

Draft Minutes – Acton Finance Committee  
October 25, 2005  
Acton Town Hall – Room 204 7:30 PM

Pursuant to a notice duly posted with the Town Clerk and with a quorum of members present, the Acton Finance Committee convened at 7:30 pm on October 25, 2005. The Agenda for this meeting is made by part the Minutes and is attached.

Members present for the meeting: Jonathan Chinitz, Pat Clifford, Pat Easterly, Bob Evans, Herman Kabakoff, Allen Nitschelm, Steve Noone, Rita Roeber and David Stone, Chair, and associate member Kent Sharp.

**CHAIRMAN’S INTRODUCTION**

The chair called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm and welcomed Ms. Ashton, the League of Women Voters Observer. He announced that Mr. Nitschelm had been reappointed to the vacancy created by Gim Hom’s resignation.

**STATE OF THE TOWN:**

The following observations were offered as a recap to the State of the Town meeting on October 24.

Stone: head count is the only controllable variable in the budget and yet is not addressed directly in the materials or discussion. The ALG budget contemplates a 4% increase in salaries that foreshadows an override even if the budget can be brought into balance this year.

Nitschelm: asked if the contract that results from collective bargaining needs ratification from Town Meeting and was advised that it did not.

Easterly: disappointed that there was not more feedback from the public on the capital spending issue

Chinitz: felt the turnout was low; believes better attendance is related to proximity of a proposed override

Clifford: content of program contributed to low attendance compared to intense interest in transfer station and override vote last year

Nitschelm: Town is constrained by the promise not to override; FinCom could take a leadership position to force an override if there is an operating deficit.

Easterly and Stone both said it was too early in the budget process to make determinations on specific spending amounts.

Roeber: There were a wide range of views offered on Economic Development; the tie in is the Master Plan; it is time to revisit the Master Plan.

Evans: Reminded the group that the Schools are in a search process for a new Director of Pupil Services. He is a member of the committee conducting the search and anyone having input should contact him.

## **PUBLIC ACCESS TO FINCOM E-MAIL**

After updating the committee on technical aspects of this effort, the Chair was encouraged to proceed with setting up the Yahoo Group for FinCom email correspondence. It is expected that there will be information about it on the Town's web site and in other local publications.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **Municipal Benchmarking**

Mr. Stone reminded the committee that the cost of the service presented to FinCom was \$7500 and asked for further discussion.

Mr. Nitschelm said that in light of the huge budget problems facing the town it would be important to identify areas that stick out as places to save more money. He characterized the decision as a "proverbial no brainer" because the cost was low and likely to be covered with savings. He moved that FinCom recommend purchasing the Municipal Benchmarking Service. Mr. Noone seconded the motion.

Mr. Kabakoff asked about the reactions of the Manager and Assistant Manager and the Superintendent to the proposals.

Mr. Nitschelm said Mr. Johnson and Mr. Murray were noncommittal and that there were inaccuracies in the materials presented to them.

Ms. Clifford asked who on the staff would be responsible for doing the vetting of the materials before the report can be finalized, how much time is required and how was that time to be funded.

Ms. Roeber said that in order to get a meaningful report this would involve a big undertaking and raised the concern that there would have to be a buy in by all levels of staff.

Ms. Easterly said that while she supports the concept of benchmarking, her experience had been that unless all levels buy into the effort, the process dies out. She believes it will be time consuming and is concerned with the length of the report and would not support spending money without seeing the benefit.

Mr. Evans said that the report seemed generally appealing but that there was little specific data and expressed concern over its possible use. He referred to the Town's reengineering study which took a great deal of time and yielded only some successes. He felt the time required of staff would not be useful

Mr. Sharp raised the issue of the validity of the peer group's data. If each town examines the data as part of the purchase then how can we judge how good the numbers are for towns in the peer group that are not clients of Municipal Benchmarking.

Ms. Ashton said that when the School Committee met with the Municipal Benchmarking staff several years ago, they were concerned that the reports did not reflect an understanding of the policy decisions underlying the data gathered by DOE. She cited the way in which teachers can be counted as administrators in systems that give department heads certain responsibilities.

Mr. Noone said in his experience with benchmarking there is no perfect survey and that the time required to vet the numbers is as much time as can be put into the effort. He endorsed the idea of at least having a set of real numbers that everyone can use.

Mr. Nitschelm suggested that as a committee FinCom can find places to raise revenues and make cuts and this report would be a starting place.

The Chair determined that there were enough unanswered questions to preclude a vote and suggested Mr. Nitschelm withdraw his motion until there could be more information gathered particularly on the buy in issue as it affects the Board of Selectmen and the School Committee.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**BOS:** (Kabakoff) October 17<sup>th</sup> meeting included discussion of a site plan for a drive through Sovereign Bank at Kelly's Corner. Questions were raised about how consistent the design would be with the village plan for that area. A proposal for a design guideline committee was approved; discussed traffic speed and pedestrian safety on Musket Drive; suspended liquor license for Daniela's restaurant for seven days.

**ACHC:** (Clifford) Reported on census information for Franklin Place 40B; estimate is that there are 0.8 children per unit; three of the twelve units are affordable.

**EDC:** (Roeber) Continuing to pull information together on commercial development.

**HIT:** (Chinitz) Statements for September data are favorable and support contribution to the trust fund balance.

**APS:** (Easterly) Accepted gift from McCarthy-Towne PTSO \$96,000. Energy contract finalized – now estimated to be \$350K over budget; no school committee comment on

ALG process as reported from representatives. Mr. Chinitz observed that at the State of the Town meeting, the School Committee and administration presented School Choice as a means of raising revenue to reduce class size as opposed to a way to bank revenue to keep future costs down. He suggested that FinCom might want to discuss this approach during budget discussions.

**MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING:**

Mr. Chinitz moved approval of the Minutes of the October 11, 2015, meeting; ms Easterly supported the motion which was adopted without objection.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

At 9:20 pm Ms. Roeber moved adjournment.

Respectfully Submitted,

Patricia Clifford  
Clerk