



Town of Griswold

Board of Finance
Regular Meeting
October 16, 2012
7:00 PM

Town Hall Meeting Room
APPROVED MINUTES



1. Roll Call/Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM

Board of Finance Members Present:

Steve Merchant, Sr. – Chairman
Peter Dorff – Vice Chairman
Brian Baker
Scott Davis
Gail Rooke-Norman
Daniel Webster
John Wolkowski

Also Present:

Erik Christensen, Director of Finance
Philip Anthony, First Selectman
11 other persons

2. Approval of Minutes

S. Davis stated concerns that with the length of discussion that occurred regarding the Town ethics policy, more information needs to be included in Item 4a of the minutes such as the discussion of S. Davis's ability to vote on the Board of Education budget as a result of G. Rooke-Norman's comment regarding Section 35-10(c) which indicates the ability of S. Davis to vote on the board of Education budget and what the consensus of the Board was regarding that issue. D. Webster addressed the same concerns regarding omissions. **MOTION:** P. Dorff made a motion that was seconded by D. Webster to table the approval of the regular meeting minutes from September 18, 2012 to allow requested changes to be made to Item 4a. All in favor; **motion carried.**

3. New Business

a) Finance Director monthly report.

A copy of said report is available in the Finance Office. S. Merchant suggested moving item a after item b on the agenda. The Finance Director stated that there was not a lot going on yet this year. Revenues collected to this point are around \$9.5 million which is around 31% of the budgeted revenues. One thing that he was made aware of from the Board of Education is that tuition revenue is expected to be about \$140,000 less than what they had budgeted. This is a result of less Special Education students from out of town than expected. Last year there were three out of town students that were going to the alternative high school but this year there are none. That accounts for \$121,000. Special education students at the high school decreased from 24 last year to 20 this year which are around \$21,000 per student and the alternative high school students are roughly \$40,000 each so they are looking at around a \$140,000 shortfall. Other than that revenues are looking normal and there are no concerns. The Finance Director stated that expenditures thus far are around \$4.1 million. This does not

include expenses for September for the Board of Education which are around \$1.7 million. He indicated there has only been one line item overspent and that is the transfer station electricity item but that is going to correct itself because they have the solar panels and once per year in April we get refunded for the energy generated and sold back to CL&P which will be put back into that line item and clear itself out. He stated at this time there is nothing else overspent and there is nothing else that looks like it will be overspent. He stated we did have savings with our MIRMA assessment that was expected to be around \$16,000 which was included in the workers comp line item but after their audit we received a credit for that amount and will save \$16,000. D. Webster asked if there was any way the reports can include a column for percentage of budget remaining for expenditures. The Finance Director stated that he should be able to add a column to the report. D. Webster indicated that he sees there was money paid for travel in the Selectmen's department and asked if we had receipts. The Finance Director indicated that he believes that the only one that has been paid for travel is the Second Selectman and he has submitted mileage logs for reimbursement. D. Webster asked what position was in department 1801 line item 5101. The Finance Director indicated that this was the custodian. D. Webster also indicated that it looks like we have been spending a lot in building repairs. The Finance Director indicated that we have been having a lot of problems with the air conditioning unit. D. Webster asked if we have Elected Officials that for whatever reason cannot perform their job duties are we still obligated to pay them weekly. The Finance Director stated that he believes so. D. Webster stated that if they are 4 months, 6 months or a year they are still entitled to their weekly salary. The Finance Director stated that he would have to look into it for an extended period of time like that. P. Dorff asked if there was any word on closing out the middle school project. The finance Director stated that the State just got back to him and they needed a few more bid documents and he has been in contact with Al McClellan at FIP to get.

b) Discussion and possible action on request from Board of Selectmen to change vacant Assistant Assessor position from part-time to full-time.

Philip Anthony spoke on behalf of the Board of Selectmen regarding the Assistant Assessor position. He indicated this is the only department without an assistant at this time. P. Anthony stated the Town has tried to hire a part-time Assistant Assessor for the past year and a half. We were able to hire one but she left after a few months for a full-time position. He indicated the Assessor is backlogged three years and it would also help out when the Assessor is on vacation, sick, etc. S. Merchant asked the Finance Director what the cost would be. The Finance Director stated that the additional cost for the current fiscal year would be \$15,303 based on if the new hire was on the family insurance plan. There was discussion regarding the cost for the rest of the fiscal year. D. Webster asked why this position was not currently posted on the Connecticut Association of Assessing Officers website. P. Anthony stated it was posted in the past but to no avail. P. Anthony stated that it will be tough to keep a part-time person because they will just leave when a full-time position opens up. D. Webster stated he just wants to make sure we are still looking to which P. Anthony stated we have been but not recently. P. Dorff asked what happened with the backlog of work when the part-time Assistant Assessor was here. P. Anthony stated she could only do so much but had to be trained and there was only a minor dent in the backlog before she left. P. Dorff asked P. Anthony where the proposed \$15,303 comes from. P. Anthony stated that was the Board's job to decide. G. Rooke-Norman asked about new computers that were put in place for the general public to reduce the amount of questions for the Assessor and when were they implemented? P. Anthony stated it was

