

The Wilbraham Finance Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
Town Hall  
March 29, 2016  
7:00 p.m.

Present: Nancy Piccin, Walt Damon, John Guzzo, Anna Levine, Carolyn Brennan, Mike Mannix, Todd Luzi, Kevin Murray, Board of Selectman Sue Bunnell and Robert Russell

Absent: Dan Miles

Also present: Town Accountant Nancy Johnson, Town Administrator Nick Breault, Town Collector/Treasurer Tom Sullivan, CPA Chairman Peter Manolakis, Superintendent Marty O'Shea, and Business Manager Beth Regulbuto

### **Open Forum**

No topics discussed

### **Community Preservation**

Chairman Peter Manolakis discussed the projects the CPA Committee approved for FY-2017

1. Administration fees: \$2,500, Fees for CPA association in Boston, also costs for ads in the newspaper for notification of public hearings.
2. Mt Marcy – Glendale Rd: \$150,000, Open Space Land Acquisition of Parcel 611V Glendale Rd. 47.311 acres to be purchased to remain in its natural state, for use and enjoyment as a recreational area. Mt. Marcy contains the highest point in Wilbraham. A second source of funding will be applied for via a State Land grant for \$200,000. The acquisition of this property includes parcels of land that otherwise could be used as buildable lots, therefore this purchase would take the lots off the tax revenue base.
3. Records Preservation: \$9,282, Ongoing project (\$164,000 since 2005), for historical preservation to preserve records that are 50 years or older. Beverly Litchfield is responsible for the preservation and Peter said she feels she will be done either this year or next.
4. Country Club of Wilbraham: \$23,374 includes 5 projects on the Country Club. The historical commission voted the majority down (before it was presented to the CPA committee) except for \$4,800 for attic repairs due to bat infestation. That part of the building is the only part of the Country Club that is historical, thus the only part that meets the rules for CPA historic funding. The CPA committee approved \$4,800 for repairs to the attic.
5. Forest Management, Management Plan –Three Rivers Rd and Maynard Rd: \$10,000, Study to determine clean-up of this area. This would include removal of downed trees and invasive plants.
6. Wilbraham Children's Museum- Handicap Access, \$146,470. Rehab the building and the building's bathroom for handicap access. Have to use an architect that specializes in historical buildings. The building will need a new door that can accommodate wheel chairs. The bathroom will need to be moved to another location in the building.
7. Wilbraham Soccer Club-Public Bathrooms- \$82,750. The WSC presented a \$165,500 request to build a pavilion and public bathrooms. The DOR agreed that CPA funds can be used to build bathrooms because the bathrooms will be used by the general public. The \$82,750 approved by the CPA committee will only be used to construct the bathrooms.

Peter explained that any committed funds that are ultimately unused by an approved project, are returned to the respective CPA funds balances which are then available for use on other projects in future fiscal years.

### **Capital Planning Reallocation of funds.**

Via a memo to the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee, the Capital Planning Committee is requesting to re-allocate \$10,000 of unspent funds from the FY2016 bond authorization to complete the exterior trim project at the Little Red School House. The Spec Pond Pavilion project came in under budget which allowed for a surplus in that account.

MOTION: The Finance Committee moves to reallocate \$10,000 of unspent funds from prior year bond authorization to complete the exterior trim project at the Little Red School House. Seconded, voted unanimously.

MOTION: The Board of Selectmen moves to reallocate \$10,000 of unspent funds from prior year bond authorization to complete the exterior trim project at the Little Red School House. Seconded, voted unanimously.

### **Police Department – Letter from Union**

A letter from the Police Union in support of an additional patrolman was presented to the Finance Committee. Nancy Piccin detailed some of the points in the letter:

- Many times police officers are required to stay an extra shift so there are times they have to work a 16 hour shift.
- Details the number of shifts when officers cannot use their earned time off because of the low level staffing.
- A total of 102 denied requests for time off due to minimum staffing level requirements.
- There are officers with 20+ years of service unable to take time off.
- There was a Matrix study back in 2008, it suggests we have 28.5 patrol officers based on the size of our town. Currently we have 26 total police staff. Due to lack of budget, extra police officers were not hired.
- Calls have increased from 17,000+ to 23,000+.

Mike Mannix suggests that the hiring of a new patrolman should not necessarily be ‘replacement leave driven’ but be ‘work-load’ driven. He feels you do need officers for leave replacement, however if officers are missing because they are on a short leave of absence and expected to return, hiring to replace them is redundant, and just add to the fact that it is not ‘work load’ driven. He suggested that increasing the work force would just add to the problem rather than reduce it. Nancy feels the hiring of the police officer would help alleviate the overtime spending. Anna feels you can’t separate work load vs. leave driven, that they are too related. Sue Bunnell said the reason why extra officers were not hired after we received the matrix study in 2008, was budget driven, and the police department has always done a good job of getting through with the personnel they have. The study compared Wilbraham with sister communities of similar demographics, population, geography, socioeconomics, etc., not just geographically adjacent communities. We have looked so many times at injuries/extended sick leave as blips/bumps as short term problems, but the fact is the Chief has been struggling with this problem for four years where he has had at least 2 people out. And as soon as you pull two people out of a rotation it wreaks havoc on the scheduling. Bob Russell commented that currently the police department has five officers out. At least two of the five should be resolved within the next six months.

