

Minutes of the Meeting of the Heath Finance Committee
February 19, 2013

Time: 7:10 pm

Place: Community Hall

Present: Ned Wolf, Gloria Fisher, Don Freeman, Kathy Inman, Kara Leistyna, Sheila Litchfield,
Tom Lively, Brian DeVriese, and Mike Smith

Absent: Jeff Simmons

Mike said that by the next Selectboard meeting he will have a number for the cost of the roadside mower he is requesting.

Members looked at the e-mails 'Highway Job Responsibilities' and 'Highway Wage Survey 2012'. The wages of Heath's Supervisor, Foreman, and Driver/Operator appear to be lower than corresponding wages in such towns as Ashfield, Charlemont, Hawley, Leyden, and Gill. Don noted that if the Heath wages were 5% greater than they are now they would be closer to those of the other towns. Sheila said that if there is to be a cost-of-living-increase, or COLA, that would be applied first. It has yet to be seen whether needed changes in wages can be made within the parameters of Heath's system of salary grades and steps. It may be necessary to make changes in the salary grades and corresponding job descriptions. Mike said he wanted to be present when any changes are made. Sheila invited Mike and a Finance Committee member to participate in the process possibly as early as next Thursday, February 28.

At 8:20 pm members suspended the meeting to go downstairs where the meeting resumed.

The minutes of the February 5th meeting were read and approved. Ned's draft of the Annual Report 2012 was read and approved with emendations.

Don made a motion that the Finance Committee approves the transfer of \$367 from the Reserve Fund to the Wildlife Management Fund to pay a bill from Beaver Solutions related to beaver activity near route 8A. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

There was a discussion of budget priorities and the relative importance of buying down the tax rate, building up stabilization, and having some kind of capital investments. Members acknowledged the absence of a Heath school building payment, a Mohawk Regional School District assessment that is down by about \$20,000, and a Town valuation that is up from 88 million last year to about 92 million this year. Members also recognized that 20 to 30 thousand of the \$177,000 in Free Cash will be taken out in about a week. After using 50 thousand dollars to bring down the tax rate there would be about 95 thousand dollars left in Free Cash. There was agreement that to build up stabilization and set up special accounts is likely to cushion the impact of future financial hits and save money. There was a consensus that about 50% go into stabilization where unlike Free Cash it's in our hands, 25% go into capital projects, and 25% go into holding down the tax rate. Don will draft a memo that he sends to the Selectboard and Finance Committee for their review.

The discussion turned to the purchase of a new roadside mower. The suggestion was made that before buying such a mower we ask what the person to run it will cost. Is it a job that could be done by a member of the Highway Department? Could the job be contracted out?

Another topic of discussion was the practical difficulty of Selectboard members having sufficient time and information to manage all that needs managing in the running of the Town. Members spoke of advantages and disadvantages of hiring a Town Manager.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Ned Wolf, Secretary