

Westwood Finance and Warrant Commission
November 13, 2012
Meeting Minutes

Chairman Masi-Phelps called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M.

Finance and Warrant Commission (Fincom) member absent – Craig Foscaldo. (Fincom University Station Subcommittee members joined shortly after attending Planning Board meeting)

Chairman Masi-Phelps asked if anyone wished to record the meeting; no one was in attendance. Sheila will contact WestCat to request recording of future meetings.

Attending tonight's meeting: Selectman Nancy Hyde, Town Administrator Mike Jaillet, Finance Director Pam Dukeman, Assessor Mark Murphy and DPW Director Todd Korchin.

Chairman Masi-Phelps:

- Extended thanks to all for attending tonight's meeting.
- The University Station project:
 - Question remains whether there is sufficient time to conduct a February 28, 2013 special town meeting.
 - Every opportunity is being given to the developer to present their case; the Planning Board is meeting weekly so the developer can respond to concerns, etc.
 - The Selectmen have a meeting scheduled for November 15 at the Downey School when they plan to open the warrant for the February special town meeting. The University Station development agreement will also be publicly discussed at this meeting.
 - Next Planning Board meeting is scheduled for November 20 and the School Committee will discuss the project at their November 28 meeting.

Financial Update – Finance Director Pam Dukeman

Chairman Masi-Phelps welcomed Pam, stating this is the first of many meetings over the next few months when Pam will provide financial updates to the Fincom.

Prior to tonight's meeting, members received tonight's presentation as well as presentations made at recent Board of Selectmen meetings.

Pam verbally reviewed tonight's presentation. Some major comments:

- As was done in previous years, when the Selectmen review budget material at their meetings, that information will be forwarded to the Fincom and the Long Range Financial Planning Committee so that all are kept informed as the budget process continues.
- Significant progress was made in FY13 to increase reserves and start funding of OPEB liability.
- Additional FY13 state aid, primarily in Chapter 70 education funds.
- The preliminary FY14 revenue budget is similar to FY13. The Selectmen's initial budget plan proposes to continue progress on reserves and capital.
- There are no employee contracts in place for FY14. This is a major piece of the budget going forward. Approximately 70% of the Town budget is salaries. In previous years the Town has been able to remain within budget because of disciplined employee contracts.

Fincom Member Comments/Questions:

- Will the Town be addressing the current public safety staffing issue in FY14? Wasn't there a commitment to do this as a result of Fincom comments and concerns in March of 2012?
 - Town Administrator Mike Jaillet:
 - We plan to look at the needs of all municipal departments.
 - Mike did not recall that a commitment was made to fund anything, but to assess the needs of the Fire Department which will be done and will be put forth to the Selectmen.
 - Staffing within the Fire Department can be difficult to negotiate. The hope would be to explore a more creative way to increase staff during the hours most needed.
 - If University Station proceeds, there will be some additional staffing needs and the Fire Department will likely be among those needs. Those needs will not likely be required in FY14. Public safety staffing requires a 9-12 month advance hiring due to training, etc.
 - Members discussed at length the prior Fincom public conversations relative to the need for current adequate Fire Department staffing; it is concerning that the Town Administrator does not have the same recollection of those conversations.
 - It is a critical issue whether the Town has adequate equipment to respond timely to fire and/or ambulance calls.
 - The initial University Station fiscal analysis distributed today does not address the current staffing requirements.
 - Vice Chair Marianne LeBlanc followed up that in fact the Selectmen were present at the March, 2012 Fincom meeting when a commitment was made to address the Fire Department staffing deficiencies. Have there been discussions with the Chief?
 - Yes.
 - Selectman Hyde stated the Selectmen heard the Fincom's concerns which will be part of the Board's discussions going forward. Selectman Hyde recalled the Fire Department staffing would be analyzed.
 - Chairman Masi-Phelps stated the adequacy of Fire Department staffing has been highlighted for several years as a concern in the Fincom's Town Meeting report to residents. There needs to be a commitment this year to address this issue. The Fincom makes a recommendation to residents on the Town's budget assuming the funding being requested ensures the adequacy of the Fire Department staffing. The Chairman urged Mike to be in touch with the Fincom's Municipal Subcommittee about this issue.
 - Mike responded he will arrange a meeting with the Chief and the Municipal Subcommittee to discuss the issues.

