

beaLunenburg Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
Bilotta Meeting Room
Lunenburg Town Hall
February 22, 2024

Members Present: Chair Evan Watters, Vice Chair Chris Menard (Zoom), Clerk Tiffaney Tavares, Board Member Tom Gray, Board Member Dave Passios, Board Member Jean Russell, Board Member Jay Simeone

1. Call to Order

The meeting opened at 7:00 PM.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Announcements

Evan Watters states this is a revised agenda as the land use department will not be sharing their presentation tonight.

4. Public Comment

Peter Beardmore, 282 Pleasant Street, provided a few comments to the committee for consideration. Relative to the meeting last night, there is concern about a pie chart that displayed the budget. The pie chart only included debt. This is non-discretionary spending and not part of what we would use to fund services of any form. That accounts for \$163,000 of that \$500,000 that comes right off the top of the taxes and is excludable debt. The regular debt service is roughly \$335,000 and is from the sewer betterment agreement which is completely funded out of a revolving account. If you take the debt out of those pie charts the school is spending 55.4%. Regarding the override, it seems as though the schools are being targeted and expected to go for an override and lead the effort. When the Town Manager first discussed the override, it was specifically related to the school department budget. In reference to the grant writing topic, there is agreement that the position will pay for itself but there is an upfront investment associated. That money needs to be taken away from somewhere.

5. Town Manager Report

There are no updates to report since the last meeting 24 hours prior.

6. Finance Director Report

The FY 23 expenditure recap has been sent to the committee to review. This will be reviewed at the next meeting.

7. New Business

a. Land Use Department FY 25 Budget Presentation

This presentation was canceled prior to the meeting.

b. Council on Aging FY 25 Budget Presentation

The director of the Lunenburg Council on Aging, Sue Doherty, presented the budget.

According to the 2020 consensus there are 3,120 people over the age of 60 making up approximately 30% of the Lunenburg population but the council on aging is still less than 1% of the town budget.

The budget request includes an increase in the meal site managers hours from 19.5 per week to 24 hours per week. That additional 4.5 hours will be adding Fridays to her schedule. This would increase the salary by \$6,648 bringing the annual salary up to \$25,858.

A reason for the 4.5-hour increase is due to efficiency and the struggle to only run Monday through Thursday. The meal site manager makes everything from scratch and is locally sourced. Currently, the center offers lunch 2 days out of the week costing \$5 and breakfast once a week at \$3. Additionally, deliveries of meals on wheels occur 4 days out of the week.

There's an active nutrition program running 3 days a week that includes menu planning, shopping, cooking. The manager has 3 employees working under her and 2 volunteers that she supervises.

Questions:

Tiffaney Tavares questions if anyone has reached out to the high school to try to get more young people involved with the aging community. So, they can see different walks of life and perspectives. Sue Doherty states that the national honor society contacts them every year. The problem is that they have classes during the day. Last fiscal year there were 56 volunteers and 1 of which was a student from the national honor society.

Chris Menard questioned if this is a pensioned position. There is a consensus that after 24 hours it turns into a benefited position. Chris Menard worries about additional costs and requests an alternative option. Tom Gray states this is a nationwide problem where lower paid people get the same level of health care benefits as someone who makes a lot more. The benefits become 30 to 40 percent

of the actual salary. Tiffaney Tavares believes if teachers are worthy of a pension and health insurance then so should the people who are feeding our elderly.

Deb Lincoln, who is the chairperson for the council on aging and volunteers in the kitchen provides her input. Deb Lincoln states that she doesn't believe that more part time positions or more volunteer positions will be beneficial. It is a very small kitchen. Deb Lincoln reiterates that 1 percent of the budget is used for 30 percent of our community. These people have been here for decades, and some are struggling to stay in their homes, pay their utility bills, and we are offering them this one place, that's a home for them to come to have community and a reasonably priced beautiful meal. I think that we owe them that. We should not be fundraising and having Sue Doherty go out and get grants to pay people to be in the kitchen. This is something we give our seniors. We owe them that.

Evan Watters agrees with Deb Lincoln and Sue Doherty. He has asked everyone in the committee this year to really dig into every number of every line not because we want to take things away from anybody. It's just because there's a public perception out there currently that money is being mismanaged.

