

CHARLESTOWN FINANCE COMMITTEE
MONDAY, October 16, 2023 AT 6:30 P.M.
COMMUNITY ROOM

Finance Committee Members Present: Dave Richardson; Robert Davis; Sarah Davis; Richard Carter; Trina Royce; Keith Weed; Steve Neill; Adam Choquette; Nancy Houghton
- Ex-officio

Staff Present: Patricia Chaffee

Mr. Richardson called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and asked members to introduce themselves and state how many years they have served on the Committee. He said that this would be an organizational meeting and the first order of business is to elect a Chair and Vice Chairperson.

Mr. Neill nominated Mr. Richardson as the Chairperson. Mr. Richardson accepted the nomination. Mr. Weed seconded the nomination. Roll call: Dave Richardson - yes; Robert Davis - yes; Sarah Davis - yes; Richard Carter - yes; Trina Royce - yes; Keith Weed - yes; Steve Neill - yes; Adam Choquette – yes. Mr. Richardson was nominated as the Chairperson for the Finance Committee.

Mr. Richardson nominated Mr. Neill as the Vice Chairperson. Mr. Neill accepted the nomination. Mr. Davis seconded the nomination. Roll call: Dave Richardson - yes; Robert Davis - yes; Sarah Davis - yes; Richard Carter - yes; Trina Royce - yes; Keith Weed - yes; Steve Neill - yes; Adam Choquette – yes. Mr. Neill was nominated as the Vice Chairperson for the Finance Committee.

Ms. Houghton questioned as to whether she should be voting as an ex-officio. Ms. Chaffee thought the Planning Board had the only ex-officio that voted. Ms. Houghton abstained from all voting.

Mr. Richardson asked if there were any statement/comments from the Selectboard as to what we should be thinking about for the coming year. Ms. Chaffee discussed several items:

- Power Committee discussing solar and will have someone talk to the Board at the end of November; the Police Department will be looking for a cruise, Highway will be requesting a truck and the Transfer Station roll off schedule for purchase, which would be a warrant article, possibly a move of the pump house at the pool which would use capital reserves.

There was discussion of a few areas of concern in the budget. Health and Human Services, General buildings Water/Sewer. The Committee will have the Police Department in to review budget as well as other departments. It was noted that any salaries numbers in the budget reflect if there was no wage increase in 2024.

Mr. Richardson explained that different department heads will be asked to come in to discuss their proposed budgets and in the early part of January the committee will meet with the Selectboard to go over the budgets.

Mr. Richardson said someone from the public asked if the public can attend the Finance Committee meetings and yes, the meetings are public.

Mr. Richardson told the Committee that there was a need to find candidates to fill the vacant seat on the Committee. It was recommended that it be listed on the website, and to ask Shelly Blouin-Andrus to push it to the forum (Facebook). Ms. Royce agreed, and mentioned that they can contact Ms. Chaffee with interest by 5:00 on October 27th. The Committee will discuss the candidates at the October 30th meeting and send their recommendation to the Selectboard for the November 1st meeting.

Mr. Carter arrived at 6:46 and Mr. Richardson caught him up.

Mr. Richardson asked if there was anything specific about the budget that stands out to members to discuss. Ms. Royce and Mr. Carter had nothing; Mr. Weed didn't have a chance to look at it; Mr. Neill said some numbers from last year were out of wack on the government buildings, such as water/sewer, fuel, electricity; Mr. Davis talked to Ms. Chaffee about a possible typo in a budget line item that went up \$100,000.; Fire Department budget salary line needs to be fixed - move some items to regular budget from capital.

Ms. Houghton commented that the fuel for the town hall was high as the heat was staying on more than it should have been. There was a thermostat problem and it has been rectified.

Ms. Davis had questions about the Cemetery budget. Once the Committee decides on when and who they want to meet with, it was asked if the Cemetery Trustees could also be asked to attend to discuss their budget at a meeting. Mr. Neill noted that the Health Insurance for Cemetery employees went down quite a bit for the new year. This will be double checked.

Mr. Choquette questioned the General Assistance electricity budget vs. actual. Ms. Chaffee stated we are obligated by law to assist and these numbers vary year-by-year. Mr. Neill mentioned that Kathleen Ferranti talked to the Board a couple of meetings ago, she indicated that electricity wasn't shut off during Covid – now it is being shut off. The electric companies need bills to be current. Old bills stacked up and all need to be paid off to avoid the shut-off. Mr. Richardson said that over the years, different administrators for General Assistance provide different sources for assistance. It was noted that there is an application process and software to determine eligible amounts. Mr. Neill mentioned that even if a transient comes through town and knocks on the Town door, the Town is obligated to help them. The Town can put a lien on property to get money back when the house is sold.

Mr. Choquette questioned the police overtime. Should the budget amount be increased? He was told they are short-staffed, and have been for 3 years, and extra shifts are paid overtime. He also asked how we expense phone costs, especially for the Cemetery. Ms. Chaffee noted that most phone lines in the budget include internet. There have been some changes made to services, and office will have a better look at the new monthly costs to budget.

Mr. Choquette was curious about internal controls of the Selectboard and what goes into the financial reporting. He wants to see how controls are established and followed. Mr. Richardson stated he received an email about some things not listed in the Town Annual Report. Ms. Chaffee explained that there were only a few days for Ms. Emerson to put the report together and it met legal requirements.

Mr. Choquette asked if there were any salaries for any one person listed in different department budgets. Mr. Davis said there were employees with multiple part-time jobs within the town, and their salaries are listed in the separate departments. Mr. Davis said the public can request a list of town employees and their salaries. Mr. Carter suggested we have a copy. It will have available for the next meeting.

Ms. Royce commented that there were a lot of over expended lines and asked if the Selectboard is watching? Ms. Houghton said the Board was.

Mr. Richardson asked about any special road/sidewalk projects. Mr. Weed said there were no sidewalk repairs this year, that they have been working on FEMA repairs.

Mr. Weed said that money for highway paving/construction under contract can be carried over to next year when we have a contract or it is encumbered.

Ms. Houghton told the Committee that the Town's propane and oil prices are better this year. The town worked with Alstead, Walpole, and Langdon to get lower prices. Propane is at \$1.336/gallon and oil is at \$2.71/gallon with Irving. The contract started in July. Mr.

Neill asked if the tanks will be filled at the end of year so the budgeted amounts can reflect a cleared picture of a full years usage. Ms. Chaffee will confirm with Jason West.

Mr. Richardson asked the Committee members if there was a need to meet next week. He indicated no need to meet, that things are moving along. Mr. Davis agreed. It was agreed that the next meeting will be October 30, 2023.

Mr. Richardson will talk to Ms. Chaffee about scheduling the department heads to discuss their budgets. Mr. Richardson will then email the Committee members who we will be hearing from at each meeting.

Mr. Richardson stated that meetings are to be in person in the Community room, and not by Zoom or phone.

Mr. Davis motion to adjourn at 7:41. Mr. Richardson seconded. Roll call: Dave Richardson - yes; Robert Davis - yes; Sarah Davis - yes; Richard Carter - yes; Trina Royce - yes; Keith Weed - yes; Steve Neill - yes; Adam Choquette – yes. Motion passed.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Tardiff, Recording Secretary

(Note: these are unapproved meeting minutes. Any corrections will be made at the next Selectboard meeting on October 30, 2023)