

FINANCE COMMITTEE
PUBLIC MEETING
Judge Welsh Room, Town Hall
Provincetown MA

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2017

Members Present: Chairman Mark Hatch (MH); Kathleen Goodwin (KG); Duane Steele (DS); Mark Bjorstrom (MR); Mark Del Franco (MD) participated by conference call; Scott Valentino (SV), Vice Chair (arrived at 10:16am)

Absent: Stan Sikorski

Others Present: David Panagore, (DP), Town Manager; Alex Williams (AW), Treasurer; Mary-Jo Avellar (MJA), Town Moderator

The meeting was called to order by MH at 10:08am.

1. Budget Session Schedule

DP opened the meeting by giving an overview of the time-table for the budget season schedule ahead, presenting a cross-reference among the three working documents in today's packet: FY19 Budget and CIP Schedule, Budget Season Schedule and Annual Town Meeting Timetable. DP referred to the calendar insert that served to capture all the major obligations going through spring Town Meeting, and the spreadsheet featuring the Budget Timeframe which he singled out as the most definitive document in terms of the Town's legal obligations as required by the Charter to get to town meeting.

DP pointed to a currently open item on the calendar that asks when FINCOM wants to schedule its operating budget reviews and asked how this year's reviews might be handled. MH commented that the way reviews were done last year in three sessions including a day, if needed, for call-backs, worked well and proposed Tues., Feb., 6th and Wed., Feb. 7th with Fri., Feb. 9th, if needed, for the 2018 reviews which everyone agreed on.

DP made note per the calendar draft that Tues., Feb. 13, 2018 is the proposed day for a joint meeting between FINCOM and the Board of Selectmen to reconcile budget differences. DP said town is considering having Town Forum on Sat., Feb. 3rd and suggested topics to be covered such as the budget, the regulation of medical marijuana as a zoning item and any licenses to be given out for later next year.

MH asked FINCOM for black-out dates they have per the upcoming proposed schedules. MB said he is out of town from Feb. 20 through March 14th. MH added that he is in France from the 14th through the 20th of March. DP advised that the FINCOM report be made available by March 26th to meet the schedule and the Town Moderator meeting on the 27th.

Other dates: Warrant to close on March 2nd; Board of Selectmen vote on article recommendations on March 19th. A plan is considered to have all FINCOM articles in place before MH leaves for France so they can be made ready and voted on upon his return. No travel plans are reported at this time for KG & SV. MH will send out e-mails to confirm FINCOM review dates and a letter to the voters before he leaves for France.

2. MMA attendance and dates

MH referred to the brochure copy for next year's Massachusetts Municipal Association Annual Meeting and Trade Show, scheduled for Jan. 19- 20, 2018 in Boston; MB, MA and MH plan to attend. DP said he saw no reason why hotel reimbursement, in addition to travel expenses and the admission fee, could not be covered out of FINCOM's budget. MH made the motion for FINCOM to reimburse two hotel nights for FINCOM members' attending Jan.'s MMA event; DS seconded the motion and it passed, 5-0-0. MH, DS, KG, MB, SV. DP mentioned that the town now has its own credit card to use for billing expenses.

3. Social Media/Events leading up to ATM

Citing Town Meeting as a motivating factor, MH brokered a discussion on social media and what it means for FINCOM in terms of policy, usage, endorsements and the like. MH revealed that while he is very opinionated he gets extraordinarily frustrated at online discussions where he is also likely to give in to his worst impulses and so seeks a way to set a tone and re-direct these things back toward the subject matter at hand and so be less re-active.

MH added that he spends 10-20 hrs. a week on town business and finds it incredibly frustrating and difficult when people post something that is totally untrue, fail to have read a document pertaining to the topic thread, or suggest nefarious things are going on when they aren't.

MB mentioned the importance in making a distinction when someone is speaking as a representative of FINCOM or as a private citizen. MJA said she felt the business of speaking as a private citizen is a specious argument; that whenever a town board member speaks up they are going to be acknowledged for the positions they hold and that the best solution for avoiding troublesome engagements on social media is to avoid the blog sites altogether. MH said he felt MJA made a valid point.

MB asked DP what guidance he gives town employees on the subject of social media. DP said it is still a developing policy, but that Provincetown is a step ahead of most towns on the Cape and referenced an interview in Time Magazine with French President Macron who claims that Twitter and social media do not work when you are a public official. DP stated that 900 people a week look at Town Talk and many town employees do not post online because they don't wish to be exposed or attacked.

DP concurred with MJA's position that a distinction between the personal and the professional is difficult without knowing all the facts and who is positing what. DP said he is making Town Talk into a matter of town policy; to make it more formal, professional. DP noted that in other towns people have been thrown off sites, but cautions against perceived censorship.

MJA referenced a time in the previous administration when employees were posting on town-time and feels a more formal approach is merited; formalize it and ignore it. MH pointed out that social media is designed to be of the moment whereas town boards like FINCOM need to maintain the long view.

MD supported recognition of a line between social media and Town Talk, which should not be monitored by Town Manager. DP responded that when he came to town he was informed that social media was in a bad place and he sought to address and improve that status. DP said if he could hire an outside manager to regulate the Town's social media, he'd do it and hopes that enforcement will mean someone or some entity other than Town Manager will be responsible.