at least a year ago. He also stated that even though the computers are out there, the public still has questions for the Assessor and need help finding street cards, etc. G. Rooke-Norman also stated that at the end of the third paragraph of the Assessor's letter she says that it is the function of the Assessor to discover, list and value. She asked if the value was done by the company hired to do the revaluation. P. Anthony stated that was correct for the reval itself. She then asked how she discovers property. P. Anthony stated one example would be when residents identify properties to the Assessor that the Assessor needs to research and review the assessments. S. Merchant asked if the Assessor went out into the field. P. Anthony stated that she does, sometimes with the Zoning Enforcement Officer and sometimes by herself. D. Webster mentioned that when he was on the Connecticut Association of Assessing Officers website he stated he saw a job posting that would be worth exploring for an Assistant Assessor/Assistant Tax Collector and it seemed to him to make sense that someone doing the assessments also work in the tax collection office because they would be familiar with the taxes that needed to be collected. He stated that several Towns appeared to be heading in that direction and it may be an opportunity to save the taxpayers some money. P. Anthony stated that we have a Tax Collector and an Assistant Tax Collector in place for this fiscal year that is fully funded so it is a moot point for this fiscal year. P. Dorff stated he is opposed to hiring a full-time Assistant Assessor this early in the year and taking that much out of the contingency amount. D. Webster stated that the taxpayers just passed the budget knowing that was a part-time position. P. Anthony asked the Finance director if the money that has not been paid out of the Assistant Assessor line item was still in the budget. The Finance Director explained that the \$15,303 was the net of what is in the current budget and what we would have to spend for the rest of the fiscal year. P. Anthony asked to confirm that was based on the higher end family insurance and could be conceivably less. The Finance Director stated that this was correct. P. Anthony asked how much less it would be if they were not on the family insurance. The Finance Director stated that if they were single it would drop it by around \$7,000. **MOTION:** D. Webster made a **motion** that was seconded by J. Wolkowski to reject the request for a full-time Assistant Assessor position and leave it at part-time. There was no discussion. All in favor; **motion carried.**

c) **Discussion and possible action on request for funding from the Snowflake Festival Committee.**

S. Merchant asked if this was just a request for next year. The Finance Director stated that they were looking for money for this year. G. Rooke-Norman asked if there was money in last year's budget that we didn't use. The Finance Director stated that they have not had an appropriation since he believes 07/08. P. Dorff mentioned that we have had to make a lot of cuts to donations during the budget process and it doesn't seem right to start handing those back out. D. Webster asked what the date of the parade was. It was mentioned that it was November 18th. G. Rooke-Norman asked if activities like this were usually under the recreation budget. The Finance Director said it could be either recreation or contributions. G. Rooke-Norman asked if there were any funds in the recreation budget that might be available for that. The Finance Director stated that he did not think so but he would have to ask Ryan. There was discussion regarding the event and it is good for the kids in Town. G. Rooke-Norman stated she can't see how they could do \$1,000. **MOTION:** G. Rooke-Norman made a **motion** that was seconded by J. Wolkowski to approve \$400 for the Snowflake Festival with the request that there be a line item next year so it can be addressed at the appropriate time during the budget process. P. Dorff asked where the money was coming from. The Finance Director stated the contingency/exchange account and there

was \$45,000 that has not been used yet. B. Baker, S. Davis, G. Rooke-Norman, D. Webster, J. Wolkowski in favor, P. Dorff opposed; **motion carried.**

