

Town of Holliston

Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

March 30th, 2021

The meeting was held remotely under the guidelines that were issued because of the emergency caused by the COVID-19 virus. All votes taken during this meeting were done as a roll call vote.

Dr. Szajda called the Finance Committee to order at 7:02PM. In attendance were Chairperson Ken Szajda, Vice Chair Dan Alfred, Sue Nersessian, Vincent Murphy, Michelle Zeamer, Tim Maxwell, and Clerk Mark Whittaker.

Other notable attendees included Town Administrator Travis Ahern, Vice Chair Tina Hein of the Holliston Select Board, Chief Cassidy, stipend committee members Joan Shaughnessy, Dan Whynot, and Erica Plunkett, School budget subcommittee members Anne Louise Hanstad, Lisa Kocian, and superintendent of Holliston Schools Dr. Susan Kustka.

Administrative tasks:

Revisions to the minutes from February 23rd were discussed and approval was deferred until the new changes could be reviewed. A motion to accept the minutes from March 9th, March 16th, and March 23rd, as well as accept but not release the minutes from the executive sessions on March 9th and March 23rd was made by Mark Whittaker, seconded by Dan Alfred. The motion passed 7-0.

The Stipend Committee presented their findings and reiterated that there was no clear data-driven decision on how Holliston should use stipends or whether stipends should be paid at all. Members of the Finance committee stated that it made sense to do it equitably with either all boards getting stipends, or no boards getting stipends, and it did not make sense for just one or two to get stipends and not others. Specific discussion about the disproportionate stipend paid to the members of the Board of Assessors focused on the longstanding belief that there was required annual training, when in fact training is only required once. Using the logic presented in the stipend committee report, that would favor a one-time stipend to cover the training but would not justify annual stipends unless that was part of a town-wide stipend program to remunerate all board and committee members equitably.

Budget Reviews:

Anne Louise Hanstad was scheduled to present the school budget request. However, due to ongoing negotiations with the teacher's union, no budget has been voted by the school committee at this time. She suggested that the Finance Committee use the Superintendent's proposed budget as a placeholder in the budget spreadsheet for now. Further budget discussion was deferred to mid-April after the next scheduled mediation session with the teacher's union.

Town administrator updates:

Travis Ahern gave updates on several items. Notable updates included:

1. An overview of warrant articles for the May town meeting, including 3 citizens petitions.
2. A list of capital requests for May and October town meetings and a 5 Year Capital Improvement plan he has been working on for the capital subcommittee.
3. Presentation of an organizational model for some of the town hall offices. This was requested by the Finance Committee as part of the discussion of the additional hours request from the Town Clerk's office. Travis asked if the committee agreed that the position could be posted with the requested additional hours. No official vote was taken but the finance committee voiced no objections to the posting.

Travis presented the Sustainability Coordinator budget request of \$50,000. The only item in the budget is the cost of the contract for the Sustainability Coordinator; it is level funded from last year. Travis gave a review of sustainability efforts and grants obtained over the past year. He also discussed initiatives for the coming fiscal year.

Liaison Updates:

No liaison updates were made this week.

Covid Financial Report:

Chief Cassidy stated 11 new expenses were posted to Munis in the last week totaling approximately \$4,000. Two new requests were approved at the March 29 Select Board meeting for air filtration systems for the senior center and for a cleaning/sanitizing sprayer for use by the Parks and Recreation Department.

FY22 budget:

Dr. Szajda stated he would send out an updated budget planning spreadsheet. He noted that the current spreadsheet did not include any COLA adjustments, but that he had asked Travis to prepare numbers that included a 2% COLA for discussion purposes to give a more realistic picture of what the current budget deficit looks like. He pointed out that the committee will begin discussing options for balancing the budget next week, including discussion of what the COLA adjustment should be.

Vincent Murphy asked if the Select Board had a list of priorities for the upcoming budget discussions. Travis stated that there was no list of priorities made at this time.

Travis also stated that no additional direction has been given on the ARPA funds at this time.

Dan Alfred made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Sue Nersessian. The motion passed 7-0 and the meeting was adjourned at 9:31 PM.