



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
Town of Lanesborough
Finance Committee

MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 3, 2019 MEETING

Members Present: Chair Jodi Szczepaniak-Locke, Stephen Wentworth, Ronald Tinkham, and Kevin Towle

Members Absent: Member JJ Filiault

Others Present: None

Chair Szczepaniak-Locke called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

The Committee considered the minutes of the July 15, 2019. The Chair called for a motion to approve the minutes.

MOTION: Motion by Alternate Member Tinkham to approve the minutes of July 15, 2019 as presented; second by Member Wentworth.

VOTE: 4-0

RESULT: The minutes of July 15, 2019 were approved.

Chair Szczepaniak-Locke indicated that the minutes of February and March were not yet posted online and stated that the Town Clerk did not have them. Member Tinkham stated that he had submitted them to the Clerk and would resend. Upon further discussion, it was determined that the March meeting had been cancelled, thus only the February minutes needed to be submitted.

The Committee heard a presentation from Member Wentworth regarding the quarterly tax payment. Member Wentworth presented the Committee with a handout containing background information. Member Wentworth stated that the Town's fiscal year ends on June 30th, but the calculation of the new tax rate does not occur until November. Thus, the tax bills for July and October are calculated as an estimate based on the prior fiscal year. The new tax rate plus any necessary adjustments are reflected in February and May bills. Member Tinkham recommended adding information about how the tax rate is calculated to the Assessors page on the Town website.

Member Tinkham expressed concerns regarding the Town's budget creation bylaw, specifically relating to how the budget is prepared (Section 3(6)) which states that "The [Finance] Committee shall prepare the fiscal year budget line items for the Town Report/Annual Meeting." He expressed his belief that the Town does not follow the procedure outlined in the bylaw and that, historically, the Town Manager prepared the budget, and recommended updating the bylaw to reflect the process. Member Wentworth indicated that it is not advisable for the Finance Committee to take responsibility for creating the budget and that the Finance Committee should provide a neutral recommendation to Town Meeting based on what is presented by the Town Manager. Member Wentworth continued by stating that the process had evolved over time and that other Town bylaws are less prescriptive about who has budget creation responsibility but practice is that the budget is created by the Executive Branch (Selectmen/Town Manager) and the Finance Committee gives a recommendation. It was recommended that the Town discuss the process moving forward with the Town Manager to address what, if any, changes could be made to ensure a better process. Member Wentworth stated that he had received feedback expressing concern about weakening the Finance Committee's role in the budget process. He further stated that the Committee had tried different procedures and that the current process seems to be working, but he did not want the Committee to be locked into a specific process by a bylaw change. Member Towle concurred that the bylaw should be

less specific and allow more leeway for the Town Manager and Board of Selectmen to develop a process that works well for them and that the purpose of the Finance Committee is advisory. Chair Szczepaniak-Locke stated that the primary role of the Finance Committee is to advise and to take a more objective role in the process. Member Tinkham stated that the Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen should hold a joint meeting prior to Town Meeting to discuss and resolve discrepancies in the budget recommendations. Member Wentworth stated that the budget is largely dictated by fixed costs leaving “not much to argue about” without making major changes to reduce fixed costs. Member Wentworth stated that Town Meeting voters make the final decision on which number to accept.

The Committee reviewed the Town’s Expense and Revenue Report through May provided by the Town Accountant. Member Tinkham stated that since the budget had already been closed out that there was no merit in discussing the report. Member Wentworth stated that the Town Accountant typically waits until the annual audit has been completed in case adjustments are needed.

MOTION: Motion by Member Wentworth to postpone consideration of Expense and Revenue Reports until the End of Year reports; second by Member Tinkham.

VOTE: 4-0

RESULT: The Committee will consider Expense and Revenue Reports once the End of Year reports are provided by the Town Accountant.

The Committee considered reappointment of liaisons to other committees. There was concern that members of the public assume that the various liaisons speak for the entire Committee when they participate in other meetings. Chair Szczepaniak-Locke stated that most Committee members follow along with the minutes of other committees, but did indicate that the schools may still need a representative from the Finance Committee. Member Wentworth stated that the school building project was nearly closed out and that the money had already been spent. Chair Szczepaniak-Locke stated that she would hold off on assignments for this year other than for the school project.

The Committee set its next meeting for October 7, 2019.

Chair Szczepaniak-Locke called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

MOTION: Motion by Member Wentworth to adjourn the meeting; second by Member Tinkham.

VOTE: 4-0

RESULT: Meeting adjourned at 6:43 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kevin M. Towle, Member