

4/3//2024 -- Oakham, MA Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

FinCom meeting called to order at 6:05 pm. Corey Packard and Alan Flagg are in attendance. This is a joint meeting with the BOS, and they are called to order at 6:05pm. There are no public inquiries.

The Superintendent of QRSD Colleen Mucha is present to discuss the needed Oakham Center school repairs and the school budget, Building and Grounds director Kevin Clark accompanies her. The 20 year-old 119 gl hot water heater is leaking and getting worse. School must close if there is no hot water. The material cost estimate is \$12,000, waiting on labor estimate. Corey Packard says he is comfortable with cost as long as 3 quotes are required. Aaron Langlois (BOS) says he agrees with getting three bids from qualified experts. Repairs to an exterior wall and the need to replace asphalt is next discussed. The hot water heater is priority, followed by the wall and then asphalt. FinCom confirms funds remain in reserve fund if needed.

QRSD Budget. FinCom summarizes current revenue forecast and budget status. QRSD 3 yr trend is a 5% increase. QRSD increase alone consumes all the FY25 revenue increase. This is very concerning to FinCom and BOS. QRSD is on budget version 4, they have made cuts and understand it is a challenging budget year for the towns. Superintendent Mucha explains the challenges the school faces including a \$93,000 cut in state funding. FinCom asks about the school's staff head count. They have not included staffing numbers in the budgets. Benefits are up \$620,000, which is 1/3rd total increase. Is this driven by an increase in staff. The Superintendent responds that staffing is based on students' needs and she will get back to us with answers to the questions we asked. BOS and FinCom Thank her for attending and we move on to the budget.

FY2025 town budget. FinCom chair summarizes current known status of revenue vs expenses and suggests we focus only on departments with increases. Do not focus on mandatory, or contract increases, focus on the items we can impact. Categorize items as need to have, want to have, and nice to have. The BOS Chair reminds all this is not the meeting to start cutting this is the time to review requests. The BOS and FinCom review the information on a line-by-line basis and discuss each. Possible adjustments are highlighted during the discussion. Contract employees' increases are firm and updated. A planned wage increase will be added to each employee later in the process. BOS looking at a 3% increase. FinCom chair comments when we talk compensation it is the total dollar amount that matters to the budget, not the rate or the number of hours but the rate X hours. Discussion ensues on COA Coordinator being underpaid for the role. BOS member A. Langlois says when we lose a key employee the town ends up paying more for a new hire than we would have paid for in an increase to keep the prior employee. During Library budget discussion the Library Director provides an update on repairs to the library well. They are down 400' with no increase in pressure. The driller wants to go down another 100' and possibly hydrocrack. Additional cost is ~\$3,400 plus \$4200 for cracking. Police and Fire discussion about the growth in spend over the past few years here and is this the year to continue that or focus funds in other areas. Total compensation is up for the town, but it has been focused on specific areas. All agree we should end for the evening, go back and review/think about tonight's discussions. We will meet again next week. The concept of a presentation on the budget is briefly discussed. Timing is a challenge. The last time this was done 5 individuals attended so it would mainly be a webinar. The 3/20/24 FinCom meeting minutes are approved.

Meeting adjourned at 7:48pm.