4. Old Business

a) Discussion of Town ethics policy

S. Merchant stated that the Ethics Commission has ruled but was not positive that they ruled on what the Board was looking for. The Finance Director stated that the letter he had sent to N. Sylvestre stated the question that was asked at the last meeting and that's what was ruled on. G. Rooke-Norman stated that she went to the meeting and the question was not brought up or discussed by the Ethics Commission and she is not aware of any special meeting that was called but frankly no chairman should make a determination without it being discussed and voted on by a board and rarely is a chairman authorized to do so. B. Baker asked the Finance Director if the letter provided to the Board was the response from N. Sylvestre to the letter sent by the Finance Director. The Finance Director indicated that it was. B. Baker also said that he had a problem that the letter was not dated. G. Rooke-Norman stated that she has an issue that there are 6 or 8 or 9 line items in the budget that we need an answer so we can have a comfort level and move on as far as all of those line items and not just the Building Official's salary. S. Merchant asked the Finance Director why the letter only asked about the Building Official's salary line item. The Finance Director and D. Webster stated that was what the Board had asked for at the last meeting. There was discussion about what was asked. P. Dorff mentioned he remembers the question the same way D. Webster had said it. D. Webster stated that he would have like to have been at the Ethics Commission meeting on October 4th but was out of Town on business so subsequently he tried to get a copy of the minutes of which none exist so he tried to get a copy of the tape which does exist but is blank. He went to get a copy of the tape from the July 12th and that tape was blank also. He stated that was a direct violation of the Town code because they are supposed to submit meeting minutes like any other committee and they have to be available within 7 days to the public. S. Merchant asked if anyone has made the Selectmen aware of this. No one was aware of this. D. Webster stated that it appears the Ethics Committee is not following the same rules that they need to follow. There was a discussion on where the Ethics Commission met. It was indicated they meet in the Town Hall meeting room and G. Rooke-Norman stated that there was a person saying that they were all set to tape. D. Webster stated that first and foremost he wants to get to the bottom of the July 12th meeting because there was a subsequent Board of Finance meeting that some were not at and he wants to know why S. Merchant had mentioned that the First Selectman said the meeting of the Ethics Committee on July 12th never happened and subsequently at the next Board of Finance meeting the Chairman told him the meeting never happened when he had the meeting minutes in his hand and he also stated that the agenda for the October 4th meeting had approval of the July 12th meeting minutes. D. Webster stated that we need some answers and it may be time to call in the State Ethics Commission on this. B. Baker questioned whether the Ethics Commission was capable of handling the scope of this inquiry. He believes that they don't have the experience or the knowledge to give the Board a ruling on any of their questions and he also believed we should bring in the State Ethics Commission. G. Rooke-Norman stated that she shares the distress but she does not believe the State has statutory jurisdiction to come in and substitute their opinion in a municipality that has an ordinance that has regulations and has an appointed Ethics Commission. S. Merchant stated that he thinks if we call the State they are going to tell us that we have to try to work it out within but he is not sure what that would entail. He does not think they would come in until after it is discussed with

the Selectmen. P. Dorff stated that it is not the Board's responsibility to monitor the Ethics Commission and thinks the only thing to do is to send a letter to the Selectmen stating these facts and not getting adequate responses from the Ethics Commission and ask them to resolve the problem. There was discussion about what should be included in the letter. G. Rooke-Norman made a suggestion to send the Ethics Commission a request for an advisory opinion on the building department line items and ask that it be included on their next agenda. G. Rooke-Norman is concerned all Ethics Committee members never saw the original letter from Erik Christensen. S. Merchant stated he believes it is time for the Selectmen to look into what is going on. There was discussion on if there should be a joint meeting with the Ethics Commission and Board of Selectmen. S. Merchant asked if the Ethics Commission has regular meetings. The Finance Director stated that he believes they meet quarterly. G. Rooke-Norman stated that it is time to send a written request to the Board of Selectmen stating that in the ethics regulations it says that the Ethics Commission has to provide a certain amount of training and nothing is being done. S. Merchant mentioned that he discussed that with the First Selectman. S. Davis mentioned that he would hope that the Ethics Commission would follow the policy. He stated it is pretty clear cut what is considered a violation. P. Dorff asked to clarify what was to be included in the letter to the Board of Selectmen and discussion followed regarding incidents previously mentioned. D. Webster asked to go on record stating that if Gail had not brought it to his attention tonight that she was at the meeting and this was never discussed, we might have conducted business only to find out that he was in conflict. There was discussion of if there has ever been a formal complaint regarding anyone on the Board that has voted on an item that they shouldn't have. No one had knowledge of any formal complaints. There was discussion regarding what the advisory opinion was going to state. G. Rooke-Norman stated that all line items in the building department would be included. D. Webster asked about any other perceived conflicts that may be needed to be ruled upon. S. Davis stated that per section 35-10(c) gives him the ability to vote but if the Board wants an advisory opinion that is ok. G. Rooke-Norman stated that she is concerned that if the Board starts giving them the entire budget it will be too much. S. Merchant stated he believes it is best not to overwhelm the Ethics Commission at this time. P. Dorff stated that he thinks it would be a good idea to ask about the Board of Education as well. S. Merchant asked the Finance Director to notify the Board of Finance of when the next Ethics Commission meeting is. **MOTION:** G. Rooke-Norman made a **motion** that was seconded by B. Baker to authorize the Finance Director to submit the advisory opinions to the Ethics Commission and letter to the Board of Selectmen on the Board's behalf as well as authorizing the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to approve the letter after editing. D. Webster asked if the Board can be e-mailed the letter prior to submission to the Board of Selectman. The Finance Director stated that he would e-mail a copy to allow for changes or suggestions. All in favor; **motion carried.**

5. Any Other Business

No other business.

- 6. Adjournment: MOTION:** D. Webster made a **motion** that was seconded by B. Baker to adjourn. There was no discussion. All in favor; **motion carried.** S. Merchant, Sr. adjourned the meeting at 8:04 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Acting Recording Secretary
Erik Christensen