



Topsfield Finance Committee
Minutes to the Meetings
Meeting was held via Zoom Video Conference
January 26, 2021

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the Topsfield Board of Selectman was conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible. Specific information and the general guidelines for remote participation by members of the public and/or parties with a right and/or requirement to attend this meeting can be found on the Topsfield website, at www.topsfieldma.gov.

I. Call to Order: Chair Che Elwell called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM with Karen Dow, Karen Duval, Jon Guido, Mike Hartmann, Eric Menzer, and David Larson present. Also present: Catherine Gabriel, Town Accountant; Kevin Harutunian, Town Administrator; Debi Morong, Select Board Executive Assistant; Dick Gandt, Select Board Member; Charise Rohm-Nulsen, Topsfield Elementary School Committee Chair; Dr. Scott Morrision, Tri-Town School Union Superintendent; Steve Greenberg, TTU Assistant Superintendent; Carroll Willa, Steward School Principal; Zillie Bhuj, Masconomet School Committee; Melissa Ogden, Masconomet School Committee; Dr. Michael Harvey, Masconomet Regional School District Superintendent. Members of the public present: none. All votes at the meeting were taken by roll call, as this was a meeting via remote participation.

II. Department Presentations:

- a. Topsfield Elementary Schools:** Charise Rohm-Nulsen noted the schools appreciate working with the Town through difficult times; sharing of CARES funds has been important for school operation, covering rental of a tent for outdoor mask breaks, and HEPA filters. The draft FY22 budget is a level-service budget, which means once again, long-term priorities are not included: no free 5-day kindergarten, no HVAC specialist on staff, no technology in the operating budget, no grant writer. The first draft budget shows a 5.48% increase in the Town contribution compared to FY21, roughly \$248k over the FinCom 2.75% guideline. Enrollment is projected to be stable. Budget assumes a return to normal operation, and has increased use of the kindergarten tuition revolving fund. Annual end-user technology replacement on a 5-year cycle would cost about \$110k. Next TESC meeting is 2/4 to deliberate on the budget.
- b. Masconomet Regional School District:** Dr. Harvey discussed the budget

development calendar. The draft FY22 budget assumes level services and normal operations, showing a 2.7% increase in the operating budget, and a 2.9% increase in the total assessment (just below the FinCom guideline of 3%). Topsfield's share of the budget will increase due to an enrollment shift. A decrease in Middle School enrollment allows for a decrease in personnel costs, while transportation, pension and SPED costs are up. The next MRSC meeting is 2/3 to review budget details. The MRSC policy subcommittee is seeking to phase in a 5-year rolling average to determine enrollment share. A request to go from quarterly to monthly town payments of assessments has been changed to just different due dates for quarterly payments. No capital requests are anticipated for FY22.

The FinCom is pleased that both school districts have draft budgets earlier this year, providing greater clarity to Topsfield's overall budget situation, and appreciates all the hard work. The Masconomet guideline is 0.25% higher than the Elementary Schools guideline, as the Masconomet budget includes pension and insurance costs, which typically increase significantly more than 2.5%.

III. Liaison Updates:

- **John:** BoH should visit, perhaps 2/8. COA has a new director, Kathleen Barbarisi; she'll come to a meeting to be introduced.
- **K. Dow:** Fire will visit 2/1; discussing how best to direct ambulance revenue to cover operating costs (Ambulance Enterprise? Stabilization? Revolving?).
- **Mike:** Treasurer will visit. Assessor looking to pay a consultant to properly value Gas and Electric Company property; other towns have seen a net revenue of roughly \$10-20k.
- **Che:** Possible use of Fair View Farm on Rt. 1 for Cabot Theater outdoor concerts; Kevin reports plan withdrawn but a smaller scale program might be proposed. Discussion among BoS, Highway and Coppermine Rd. residents about paving Middleton section of Coppermine, for which Topsfield has an easement. Rep. Brad Hill's earmark in MA budget for \$40k for paving was removed this year due to COVID pandemic. Neighborhood would like to see a warrant article at May 2021 Town Meeting. What is the implication for other unaccepted roads in town?
- **K. Duval:** Police will visit 2/1.

IV. Review of Model: Mike reports the latest version is \$478k over the levy limit with both school districts at guidelines. To this should be added about \$165k for Topsfield's share of Masconomet budget, due to enrollment shift noted above. Free Cash is not yet certified so almost no free cash has been applied to reduce the tax rate.

V. Minutes: 1/11 minutes will be voted next week.

VI. Next meetings: 2/1: Highway/Parks & Cemetery, Fire and Police will visit. 2/8: Board of Health, Treasurer, perhaps others.

VII. Topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chair 48 hours in advance of the meeting:

- Che: Jon did a nice job at the BoS meeting remembering John Spencer
- Kevin: BoS work session 1/27 to review the remainder of the Omnibus budget, leading to version 2 as of 2/4. Capital and any non-traditional articles will be addressed in a few weeks. A Zoom Open House on the operating budget will be held 1/28. The capital Open House on 1/21 was attended by the BoS, several FinCom members and a few others.

VIII. Adjourn: A motion was made by Karen Dow to adjourn at 8:56 PM, seconded by Eric Menzer and voted in favor 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Dow

Attachments: none