



Topsfield Finance Committee

Minutes to the Meetings

Meeting was held in the COA Activities Room, Topsfield Town Hall

Remote participation was also possible via a posted Zoom link

September 27, 2021

Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, this meeting will be conducted in person. We will also attempt to include via remote means, in accordance with applicable law. This means that members of the public body as well as members of the public may access this meeting in person, or via virtual means. In person attendance will be at the meeting location listed above, and it is possible that any or all members of the public body may attend remotely, with in-person attendance consisting of members of the public. The meeting may also be accessed remotely via contact provided below. When required by law or allowed by the Chair, persons wishing to provide public comment or otherwise participate in the meeting, may do so by in person attendance, or by accessing the meeting remotely, as noted above. Additionally, the meeting may be broadcast at a later date via the town YouTube channel and Boxford Cable Television.

I. Call to Order: Summer Chair Che Elwell called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM with Karen Dow, Karen Duval, Jon Guido, Mike Hartmann, David Larson, and Eric Menzer present. Also present: Catherine Gabriel, Town Accountant; Beth Willis, Town Clerk (via Zoom); and Kevin Harutunian, Town Administrator. Members of the public present: none. All votes at the meeting were taken by roll call, for the benefit of any remote participants.

II. Confirmation of Reappointee Oaths and Ethics Training Completion: All done.

III. FY2022 Finance Committee Reorganization:

a. Election of the Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary: A nomination was made by Jon Guido for Che Elwell as the Committee Chair, seconded by Eric Menzer. Voted in favor 6-0-1 with Che Elwell abstaining.

A nomination was made by Eric Menzer for Jon Guido as the Committee Vice Chair, seconded by David Larson, voted in favor 6-0-1 with Jon Guido abstaining.

A nomination was made by Mike Hartmann for Karen Dow as the Committee Clerk, seconded by Jon Guido, voted in favor 6-0-1 with Karen Dow abstaining.

b. Fin Com Liaison Assignments: Che asked that each Finance Committee

member review possible liaison assignments. Mike is willing to remain as the modeler. Some assignments will require significant time to sort through budgetary impacts, so the workload should be distributed, with secondary/backup liaisons for Elementary Schools, Masconomet and Police. Impacts include further progress on Topsfield Elementary School Committee goals, Masconomet collective bargaining, and federal/state community policing standards. Assignments will be discussed further at the next meeting.

c. Fin Com Email Monitoring: Che Elwell will monitor the general Finance Committee email; no emails received prior to this meeting.

d. Fin Com Website: Che Elwell will explore how to post updated content until we have a Minutes Secretary. The FinCom clerk will take the minutes for the fall to reduce spending, until meeting minutes get complicated and require a Minutes Secretary.

IV. Discussion on successful FY2022 process and areas of focus for FY2023:

- David suggested discussing Planning Board articles earlier for informational purposes, with voting the FinCom recommendations after the Planning Board makes their final votes.
- Mike requested a draft warrant earlier in the process, for careful proof-reading
- Mike will display the model on the screen (and via Zoom screen-sharing) during model discussions.
- Eric suggested coordination among the three towns on the Masco budget; Karen Duval reported this happened during the Masco budget meetings.
- Che has talked with Kevin about the surprise budget amendment from the Board of Health during the May 2021 Annual Town Meeting, and the need for all to respect the budget process. Kevin plans to send a “respect the process” message to all department heads next week.

V. Discuss potential areas of focus for FY2023 and beyond:

- Eric: downtown revitalization.
- David: federal and state mandates in education, e.g. for universal pre-K, who funds and for how long?
- Karen Dow: people ask why their taxes are so high; one year of property taxes on a typical house doesn’t cover the cost of one child for one school year, never mind other town services. Che estimates it takes about 15 years to cover the cost of educating one child K-12.
- Mike: should the Town take control of the Emerson Fields?
- Kevin: Perkins Row bridge by Steward needs to be rebuilt. One-way traffic until then is working. Likely FY2026 before the design and construction is complete; MA DOT expected to cover the anticipated \$5M cost.
- Karen Duval: improve citizen engagement; visuals/projections to explain what annual increases in department budgets lead to. Catherine is not sure there has been time to update the 5-year budget projection, which ideally would be done August-September. David

points out this is a useful tool. MA DOR also has a new projection tool.

- Jon: have a workshop **before** the budget forum to provide general voter education on how the Town government works, separate from budget information.
- David: 5-year capital plan is important.
- David: What are the past and planned uses for the federal COVID-related funds for schools? Karen Duval: Masco has been transparent. Kevin: working on it for Town/Elementary.
- Karen Duval: build on COVID experience to re-invent education.

VI. Fall meeting schedule: Che to set up proposed schedule, will aim for nights that don't conflict with Select Board meetings, where possible. Expect to issue FY2023 guidelines by 11/8/21. Next meetings are 10/18 and 11/1 at 6:30 pm.

VII. Topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chair 48 hours in advance of the meeting: David asked if FY2021 was closed out and verified. Catherine reports new auditors will be in 10/18 to check FY2020 and work on FY2021. She'll send budget-to-actual for FY2020 and FY2021. The State is behind on certification, free cash likely not official until January.

VIII. Adjourn: A motion was made by Karen Dow to adjourn at 7:40 PM, seconded by Eric Menzer and voted in favor 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Dow

Attachments: none