SV said he's not as savvy as others and avoids social media as it's a pissing contest; asks if Town Talk can be more of a notification board, as DP suggests, where questions can be submitted but not posted; intercepted by a staffer and addressed that way. MH offered that in his business setting if anyone posted something unacceptable they would be terminated immediately and yet the same actions for zero tolerance are not applicable to the Town's social media sites.

MJA countered that FINCOM must consider first amendment/free speech issues and the way around that is to feature a bulletin board. DP suggested free speech is not always what it purports to stand for; that there is no free speech on Facebook where you can be banned by management, but said it would be unfortunate if more conversations, not less, was the result of enforcement measures in Town.

SV asked if a live-feed would work where people can sound off civilly at specific times on specific nights, but otherwise the site is primarily for information only. DP said Provincetown is the tip of the spear and ahead of other Cape town which are only now adapting social media; that he wouldn't be surprised if public meetings were running online in five years.

MH cited the benefit of having Town Talk be a posting site with no discussion, adding that in situations where people cannot make the distinction between a policy decision and a personal matter that it might be better for FINCOM, as it approaches Town Meeting, to make a case when issues warrant, then step away.

4. Warrant Article discussion for ATM

Alluding to the insert that shows a failure of free cash certification spending to align with proposed Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and other ATM and STM budget items, DP raised the question as to which should be the priority: items contained in the budget or petitioned items that passed by special vote?

MH questioned whether citizens seeking to put spending articles on the town warrant would be better served bringing them directly to FINCOM so that FINCOM can make it part of the process and give the petitioner better insight into the prospects of their appeal; that making the petition on the floor is completely out of process. DP clarified that MH's proposal would be an invitation; that the warrant process is part of Town's mandate. MH added that he felt the budget gets priority because it is already in-process.

DP turned attention to an insert to be forwarded that proposes a Free Cash policy initiative that would see Free Cash be spent only on emergencies and reserves and not toward any on-going operations, to which available levy would still apply.

MD asked what happens if the CIP passes but then the money isn't there. DP responded that the list gets knocked down as the funds come in based on priorities, but that it is the priorities which is the question; that according to Town Council it becomes an administrative action which he is not happy about as he feels it is more a policy concern. DP will bring 6-8 policies to next FINCOM mtg.

5. Water/sewer rate

MH remarked that this item insert is just for FINCOM'S edification as it's a Board of Selectman direct concern but wanted FINCOM to be cognizant of increases in water and sewer as they put additional burden on tax payers and homeowners. DP said water rates were all approved at 5:00 pm and a rate hearing will potentially be scheduled for December for both water and sewer

rates. DP said it will take until 2027 until reserves are incrementally built back up; that current sewer reserves will be blown through in 2-3 years and as the system is essentially designed for the high season, most of the rate increases would be in effect for the high season.

6. Budget Updates

MH said he pre-reviewed the Budget Updates and found nothing that stood out as troublesome. MH encouraged FINCOM to consider warrant articles of their own interest for discussion, citing a proposal to raise the resident tax exemption to 30% (currently 20%) as something for debate, asking if it, as with other proposals, promotes the Town's first priority that is year-round residency.

DP mentioned that an article expanding the exemption for those who rent to year-round people as looking good through the legislature. MH proposes a diversity policy that would mandate the Town engage in business with those who have such a policy in place. DP suggests it's a challenge for a small town to enforce such a policy as the distinctions aren't clear per the types of businesses that would be affected.

SV questioned if the amendment should feature a preference not a requirement for a diversity policy in so much as 'mom and pop' businesses might suffer from not having such a policy in place and, also, asks if each business, in turn, would need to have the same policy in place down the line. MH suggested it is not drilled down to that degree and that Town might study what other towns have in place concerning diversity mandates.

7. Any items from Town Manager that pertain to Finance

DP said there are currently eight policies that are under review for presentation at the next FINCOM meeting and the Board of Selectmen meeting on the 27th.

DP gave an Open Gov update: the next step would include a performance measure; a piece of software that builds off your current muni-system to categorize Town operations and data collection, such as how does Town produce reports; how many crimes does Town post; how long does it take Town to fix a pot-hole, and so on. DP added that the implementation of new budget programs could be cost and time-saving. MD requested training sessions in the future to access software for data storage and updates. DP concurred and would consult Josee Young.

AW updated FINCOM on changes in Town's banking: In an effort to cut costs, Town has switched banking deposits from larger institutions to smaller local and regional banks in order to increase interest and cut service fees. Town's parking account will remain at Seamen's Bank, while other accounts are now at Cape Cod 5. Town will still be doing some banking at TD. MB reminded FINCOM that even though TD is Canadian they still hire locally.

8. Any other business that may legally come before the Committee

MH proposed next FINCOM meeting Dec. 11th to be followed by a second December meeting to be held after the 18th, at which point FINCOM would have the Town Manager's budget document in hand.

MH announced an adjournment at 11:50pm and the meeting officially concluded.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jody O'Neil, November 24, 2017