

DRAFT

Minutes of the Meeting of the Heath Finance Committee

December 21, 2023 @ 6:30 pm

The atrium, 18 Jacobs Road

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

Absent: Alice Wozniak

Tom called the meeting to order at 6:33.

He reported on a letter that Heath has received from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) stating that the town will receive a payment of \$6,465 as its share of forest products payments. Heath qualifies because part of H.O. Cook State Forest is within the town's boundaries.

Tom said that in addition \$100K will be added to Heath's Chapter 90 funds.

Members read the minutes of the December 5th Finance Committee Meeting. Bob moved that the minutes be accepted as amended. Will seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

Members reviewed the draft of the letter to Department Heads, Boards, and Committees asking that they submit their 2025 budget requests.

Action Taken *Bob moved that the letter with 4 corrected dates be accepted. Will seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote.*

Salt Shed Update

Bob said that he met on Dec. 7th at the current salt shed with a representative of Iron Horse Structures from Fitchburg. Bob gave the building size as 60' X 80', which is approximately the size proposed in the plan from Walter Cudnohufsky and Associates. The person from Iron Horse gave \$219K as his estimate for the cost of just the building.

Bob visited the website of Calhoun, the company that makes the structures which Iron Horse uses. The estimated cost there is \$6 - \$20 per square foot. For a building 60' X 80' that would mean an upper estimate of \$96K, or less than half of \$219K. We need more clarity.

Is a building as big as 60' X 80' needed? It's area would be double the area of the current salt shed which is 40' X 60'. Committee members recommend that any replacement salt shed be larger than the current salt shed but don't think that a structure that's twice as big is needed.

Tom pointed out that we are the only town putting salt and sand in the same building. The FinCom understands the intent of the highway department is to have a wall of concrete blocks separating salt and sand as in the current salt shed.

Members said that Robyn would likely have contacts to help gather the information needed for an estimate of the cost of replacing the current salt shed with a new one at that site.

Community Hall Closing

Tom said that the Community Hall is now closed due to mold. Members discussed the mold remediation needed in both the Community Hall downstairs and in the stairwell of Sawyer Hall. Hilma has contacted the insurance company.

Members recalled what was written about the Community Hall in the June 11, 2020 Heath Town Facilities Task Force Report to the Select Board: The Community Hall should be open only from June 1st to October 1st unless space can be leased to cover operating costs. Ned said that if the thermostat were turned down to 55 and the kitchen cabinet doors were left open, the pipes would not freeze.

Action Taken *Bob moved that the Finance Committee recommends what was stated in the June 11, 2020 Town Facilities Task Force Report to the Select Board: The Community Hall should be open only from June 1st until October 1st unless space can be leased to cover operating costs. Will seconded the motion. The motion passed by a vote of 3 ayes and one nay.*

MLP Manager, Partime or Fulltime

Some concern was expressed about what the MLP Manager does. Are the number of hours decreasing now that construction of the broadband network is complete? Yes, the MLP is paying the MLP Manager's salary, but that is still an indirect cost to the Town.

Ned said that there is information about what the MLP Manager does in the minutes of the MLB, and that there are things that Sheila once did but no longer has done since the completion of the network.

Stipends

Bob got a sum greater than \$12K when he added up stipends which appear in Article 3 of the ATM Warrant. Not all committee members take their stipends, but the sum of stipends paid combined with other costs is significant.

Members noted again how the MTRSD assessment is close to being half the tax levy. Will the MTRSD request again at the 2024 ATMs that the change in the method of assessment they recommended in 2023 be approved?

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday, January 18th at 6:30

Will moved that the meeting be adjourned at 8:19. Bob seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,
Ned Wolf