

**FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING
TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2020**

A meeting of the Finance Committee (FC) was held on Tuesday, March 10, 2020. Mr. D'Amico called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

ATTENDANCE:

PRESENT: Howard D'Amico (Chair), Carol Gogolinski, Phil Landry, Heather Morin, Lynne Mussulli, Dick Vanden Berg

ABSENT: Michael Hutnak (Vice Chair), Sandy Kuipers

NON-VOTING: Matt Wojcik (Town Administrator), Jeanne Lovett (Finance Director)

1. MEETING WITH THE ADULT SOCIAL CENTER (ASC):

Director and Outreach Case Manager Patrice Rousseau joined the meeting. She stated that there are 1985 people over age 60 in Douglas, and they all get a newsletter. She described some of the programs offered at the ASC and the hours of operation. A State grant is used to fund the newsletter and exercise programs. The per diem position counts attendees by hand. A Cultural Council grant helps to cover the cost of entertainment.

Ms. Rousseau is asking for a position to help with events. She described how she spends her time. She plans to cross-train her current part-time employee to do Outreach.

Ms. Rousseau explained how the people in their 60's now are different from those who reached 60 ten years ago.

Ms. Rousseau spoke about the challenges of the current location.

2. MEETING WITH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

Town Engineer William Cundiff joined the meeting. The following boards and committees fall under his department: Economic Development Committee (EDC), Open Space, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), and Conservation Commission. They also assist the Building & Facilities Construction Committee, and Mr. Cundiff explained the role of that committee.

Employees under his department include himself, the Conservation Agent, an Administrative Assistant and a meeting minute taker. Mr. Cundiff reviewed salaries, COLA and steps. Expenses are essentially level-funded, with a modest increase for inflation. Mr. Cundiff reviewed the budgets of all the boards and committees under Community Development. The Conservation Commission, Open Space, and ZBA budgets are level-funded. The modest increase in the Planning Board budget is due to membership with Central Mass. Regional Planning Commission. Last year's Town Meeting had approved \$5,000 for the EDC. They are requesting another \$5,000 at the upcoming Town Meeting to move forward with potential development sites.

Mr. D'Amico asked for the status of the project for which \$400,000 for engineering to run water and sewer down Davis Street was requested last year. Mr. Cundiff stated that there are still proposals, not the same proposal, and not the same developer. Not having water and sewer in industrially zoned areas severely limits opportunities for economic growth. Douglas hoped to position itself for a MassWorks

grant to help build infrastructure. The EDC is proactively reaching out to developers. A discussion was held.

3. MEETING WITH BLACKSTONE VALLEY REGIONAL VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL (BVT):

Superintendent Dr. Michael Fitzpatrick and a student, Jessica Brown joined the meeting. Ms. Brown is a junior in Health Services and she lives in Douglas. Ms. Brown talked about her experiences at BVT and how she has learned to be a skilled worker and leader. She spoke about Skills USA. She spoke about how BVT's Career Enrichment class teaches students about college opportunities, debt, loans, etc. She should have her CNA license by the end of this year. Ms. Brown left the meeting.

Dr. Fitzpatrick stated there is a 3.9% increase in the budget request. The increase is driven mostly by lack of funding from the State, an increase in minimum obligations, Special Education costs, maintaining technology, and a health benefit increase of 7%. BVT raised \$50,000 to buy a new plow truck and plow. He spoke about other cost saving measures. They have received almost \$3 million in grants.

Douglas' BVT enrollment for 2019-2020 is 120 students, which is 7 greater than the prior year. Dr. Fitzpatrick gave a five-year enrollment history of Douglas students.

BVT was invited by the Commissioner of Education to share admission policies and offer suggestions to alternative plans. BVT's admission policy has been amended twice to reduce the emphasis on grades and "dig deeper into the interview process" to find students who have a commitment to a trade. There is a dependency on the sending school's recommendation. Dr. Fitzpatrick provided a written statement to the Commissioner. Mr. D'Amico asked to see that statement and Dr. Fitzpatrick agreed.

Mr. D'Amico stated that Dr. Fitzpatrick had agreed 4-5 years ago that BVT's admissions had changed from the original agreement. Dr. Fitzpatrick is not aware that BVT does not abide by the agreement. A discussion was held.

Mr. Vanden Berg asked how to explain to Douglas taxpayers that BVT can raise its budget request by 3.9%, but Douglas can only raise the budget request 2.5% for its schools. Dr. Fitzpatrick explained that the funding of a vocational technical school is expected to be twice the per pupil cost of a traditional high school. He explained how the funding model for a regional vocational technical school is designed.