Sue Doherty confirms that she does apply for grants and has received money that was used to build the recreation area and fund the new handicap door.

Dave Passios is concerned that everyone is wearing too many hats. He questions if this could go to a 40-hour position and encourages everyone to run every scenario possible.

c. Library FY 25 Budget Presentation

The budget request was presented by the Library Director, Muir Haman.

The Lunenburg public library welcomes all and serves residents of the Lunenburg area as a hub for the community, enriching our lives through its collections, programs, services, facilities, and people.

Previously the library received the LSTA Grant and received nearly \$13,000 to help expand science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) learning opportunities in the community.

In FY 24, there was an increase in visitors of 11% as compared to the prior year. The projected number of visitors in FY 24 is 65,000. In FY 23, the library offered 362 programs and had more than 6,400 attendees to those programs. A successful program is the summer reading program that occurs when there is no school. In the past more than 130 people attended those programs.

The library request for FY 25 totals \$613,100 and the Town managers preliminary budget is \$589,100.

The budget request includes the needed replacement of hardware/technology. Additional funds are needed to install a hearing loop in the programming room. This totals \$14,000.

Additional funding for children's programming supplies totaling \$4,000.

Programming request totaling \$24,000 and professional development including funding for training and mileage totaling \$4,000.

Questions:

Tiffany Tavares questions how the 4 hours increase in hours for the young adult library position is beneficial. Muir Haman states the position runs the teen room where a lot of teens hang out. The room roughly fits 12 to 15 teens comfortably at any given time. There have been trends in behavior in this population. Tiffany Tavares questions if that would have a positive impact especially due to our town's budget and what policies they are enforcing. Muir Haman confirms this is a new staff member who has been with the library for 1 week. The library staff balances human behavior and creates a welcoming environment. There are acceptable use behaviors posted throughout the teen room. There is no snacking in the teen room but that continues to happen. Muir Haman thinks it would have a big impact and hopefully ensure that staff may stay in their position longer.

Tiffany Tavares questions if the IT request is a part of the town and what impact would that 14,000 dollars have. Muir Haman confirms it is a separate department and has its own budget. The request pays to replace staff workstations, computers, and hardware. Additionally, He is working with the IT department head to come up with a technology plan. This request also includes the cost for the hearing enhancement nook.

Chris Menard questions if there is a fee charged for programming. Muir Haman states the library offers free programming including art workshops that need equipment and supplies. All programs have been free since he has been there. Chris Menard suggests charging for some programs and this can be discussed for budget season next year.

Dave Passios asks if there is a want rather than a need for the hearing loop. Also, questions what audio there is that needs to be repaired. Muir Haman states the current system has aged. Dave Passios asks if the hearing loop is worthless if the audio system isn't upgraded. Muir Haman confirms that the hearing loop would not work without upgrades or repairs to the system.

Evan Watters reiterates there is a 1.25% increase for the state required appropriation. He questions if that is the average for the municipal line or if it that the average off the total requested line including state aid. Muir Haman states this is just appropriated funds.

Evan Watters asks if the library plans to reapply for the LSTA grant. Muir Haman does plan to apply for a LSTA grant in the civic engagement category. He hopes to partner with civics classes at the high school and nation honor society to help to explain how government works and how to engage and participate. The deadline is in April and typically results come out in July.

Evan Watters questions if a grant writer would be beneficial to the library. Muir Haman agrees as he is currently the one writing the grants.

Evan Watters asks if we are currently meeting the needs of the town with the preliminary budget. Muir Haman states just about everybody in town would benefit from something at the library, the preliminary budget does a great job meeting those needs.

Tom Gray asked if there is still a trend with eBooks still being more expensive. Muir Haman confirms that is still the case. There is a bill at the state house that would alleviate some of those costs.

d. Town Manager's 5 Year Financial Report

This topic was pushed until the next meeting.

8. Old Business

a. Town Grant Writer Letter

Tiffany Tavares presented the letter she and Dave Passios worked on together.

Evan Watters questioned where the 50,000-line item came from and if it's a benefit position. Heather Lemieux states this is a rough estimate based on contracting services for a year's salary. This would be a non-benefited position through a contract services. The hours would vary based on what type of grant is being applied for and the different vendors needed. It doesn't have to be one particular entity as there are multiple departments looking for different services.

