Meeting, there was no plan as to how the raises would be made and that there should have been more detail so there was not proper notification to the Town. Mr. Szajda said personally he does not like loopholes, though he emphasized that he was not implying any impropriety or illegality by the members of the Select Board. Instead, Mr. Szajda stated that the members of the Select Board should stand behind decisions made and be willing to bring it before Town Meeting so that the town is made aware of those decisions. Mr. Szajda said he presents what the Finance Committee decides and the reasons behind it and then lets the Town decide. He said he would not try to bury anything. He believes all actions taken such as withdrawing the article in November and then asking Town Counsel to determine if line item transfer was required are attempts to keep this from the Town Meeting. It was discussed that there should be transparency in government. Ms. Nersessian noted that she was concerned that when people are not transparent on one thing, it makes her wonder what else are they not being transparent on.

Mr. Sparrell said it will be discussed at Town Meeting and the other issue at hand was that action needed to be taken in FY20 because there are budgets that will run out of money in May. A solution was needed so department heads were not furloughed in May. The solution may have been unorthodox but a solution was needed quickly. The Finance Committee is the financial steward and has a responsibility to make sure there is not a gap in funding. There is a process problem and a financial problem. The Finance Committee needs to make sure there are not gaps. A solution was needed good or bad. Mr.

Alfred stated that just because the Select Board makes a mess, it does not mean that the Finance Committee needs to come in and clean it up.

The Finance Committee then discussed that the solution the Select Board found is a loophole to avoid public discussion of the raises. Mr. Szajda stated that he would like the process that was used by the Select Board to transfer the funds and the total amount of the raises that were given to be discussed at Town Meeting. In this particular instance, the process that the Select Board followed should raise a lot of red flags and it is important for the Town to know how it occurred. It was also mentioned that there should have been a Town Meeting tonight to discuss this but that obviously changed due to the pandemic. It was suggested that members of the Finance Committee should go the Select Board meeting to discuss their concerns. The issue has been brought up in the past at Select Board meetings and an adequate solution was never offered by the Select Board.

Mr. Sparrell made a motion at 9:23pm to adjourn. Ms. Nersessian seconded and the motion was carried 7 to 0.