

Minutes of the Meeting of the Heath Finance Committee
July 25, 2023 @ 6:30 pm
Atrium, 18 Jacobs Road

Present: Tom Lively (Chair), Ned Wolf, and Will Emmet

Absent: Alice Wozniak, Bob McGahan

Tom called the meeting to order at 6:37.

Member's reviewed Ned's minutes of July 20th. The one recommended change was to replace the first sentence of the first paragraph on p. 2 with "Will said that repairing a truck such as truck #2 which has a large number of electronic engine controls requires specialized knowledge beyond the scope of a standard mechanic."

Tom moved that the minutes for July 20th, 2023 be approved with the above revised description of maintaining the electronics. Will seconded the motion. The motion passed with 3 ayes and 0 nays.

At 6:55 members left the atrium for the Special Town Meeting in the cafeteria.

From 7:00 until 7:55 the FinCom met in the cafeteria with Town Coordinator Hilma Sumner, Moderator Eric Sumner, Select Board members Robyn Provost-Carlson, Sue Lively, and Elissa Viarengo. Also present were Highway Department members Jeff Johnston and Kyle Jarvis.

The moderator called the meeting to order at 7:04.

Article 1, which would be to make available for the possible purchase of a second hand truck \$104K from the Equipment/Vehicle Stabilization account, was moved and seconded. Will spoke about the FinCom position in support of Article 1. His points were stated on the handout he had sent to the FinCom on July 24th.

Highway Superintendent Jeff Johnston spoke of how the body of the 2012 truck #2 is getting tender. The total spent on repairs of the 2021 since 2018 at an out of house garage is more than \$47K. Replacement of the body would cost at least \$35K. He said that following the recent ATM, he decided we should look for a good used truck.

Jeff read a report from Raymond's Repair in Northfield about servicing International trucks like truck #2. They tell of a "steady decline in performance and reliability over the years and an increase in repair costs. Engine problems include oil pressure sensing switches, engine position

sensors, o-ring sensors, and oil and exhaust coolers leading to \$10K - \$20K repairs. Idle time is very damaging to these trucks.”

Mike Smith asked about the value of the 2012 truck if it went to trade or auction. What would happen to the excess if a used truck were purchased for less than \$104K?

Jeff said that he hasn't looked into trade or auction of the 2012.

Robyn said that the excess would sit there until a motion at a town meeting were approved to put it back into stabilization.

Ken Gilbert asked if any cost analysis has been done of buying a used truck versus paying someone who uses his own truck or some other option. Will said that there was approved at the May ATM an increase in the amount for winter wages in case the need arises.

Mike Shattuck asked whether we can make it through the winter with the trucks we have as well as 5 plow blades, 3 sanders, and 3 employees. Jeff said that a plow blade can be put on a pickup, but it would take a beating on some of the roads. He said we could bring in a fourth person for a big storm.

Sue Gruen asked how much would be left in Equipment/Vehicle Stabilization if all the \$104K were spent. Ned said that only a few hundred dollars would be left.

Mike Smith asked why not use the grader routinely? Jeff said that they want to extend the life of the grader for the work on dirt roads that no other piece of equipment can do. The grader had a 'kind of' transmission overhaul about 5 years ago and we're coming up on the expected lifetime of that repair.

Bill Gran asked whether the Select Board and FinCom have updated the Capital Improvements plan of 2017. That plan called for replacing the 2003 truck #1 last year. The Select Board and the FinCom said that they have not updated that plan. Will spoke of the present reality of having 2 trucks on borrowed time. He said it is better to seek funding now than during the next storm when some truck gives out.

Cal Carr asked why the article asking for funding had changed from \$195K at the May ATM to \$104K at the July 25th STM? Sue Lively explained that the original plan had been to replace truck #1 with a new, smaller truck. \$104K had been built up in stabilization with a view to

combining it with other funding to total \$195K. Since the ATM article did not pass, the decision was made to seek a used truck with just the \$104K thereby not impacting the FY24 tax rate. Cal spoke of the Town's needing to replenish stabilization if Article 1 were to pass. He asked the FinCom whether the funds to replenish stabilization would come from tax dollars. Tom said that they would.

Adam Bergeron asked about having 4 trucks and just 3 employees. Jeff said they may seek a part-time person for winter plowing.

David Gordon said he understands that another reliable truck is needed. He asked about getting an extra driver with his own equipment saying that we might not want to trust our recently purchased vehicle to an unknown driver.

Kara Leistyna asked about the warranty for the 2012 truck in light of its repair record. She also said she's leery of buying a used truck unless there's a careful checking of the truck's condition. Jeff said that they did take advantage of the warranty up and through 2017 when it ran out. Yes, they will, if the opportunity arises do a Car-Fax like check on a used truck before purchasing. Jeff himself would not buy without first consulting with the Select Board and the FinCom.

Karen Brooks said the Town should wait until a truck fully breaks down before buying something new. She said her sense is that stabilization funds are for a rainy day and questioned whether we're at a rainy day.

Sheila Litchfield said the use of stabilization monies to subsidize broadband installations has been successful. She said she trusts people like Jeff who have the best interest of the Town in mind and wants people to get home safely.

Jean Gran said that purchasing a used truck is risky. She asked whether the Select Board had compared the cost of purchasing a used truck versus hiring a driver. Robyn said that they had carefully compared the cost of a temporary winter driver versus the cost of a fulltime employee. She said we don't know whether we can find a person with equipment to commit to us.

Pam Porter said that with 2 trucks on borrowed time a decision not to approve Article 1 could be risky.

There was a motion which was seconded to end debate. The motion passed with a two-thirds vote. The vote on Article 1 was taken with 41 ayes and 24 nays. 45 ayes were needed to pass, and Article 1 did not pass.

Robyn said that town counsel has said that Article 2 must come up at an ATM, not an STM.

End-of-Year Transfers

Hilma said that she has talked with the Accountant who suggested that he be the one who decides how the needed transfers are made. He asked if we're OK with his doing the transfers.

Both the Select Board and the FinCom said they are interested in seeing a list from the Accountant of proposed transfers. The proposed date and time for both committees to consider end-of-year transfers is Monday, July 31st at 4:00 pm.

Tom moved that the FinCom adjourn at 8:27. Will seconded the motion. The motion passed with 3 ayes and 0 nays.

Respectfully submitted,

Ned Wolf