Dave Passios shares the street light grant took many years to complete but what ultimately pushed the project was hiring a specialist in that field that knew all the players, had contacts with suppliers, and experience with writing.

Evan Watters suggests creating some sort of secondary committee. A grant writing committee made up of department heads and anyone else interested.

b. FY 25 Budget Update/Discussion

Chris Menard questions if everyone can go to the upcoming school committee meeting and make comments. He wants to confirm that is okay as long as there are no deliberations among ourselves. Evan Watters states this is a gray and risky area. Heather Lemieux has reached out to town counsel for an answer and is currently waiting for a response.

Evan Watters raised the idea of proposing a town warrant. There is great concern among the residents about the school committee budget, taxes, fixed incomes. There is a decent chance that someone is going to put forward a warrant article for an override. He suggests that article come from the finance committee directly. This is strictly to have the most accurate numbers and understanding of the entire process. The warrant closes on March 18th. The Select Board would need to have time to deliberate whether they want to move forward at their next meeting on the 5th. Evan Watters suggests looking over all the budgets and be in constant communication with the Town Manager and the superintendent. The goal is to work for both sides to find out where we are between a level service and a needs-based service override number. If we don't need the article, we can pass over it. The budget doesn't need to be fully budgeted with an override ahead of time.

Chris Menard requests that someone come in and explain to us the prop 2 ½. He isn't comfortable having this discussion until the superintendent's budget is presented in 2 days. Evan Watters states the problem is waiting is that the superintendent budget is being presented 2 days after the warrant closes.

Renee Emkey questions if we can have a special election for an override and not be tied to the May 18th election. Heather Lemieux confirms that is correct.

Tom Gray states that the Select Board has the ultimate control. Any monied articles must be approved except a citizen's petition.

Tiffany Tavares clarifies that since we as a committee are looking at all the department budgets then the committee could put something together that's comprehensive instead of having a citizen's petition.

Evan Watters provided the statistics from across the state regarding overrides from the DLS website. From FY 15 to FY 24 there have been 315 attempts at an override across the state. 221 of those have passed and 94 of them have failed. In the state there has been 111 million dollars in overrides that won and 45 million that did not win.

Renee Emkey did her own research and found that most of the overrides that passed were for new schools or buildings. It was a debt exclusion override. The overrider was a one-time event not an operational override.

Chris Menard states that he is not supportive of making a motion.

There was a motion by Evan Watters that the finance committee put together a warrant article to put forward an override to prop 2 ½ for town meeting to be discussed on March 7th and March 14th at a public hearing to create a needs-based service for the town, seconded by Tiffaney Tavares. Roll call vote. Chris Menard nay, Jean Russell aye, Tom Gray aye, Jay Simeone nay, Tiffaney Tavares aye, Evan Watters aye.

c. Town Manager's Preliminary FY 25 Budget Follow-up

There is no additional discussion.

9. Minutes

There are no new minutes to approve.

10. Committee Reports

There were no new updates.

11. Topics for Future Meetings

There are no additional topics aside from continuing discussion from tonight.

12. Upcoming Meetings

- a. Feb 29th – Information Technology & Police
- b. March 7th – DPW & Facilities
- c. Mar 14th – Fire & Lunenburg Schools
- d. Mar 20th – Monty Tech & Administration, Unclassified, & Debt Services
- e. Mar 21st – Public Access Committee, Sewer, & Other Monied Articles – Lunenburg Public School Update

13. Important Dates

- a. Jan 9th – Mar 18th – Town Meeting Warrant Open
- b. Mar 28th – FinCom Public Hearing
- c. April 2nd – FinCom Report for Warrant
- d. May 4th – Annual Town Meeting
- e. May 18th – Annual Town Election

14. Public Comment

Anna Lockwood states there is a cost benefit that we need to understand that if we make Lunenburg very unattractive to retirees, they are going to move out. The only way to keep adults with no children in school in town is to make these small and strange benefits attractive. Additionally request there be public comment after each presentation and not at just the end and beginning of the meeting.

15. Adjourn

There was a motion by Tom Gray to adjourn, seconded by Tiffaney Tavares. Chris Menard aye, Jean Russell aye, Tom Gray aye, Jay Simeone aye, Tiffaney Tavares aye, Evan Watters aye.

The meeting closed at 11:07 PM.