Dr. Fitzpatrick talked about BVT's health insurance plans. Ms. Lovett asked if there are any incentives for employees to leave the health insurance plans. A discussion was held, including contributions to OPEB.

Mr. Landry asked what percentage of BVT graduates will go to directly into the workforce to work their trade. Dr. Fitzpatrick brought information about BVT's college placements. 76% of graduates pursue employment after a four-year college. 10% pursue employment after apprenticeship programs. Dr. Fitzpatrick stated that there are 100 students on cooperative education. Mr. D'Amico does not see anything in the materials Dr. Fitzpatrick presented to reflect a change in admission criteria to accept more students who wish to learn a trade and not pursue a college education. A lengthy discussion was held.

Ms. Mussulli feels it is disheartening to look at the list and not see students working in the basic trades. Ms. Mussulli and Dr. Fitzpatrick agree that it is a societal

change. BVT is working hard to link students to industry. Many students indicate when they apply to BVT that they have no intention of going to college. Many change their minds as they progress.

Ms. Morin asked how to get BVT students to help with Town projects. Dr. Fitzpatrick explained the process.

4. RESERVE FUND TRANSFERS/VOUCHERS:

There were no Reserve Fund transfers.

5. SNOW/ICE UPDATE:

Ms. Lovett stated that Douglas is just slightly under their appropriation of \$199,950. Mr. D'Amico asked Mr. Wojcik for the actuals of Snow & Ice for the last five years and where the Town stands today. Ms. Lovett stated that she gave Mr. D'Amico that information a couple weeks ago. Ms. Gogolinski feels that any money "leftover" should go to the Highway Dept. to remove dead trees along the road.

Ms. Lovett explained that any deficits in Snow & Ice are typically funded from Free Cash at Special Town Meeting. Any unexpended funds in Snow & Ice could be transferred back into Free Cash for some other purpose.

Mr. Landy asked for an explanation of the overtime percentage increase over the last ten years. Ms. Lovett explained that it depends on each year's snow and ice events, what day of the week they occurred, whether or not the Town received FEMA money, etc. Also, there have been two rate increases to bring the rates up to Mass DOT levels in order to compete with neighboring communities for contractors.

6. OLD BUSINESS/NEW BUSINESS:

New Business: Ms. Gogolinski asked that someone reach out to the schools to ask them to "drill down" to determine which students would benefit the most from a BVT vocational education. Ms. Mussulli feels if the schools are able to bring in programs to entice students to stay in Douglas, students will stay in district. A discussion was held.

Mr. Wojcik suggested that the next meeting of the FC with the School Committee be in Executive Session in order to go over collective bargaining, as there have been additional developments. Mr. Wojcik explained the current state of the proposed budget and the school appropriation. Mr. Wojcik's budget for the school is 2%. The health insurance renewal came in at 2%.

Mr. D'Amico asked that the budget in Excel format be sent to all the FC members and that an Executive Session with the School Committee be scheduled for two weeks from today. He asked that Mr. Wojcik have the number for the schools based on whether or not the current proposed collective bargaining agreement is accepted or rejected.

Mr. Wojcik explained that the Capital Committee (CIC) has had issues with getting a quorum. Last year, they voted on a plan for this year. A few items need to be re-ranked, but that cannot be done until the amount of Free Cash is known.

He discussed how the State and Town are dealing with the Corona virus pandemic, and the impacts to operations and finances. Purchases that have not been budgeted for may need to occur for continuity of operations and personal protection equipment.

The Governor declared today that school systems will not be pushed past the 185th day nor will they be pushed past June 3rd. There will be no punitive outcome for extensive absenteeism.

Mr. Vanden Berg spoke with Nealy Urquhart yesterday regarding the Special Education budget.

Old Business: There was no old business.

7. NEXT MEETING DATES:

There was no discussion.

8. MINUTES: February 11 & 25, 2020

Mr. Landry made a motion to approve the February 11, 2020 Finance Committee meeting minutes as presented. Ms. Morin seconded the motion. Vote: Aye-4, Ms. Gogolinski and Mr. Landry abstained.

Mr. Landry made a motion to approve the February 25, 2020 Finance Committee meeting minutes as presented. Ms. Mussulli seconded the motion. Vote: Aye-6.

9. ADJOURNMENT:

Ms. Mussulli made a motion at 9:00 PM to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting. Ms. Morin seconded the motion. Vote: Aye-6.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Wright
Recording Secretary