Tax Shift Process – Assessor Mark Murphy

Prior to tonight's meeting, members received the FY13 Tax Shift presentation made to the Selectmen at their meeting on October 22. Assessor Mark Murphy explained why some communities (like Westwood) have commercial and residential (split) tax rates vs. a single tax rate.

Some major comments/questions:

- If Westwood had a single tax rate, residents would incur a sizeable property tax increase (in FY13, approximately \$874 on the average home value). This is not something the Assessors are recommending at this time.
- It is unclear at this time whether a TIF (tax increment financing) will be requested for University Station.

DPW Director Todd Korchin

- Mike Jaillet introduced Todd Korchin, Westwood's newly appointed DPW Director. Todd was promoted to this position, having worked approximately ten years within the department. Both Mike and Selectman Nancy Hyde praised Todd and stated they are pleased with his appointment.
- Todd provided a handout to members summarizing the new trash/recycling program as well as the equipment purchased with borrowing funds approved at the 2012 annual town meeting.

Subcommittee Reports

- ***Long Range Financial Planning Committee (LRFP)*** – Representative Barb Delisle reported the Fincom will now receive notes taken at the LRFP meetings which will keep members informed of topics discussed. At the October 17 meeting, Pam presented a similar financial update as discussed tonight.
- ***Town's OPEB Task Force*** – Fincom members Peter Neville and Russ Lavoie serve on this Task Force. Peter reported he believes Westwood's Task Force is on the right track. He updated members on the October 31 Task Force meeting:
 - Two guests attended:
 - Attorney Kevin Feeley – has worked with the Town in the past, particularly advising the Health Care Committee.
 - Kathleen Riley, Sr. Vice President and Actuary of "Segal" – hired by the State OPEB Commission to perform the municipal portion of their assignment. State OPEB Commission report due to be published in December.
 - The State OPEB Commission is focusing on the benefits and eligibility for retirees' health care, not on addressing how to handle the unfunded liability. Changes will not affect current retirees.
 - State Commission considering whether changes should be mandated by the State or should that option be voted locally. Most on Westwood's OPEB Task Force felt mandated requirements would be better; that way all communities would have the same regulations.
 - The timing of funding OPEB does have an effect on employee contract negotiations; changing benefits will require negotiation.
- ***Education Subcommittee*** – Chairman Russ Lavoie reported their subcommittee met with John Antonucci; no significant changes expected; situation similar to last year.
- ***Municipal Subcommittee*** – Chairman Rob Uek indicated their group has not met but they expect to start meeting with departments shortly. Rob will follow up with Mike Jaillet about the Fire Department staffing issue.
- ***Town Budget Steering Committee*** – Chairman Masi-Phelps serves on this Committee along with the Board of Selectmen and School Committee Chairs, John Antonucci, Mike Jaillet and Pam Dukeman. This Committee considers long term issues as well as the upcoming budget situation. One idea expressed by John Antonucci was that funds for SPED costs (which are unpredictable and can be quite costly) be set aside in a reserve account, as is currently done for energy expenses.
- ***University Station Subcommittee*** – Chairman George Hertz reported that today their subcommittee received a draft financial impact analysis report. Sheila will send the report out to all members tomorrow; George suggested Russ (Education Subcommittee Chair) and Rob (Municipal Subcommittee Chair) review the report, particularly how it relates to their areas and forward comments to him.

Meeting Adjourned at 10:05 P.M.

**Next Meeting
December 11, 2012
7:30 P.M., High School Professional Development Room**