

Minutes of the Meeting of the Heath Finance Committee
April 15, 2014

Time: 7:05 pm

Place: Community Hall, Senior Center

Present: Gloria Fisher, Ned Wolf, Jeff Simmons, Don Freeman (chair), Kathy Inman, and at 8:30 pm
Sheila Litchfield, and Brian DeVriese

Don made available to members copies of the following:

- Agenda (Don)
- Minutes of the April 1st meeting (Ned)
- Tax Levy Worksheet (as of 4/15/14, Don)

Members read the minutes of the April 1st meeting. Gloria made a motion seconded by Don to approve the minutes with corrections. The motion passed with one abstention due to absence.

There was a discussion of a request from Mike Smith to transfer \$234.01 from the Reserve Account into the Highway Miscellaneous Account. The purpose is to fund the continuing education units needed to maintain a hoisters' license. Jeff noted that the hoisters' license is a prerequisite for the job and that although there was a new announcement regarding continuing education credits last November, Highway Department employees would have known the announcement was coming. Members noted the Selectboard's decision to fund continuing education credits as well as required physicals and possibly other job related expenses. Ned expressed concern about such accumulating expenses but considered the amounts significantly less than the cost of a new roadside mower, a purchase he had opposed. Gloria made a motion seconded by Kathy to approve the transfer. The vote was 4 in favor and 1 opposed. Members signed the Transfer Form.

Jeff, as a member of the Municipal Safety Complex Committee, reported on a preliminary number coming from the feasibility study. An early estimate for the cost of a new safety complex is \$2.28 million which could reach \$3 million and which if financed over 40 years would be more than a dollar increase on the tax rate.

Don said that the most recent estimated tax rate for FY2015 is \$19.13. It reflects the fact that no money is needed for dump closing in the last line of Article 3. The unspent feasibility study money can be used to purchase two vehicles for the Highway Department. A lingering question is whether or not we can pay for the balance of the trash compactor using the Overlay Surplus account.

Reviewing the Warrant Articles for the May 10th Annual Town Meeting (ATM), members noted that Articles 4 – 8 which propose transfers into the Machinery Maintenance Account are making up for the absence of a Special Town Meeting (STM) before the ATM on May 10th. Members asked for clarification of the Article on Bylaw revisions. There were questions regarding the Article that would authorize all Town Departments, boards, and committees to apply for any new state or federal grants. Wouldn't

such authority come through the Selectboard? Members asked why it is necessary to have an Article to fund a grant in order that the Town mow and maintain the North Cemetery. Finally, it was noted that the word 'Highway' needs to be removed from 'Highway Equipment/Vehicle purchases' in the Articles to set up a new stabilization fund.

Members expressed some concerns about roadside mowing and the contract for providing clean uniforms for members of the Highway Department. Don made a motion seconded by Gloria to approve Article 3 but to reserve the issues of roadside mowing and uniforms. Will the requirement for continuing education units for a hoisters' license make it more difficult to hire an outside person for mowing? What will be the effect of the shift to having Highway Department employees work 4 ten hour days instead of 5 eight hour days per week? Jeff asked about the Town's preparedness if a storm like Irene were to hit. Regarding uniforms, Gloria suggested that the proposed cost is low and said that clarification is needed. Gloria made a motion seconded by Kathy to approve uniforms for the Highway Department. The vote was 2 in favor, 2 opposed, and 1 abstain.

At 8:30 members adjourned to go upstairs and join the Selectboard meeting in progress.

Brian asked Jeff for his thoughts on Heath's making use of Colrain's ambulance service. Jeff said he would like to know how financially stable they are and how long it takes them to get reimbursed for calls. He also recommended that the Colrain people be asked how long do they think it will take them to reach the various parts of Heath.

Don informed the Selectboard of the Finance Committee's having approved the transfer from the Reserve Fund. He also relayed the committee's concerns about the Warrant Articles. Regarding the Bylaw Project Jeff asked whether any of the changes Hilma has made to be in line with apparently acceptable practices in other towns need a hearing in Heath. Sheila said she would look into the matter.

Don reported on the latest estimate of the FY2015 tax rate. There was a consensus that the remaining \$8000 needed for the trash compactor can probably be taken from the Overlay Surplus Account if it can be invoiced in 2014. Possibly, Betty's new computer can also be invoiced in 2014.

Responding to Don's question about Roadside Mowing, Sheila said that she would seek a cost-benefit analysis and contact Don.

As for the North Cemetery, Sheila said the North Cemetery Commission will be meeting on whether to give the cemetery to the Town. Heath's cemetery mowing line item could increase by about one-third.

The meeting adjourned at 9:22 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Ned Wolf, Secretary

