

Minutes of the Meeting of the Heath Finance Committee  
March 12, 2013

Time: 7:02 pm

Place: Community Hall

Present: Don Freeman, Ned Wolf, Jeff Simmons, Kathy Inman, Kara Leistyna, Sheila Litchfield,  
Tom Lively, Brian DeVriese, Mike Smith, Doug Mason, and Alice Wozniak

Absent: Gloria Fisher

Mike said that the cost of repairing the grader at Schmidt Equipment would be \$12,000. The cost of the new mower he recommends for roadside mowing is \$19,500. Don asked Mike about contracting out the roadside mowing as a way of avoiding the purchase and maintenance of another piece of equipment. Mike recalled that when that was tried the budget for roadside mowing was still \$7000. Finding someone interested in the work was difficult. One person they found did not start the job until Columbus Day. Mike said the mowing was never finished. In recent years the mowing has been done by a temporary Town employee with much better results.

Mike said that he's requesting \$24,000 for Materials, an increase of \$6,000 over last year, to cover the cost of sodium chloride for dust control. Controlling dust will help to preserve the gravel roads.

Doug Mason of the Recycling Committee reported on a recent conversation he had with Jan Ameen. He said that by acting soon enough Heath can purchase a reconditioned compactor for paper and cardboard for \$7,000. The compactor would require a small extension of the concrete base already at the transfer station. Electricity would also have to be installed. He will find out more about those costs and report back. The Selectboard discussed using the waste management escrow account to cover the costs. Doug said that the committee is also looking into the cost of a 20 foot by 20 foot recycling building with a roof. One estimate is \$9,000.

Members discussed the Highway Salary review while consulting spreadsheets Don had distributed. Mike and Sheila spent several hours the afternoon of March 12 studying current salaries as they compare with the average salaries for comparable highway jobs in the towns of Ashfield, Charlemont, Gill, Hawley, and Leyden. The total proposed increase which is intended to make the Heath salaries more competitive is about \$15,000.

At 8:20 the discussion shifted to the concerns of Assessors' Clerk Alice Wozniak. Sheila noted that while the Tax Collector is comfortable with the current software Alice is not. Recounting

the long process of negotiation that led to the current software, Sheila said that no changes would be made without careful consideration of the needs of all concerned. Alice said that she would like there to be a third party such as most towns have. She said that Patriot offers a system with a third party that would be useful in interactions between the Assessors and the Tax Collector. Moreover, a third party is valuable in situations where one party is unexpectedly unable to work.

Alice asked about the Shapiro tract of land that was given to the Town. She wondered why the Town is not profiting in some way from that land. Members agreed that it is about time for an assessment of logging possibilities.

Alice expressed a preference for semiannual tax bills over quarterly. She said that tax payers would be less confused. Members noted how much the change from annual to quarterly tax bills had improved the Town's cash flow,

Finally, Alice said that she would like the Town to hire someone from Patriot for \$600 a day to fix a software problem in identifying properties, separating them, and reclassifying them. She suggested that the overlay surplus for FY10 of \$5,300 be released to the Overlay Surplus Account. The suggestion was made by Selectboard members that a line for 'Assessor's Consultant' be added to the Assessors' budget.

The discussion turned to special projects. Sheila said that it may be possible to have the Green Community Initiative pay for insulation for both the Community Hall and Sawyer Hall. The Town would have to take the steps required to become a Green Community. The boiler in Sawyer Hall needs replacing at a cost of 8 to 10 thousand dollars. Other projects include the EOC roof, removing mold in the Sawyer Hall foyer, and removing mold in the Town garages. Finally, there is work needed to get the Sawyer Hall oil tank to comply with environmental regulations.

At 9:46 pm the Finance Committee left to reconvene downstairs. Members read the minutes of the March 5<sup>th</sup> meeting. They were approved with emendations. The committee reviewed the four scenarios in Don's March 12 analysis entitled 'Further Thoughts on the Fiscal 2014 Budget, Heath Finance Committee (per DCF)'. There was support for scenario #3 which would mean a reduction of \$1.00 in the tax rate. In this scenario the increase in Stabilization would be only \$6,000, a cause for some concern. Free Cash might be the source of an additional increase of 50 thousand dollars in Stabilization.

Members recalled the discussion of Highway Department salaries. There was interest in seeking salary data from towns comparable to Heath but not included in the group of five used by Mike and Sheila.

Brian came downstairs to inform the committee that there would be a vote on the budget at the April 9<sup>th</sup> meeting. Also, the April 2<sup>nd</sup> Selectboard meeting has been switched to April 1<sup>st</sup>.

The meeting adjourned at 10:17 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ned Wolf, Secretary