### **School Budget**

Beth Regulbuto shared with the committee how they go about the budgeting process. They cannot start at a zero based budgeting as they do have staffing obligations. They look at their obligations, what level servicing would be, and what services and programs they plan on offering in a year. The biggest part of their budget is 80% salaries. They work with their administrative team who take a look at their staffing, enrollment, programs, and expenses and they bring their recommendations about things they may want to do differently in their buildings, or future programming they would like to add down the road. This process starts in November and continues to

and through the governor's budget which comes out sometime in January. So these two factors (administrative and governor's budget) is where they start when building their bottom line budget number and what they need in the district, and with that said they are really conscience of what the towns can afford and support. They do have discussions with finance committees, select board, town people and asked them what challenges they have. Ultimately they do the budget based on the needs of the children and the district.

The salaries/insurance increased \$815,000 from FY2016 to FY2017, which is contractually driven. They do work hard on changing the structure of all 5 bargaining units to keep the costs down as much as they can, while still retaining the kind of quality teachers they want in the district. They provided the committee with documentation showing FY17 budget assumptions. Anna asked how did it go with the assumptions they made in FY16, did the end up with more money, or needing money? They did receive more regional transportation reimbursement than first determined, and hiring came in better than they expected. Any unanticipated money flows into their Excess and Deficiency (E&D) fund to be used in future years. The estimate for last year that was given to the E&D fund was about \$500,000, most of that was unrealized expenses, and \$191,000 extra from transportation reimbursement. The E&D balance number was certified at \$1,300,000. As part of the proposal that passed, the school committee has committed \$650,000 from the E&D fund to the budget to help suppress assessments. The FY17 budget has a \$537,990 deficit which does include the E&D commitment. The school budget is \$45,000,000; the E&D fund is ≈3% of total budget. The State suggests the E&D should be around 5% of your budget.

Transportation is not reimbursable for special education or for routes within a mile and a half of a school. The percentage of reimbursement should be 100%, but in the last few years it has been in the 60% range. Transportation is contracted out to the Lower Pioneer Valley Education Collaborative for over 10 years. There is School Committee participation on the LPVEC board. They combine resources of 6 or 7 districts to get the best pricing on busing. The school district asked LPVEC to run some routes to estimate the time/cost of Hampden students being bused to WMS. Their projection came back that we would not have to add a bus and we could still maintain the level we were at, and would not add to the amount of time a child has to spend on a bus. Middle school and high school students would not ride together.

The school district is in discussions with their administrative team regarding the \$537,990 deficit and will bring to the school committee on April 12<sup>th</sup> recommendations for how they will work with the budget that has been passed. Staffing is the largest part of the budget and one of the first things they look to when considering cuts. They try to keep cuts as far away from the children as possible. They will be ready to provide the finance committee members with detailed information after the April 12<sup>th</sup> meeting with the school committee.

Currently (FY16) heating & building is under expenses by \$271,000, this will go to E&D for possible use in FY18. Declining enrollment affects budgets every year, reducing staffing costs, and one recent year closing Memorial School. It was determined that the town's reserves are better than the school's reserves. The State is not paying the region money that they should be paying, and the local schools and local towns are the ones that have to make up the difference. The percentage of the school budget that comes from state and federal sources has shrunk. This has been the experience of HWRSD and the experience of cities and towns across the state. This decrease is compounded by the decrease enrollment as the State pays on a per pupil basis. Nancy asked if transportation to school could be made pay for service. This cannot be done as we are a regional school district, and would forfeit any reimbursement from the State if we charged for busing. The fee we could reasonably collect from charging for service is so small that it is not worth the effort. We would have to charge an exorbitant fee to cover expenses. Even if we charged \$200 per student, the total collected would be about \$300,000; our cost of transportation is approximately \$3,200,000.

The school committee voted at their last meeting to delay the submission of a warrant article on the unification

of the middle schools. The feeling was that they may only have one shot on this and they needed more time to build consensus. Marty believes it is more important to achieve unification than to force the vote. Walt would like the opportunity to vote on unification before he votes on giving the school district the \$260,000. If Wilbraham does not give the \$260,000 it really turns into an additional \$338,000 deficit to the budget, because they would not get Hampden's portion as well. This would bring the total deficit for FY17 to \$875,000. Bob Russell wants everyone to understand the responsibility we have to educate the children. He is more than willing to vote in favor to have an article on town meeting regarding unification. He wants to be sensitive to how it looks to Hampden if we do vote on the unification in Wilbraham. It is an easier sell to the Town of Wilbraham than it is to the Town of Hampden.

**Vote Minutes**

MOTION: Accept the minutes for the March 14, 2016 Finance Committee meeting. Seconded, 6 in favor, Nancy Piccin and Kevin Murray abstain

MOTION: Accept the minutes for the March 21, 2016 Finance Committee meeting. Seconded, 7 in favor, Nancy Piccin abstains

Next Finance Committee meeting is April 5, 2016

Motion was made to adjourn at 8:50 p.m. Seconded, voted unanimously.

Debbie Brennan  
Staff Accountant