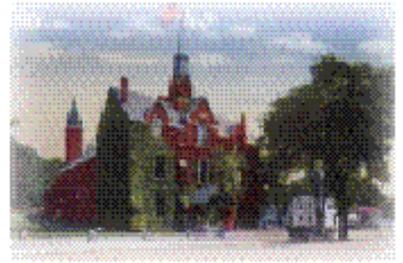


Town of Ayer

Finance Committee

Ayer Massachusetts, 01432



Location: Ayer Town Hall, Meeting Room
Finance Committee Minutes

Wednesday February 22, 2012

Present: Brian Muldoon; Chairman, Scott Houde; Vice Chairman, John Kilcommins; Clerk, Michael Pattenden; member
In Attendance: Mary Spinner, Pauline Conley, Robert Pontbriand, John Canney, Dennis Callahan, Tom Horgan, Paul
Bresnahan

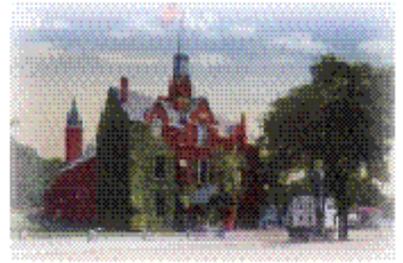
Called to order at 7:01 pm by Brian Muldoon

- Town Assessors
 - BM-We are looking into stipends. We know that the Assessors have said no to COLA's before. The BOS have been asked to cut their stipends to come closer to local towns.
 - TH-We were surprised to hear that you wanted to cut us in half.
 - BM-I apologize. That was an early working draft that should not have gone out. Do you believe your stipend is fair and equitable?
 - DC-We would like to come up with something in the spirit of cooperation.
 - BM-Nothing has been cut, we want your opinion.
 - DC-I would like to talk to our Chair next Wednesday to form a united response.
 - DC-Is the BOS cut a done deal?
 - PB-That's a Town Meeting decision.
 - DC-In regards to surveying our neighbors (stipends) Ayer is a lot different. We have a lot of industry, more intense work, and more appeals than other towns. Another issue is that in 15 years we have had one turnover on this board, the stipend is a big part of it. We have high training and competency needs.
 - BM-This is why we want your input.
 - DC-A cut could lead to turnover. The department could break down. We would like to see stipends stay high enough to keep the board.
- FinCom Town Report
 - BM Led a review of the Town Report of FinCom.
 - JK-One point on OPEB, we should include the current funding level.
 - SH-Include point on FY12 being the first funding in the amount of \$10K.
 - MP-We should grab the bull by the horns.
 - SH-Communication first. Announce we'd like to do more in FY13. Getting info out is the first step.
 - MP-Is Spring Town Meeting too early to do more?
 - SH-Budget first. Would like to begin a piece for the paper on the financial state of the town.
- Meals and Hotel Tax
 - BM-I would like to move forward with this. It's a simple process.
 - JK-Spring or fall?
 - PC-If it's spring you can start collecting earlier.
 - RP-Might need to present this on the floor of Town Meeting.
 - PC-I suggest that you sponsor this warrant
 - BM-I will see what I can gather.

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- Vicksburg Square
 - BM-What do you want to do between now and Town Meeting?
 - SH-My initial take is that we should attend the public hearing on the first. We should do a presentation at Town Meeting. I think a rebuttal statement is best used.
 - SH-The message of Trinity hasn't changed. They are just backing away from the numbers and going with the emotional factor. We need to stay on the numbers.
 - BM- My plan is to revisit what I've done before in comparison to other towns.

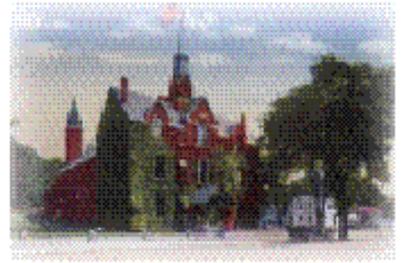
- Ayer Tax Collector
 - BM-My question is how do we do this as a committee? What can we do together to improve things?
 - JC-We could send a letter out to those who are behind in taxes.
 - SH-I think that this would help out your office. I'd be happy to help with the business processes. There is information in your office that needs to be broadcast to other departments. I will offer my services.
 - JC-A question on December 14th was how to increase revenue collection. This is a shared responsibility. Has the BOS appeared before you? Have you pushed them?
 - BM-Yes, we had a joint session.
 - SH-One issue with information is that the BOS has to go to your office before issuing licenses. This information should be pushed out to people who need it. It should be at their finger tips. You are the owner of this information.
 - JC-We've never denied information.
 - SH-It's the push vs. pull model. Eliminate the pull. You need to broadcast the information out of your office.
 - JC-If the past is prologue, when have they been denied their permits?
 - JC-We can produce the information, the issue is then what is done with the information.
 - SH-It's in the bylaws.
 - MP-If you deliver information timely then enforcement is not your problem.
 - PC-One flaw, the Tax Collector only collects taxes, other departments collect fees. May have progress if we move to one central town collector.
 - SH-I'm sure there are a lot of nuances within town hall processes. This is a starting point. We need your cooperation.
 - JC-I want to cooperate, I am not resistant. I have stated this at BOS and FinCom meetings before.
 - MP-Tax titles were last run last year. Seems some held in tax title for over a year. For these we should take the next step. I would like to see tax title pushed.
 - JC-There are steps you have to follow. My goal is to do it within a year subsequent to failure to pay the taxes. We have processes and checks to protect the interests of the town and the tax payers. Good work takes time.
 - BM-You mentioned that letters would be doable, what is the time frame?
 - JC-Everything is reasonable.
 - JK-Excise taxes just came out. Can you use MUNIS to marry excise taxes to real estate taxes?
 - JC-Excise tax data is from the registry, real estate data comes from a different vendor.
 - JK-Does the Deputy Collector see the overdue excise taxes?
 - JC-Yes.
 - JK-Seems like we could remind taxpayers of overdue excise taxes when we send out the current excise bills.
 - JK-Have you researched using an outside vendor for collections? It could help out your office.
 - JC-MUNIS is good enough. It is a matter of time to collect and review data. Good idea but that would cost money.

- Budget Review with Town Administrator
 - RP Led a review of the budget.
 - RP-The meals and hotel tax will be an issue for Town Meeting. I can help with the warrant article.
 - RP-The zero based budget process just ran out of time.
 - RP-The water and sewer rate change has been approved. We have room for improvement in collecting these fees.

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- RP-The leadership group has been positive. There are ongoing challenges but school assessment discussions continue. The RSC will set their assessment mid-March. 0-2% is what we can afford, beyond this will be a significant impact on the town operating budget and the amount we can put into stabilization. I think we'll be on the same page by mid-March.
- MS-Has the RSC done anything on health insurance?
- RP-To my knowledge no, hopefully they'll look into it.
- RP-It is still imperative that we as a town review rates and fees. They need to be in line with the cost to provide services.
- RP-The TIF committee will be meeting again to review all of the TIFs and to see what is still open.
- RP-We have decided to stay with Minuteman for health insurance for another year. We are establishing an HRA to offset any catastrophic claims. We'll realize significant savings this year due to the changes.
- RP-Online payments have been approved and are moving forward. We are looking to be online by July.
- RP-Business certificate updates are long overdue. As a town we need an accurate inventory of businesses. The nominal fee for these certificates is revenue.
- RP-Lisa Gabree and I believe that it is still imperative to fund stabilization and OPEB. We have been approached about investments; the funds are in a money market now. We would like the FinCom's involvement with this.
- RP-Nashoba Valley Technical High School made a great presentation. There are a lot of benefits to joining but the challenge is the \$550K buy in. It can be a onetime payment or a phase in. I think it will be on the BOS warrant this spring.
- PC-We will recoup the costs in just a few years.
- RP-On collections the numbers speak for themselves. If the current system works with is \$1.2M outstanding? In one week we collected approximately \$320K from posting. Tax title, water-sewer liens and bankruptcy are all public records. We had one complaint about the posting to the BOS. There have been no lawsuits. This is done across Massachusetts. I take issue with what the collector has done, I am proud of our administration.
- RP-If the school assessment exceeds 2% it will require more discussion between the RSC, BOS and FinCom. An assessment over 2% has a negative impact on stabilization, OPEB and the operating budget. This could mean cuts to public safety budgets.
- SH-2% leaves \$100K between OPEB and stabilization with \$12K left over. This is with a 2% raise for town employees.
- RP-I spoke with Shirley and they are hard pressed with an assessment between 0-2%. 2% is Shirley's critical limit.
- BM-The biggest issue is the regional schools, we have to hammer this down.

- Motion to adjourn at 9:28 pm

Motion	SH
Second	JK
B. Muldoon	Aye
S. Houde	Aye
J. Kilcommins	Aye
M. Pattenden	Aye
Vote	4 - 0

Brian Muldoon, Chairman _____ Date _____

Scott Houde, Vice Chairman _____ Date _____

John Kilcommins, Clerk _____ Date _____

Michael Pattenden, Member _____ Date _____

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