

DRAFT Minutes – Acton Finance Committee
Date March 25, 2008
Town Hall Room 204



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 March 25, 2008 to review various matters.

Members present for the meeting: Steve Noone (SN), Pat Clifford (PC), Herman Kabakoff (HK), Allen Nitschelm (AN), Kent Sharp (KS), and Pat Easterly (PE), Bill Mullin (BM), Mary Ann Ashton (MA), Bob Evans (BE).

Others Present: Dore Hunter (DH), Steve Ladoux (SL), entire Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), Jon Peterson (JP), and Sharon McManus.

BE discussed his proposed comments regarding the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) hearing associated with the proposed large complex at 48 and 54 Powder Mill Road in Concord. He proposes that the Fincom send a letter to the ZBA opposing a zoning change to accommodate this project. A copy of his proposal is attached to these minutes for reference. AN asked what the argument would be to recommend this project. BE indicated that there could be legal costs associated with an appeal. In addition, the Selectmen (BoS) are asking for some credit toward Acton's affordable housing quota. AN thought that it may be too early in the process for us to take a position. BE said that the ZBA would be making a decision in the next two weeks. DH said that the BoS is annoyed that we are not getting affordable housing credit, the BoS is also asking for traffic mitigation support. BM indicated that he is persuaded to agree with BE.

Motion: BE moved that the Fincom adopt the views contained in his memo and that the chairman communicate such to the ZBA in writing.

BM Second

SN said that this proposal has no benefit to Acton and may create pain for Acton. PE sees risks to our citizens and thinks that the town could be exposed to increased costs.

Vote: AN abstained

All others vote yes. The motion carries 8-0-1.

SN moved to approve the minutes of the Fincom meeting on March 11, 2008. KS second. Motion passed unanimously.

BM moved to approve the minutes of the Fincom meeting on March 18, 2008. SN seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Fran Osgood (FO), Chairman of the TAC discussed Article 21B. This Article will fund a planner to prepare an application for a Suburban Mobility Grant. This grant will help fund a shuttle service, either a flexible on-demand service or a fixed route service. The

planner will also assess the needs of the community to determine exactly what service is most needed. BM agreed that there is a need. \$20K for a study is worth it. BE asked what FO's assessment of the probability of success is. FO said that we have received encouragement.

Discussion of Article 18 – Updated Town Budget. BM moved to approve the \$23,614,000 town operating budget and a total of \$26,384,240 for the total municipal budget with debt service expense. PE second. AN indicated that it is tough to keep track of the numbers. AN has a problem with salary parity. Raises should be based on merit only. The allocated money should go in a reserve fund and the Town Manager should manage it accordingly. He thinks the Fincom should say no to this proposal. SN thinks that AN is overstating the effects of establishing compensation based on merit alone. This proposal puts salary ranges at parity. HK asked if all people will be increased. SL indicated that the position is the driver, not the person. AN asked if this policy will be extended to the future. DH indicated that in the future merit will drive increases. This is a one time adjustment. AN is concerned about sustainability. Revenues are not going up equal to expenses. The budget is up 7%, revenues up only 6%. BM said that every budget year is like a snow flake. Budgets and taxes need to be decoupled because taxes are not the only source of revenue. Next year will be different. Three year plans are not accurate. BM does not want to raise taxes to the max this year. AN said that he used total revenues in his calculations, not just tax revenues. He believes that a 7% increase in expenses in this economy is not sustainable. BM pointed out that next year's budget is not now determined.

VOTE: No – AN
Yes - all other members
The motion passed

Article 19 New Personnel
SN move to approve
BE second.

Separate votes for each position. SN and BE agreed.

Police Officer (\$56K)

Vote to recommend unanimous.

Deputy Police Officer

Vote to recommend unanimous

Assistant Planner

KS stated that the Planning Department is strained.

HK indicated that we should look at this Assistant Planner position as a replacement of the Building Commissioner and not an increase in headcount.

SL indicated that the intent is to fill the Building Commissioner position in addition to hiring an Assistant Planner.

VOTE:

No – HK

Yes – All other members.

Motion passed.

Article 21 Capital Improvements – Studies

PE moved to approve

BM Seconded

BE moved to amend the amount of money for the Comprehensive Community Plan to \$50,000. AN seconded.

BE thinks that the \$116K already spent for outreach is a misuse of the money authorized at the last Town Meeting.

AN pointed out that this is just a study not the actual plan. MA pointed out that the \$116K from last Town Meeting was for outreach, we now have to spend money to complete the document. (\$180K total last year plus \$90K this year). AN supports the amendment. DH said that the emphasis changed from last year. HK supports the amendment. KS asked BE if it was his opinion that the project can be completed with less money. BE said yes.

VOTE ON THE AMMENDMENT:

Yes – 4 (AN, HK, BE, KS)

NO – 5 (BM, MA, SN, PC, PE)

Amendment fails

VOTE ON PLAN FOR \$90K

No – 3 (KS, AN, HK)

Yes – 6 (BE, BM, MA, SN, PC, PE)

Motion Passes.

VOTE ON COMMUNITY SHUTTLE (\$20K):

Yes – Unanimous

Article 22 – Capital Improvements – Infrastructure

BM move to approve

SN second

Both parts A and B passed unanimously

Article 23 – Capital Improvements – Equipment & Vehicles (Bonding)

BE move to approve all three purchases

PE Second

The Front End Loader and the High-Capacity Snow Blower passed unanimously

There was discussion regarding the Ladder Truck:

AN wants to purchase a used truck because of the corrosion problem due to salt and sand mixture on the roads and the inability to wash the truck at this time. PE pointed out that the design of a new truck will reduce the corrosion problem. DH said that the corrosion issue has been addressed. He also pointed out that used trucks are sold for a reason. He does not recommend purchasing a used truck. BE opined that a new truck should last 15 years. We will probably buy problems if we buy second hand. AN said that the savings will come up front due to a reduced purchase price.

Vote:

No – 1 AN

Yes - all others

Motion Passed.

Article 24 – Street Light Replacement

AN moved to approve

MA seconded

Vote: Yes - unanimous

Article 34 Social Worker

DH indicated that the BoS will probably not support. HK asked if they will pass over. DH said no. PC asked the price. SL said \$30K.

No motion made. Fincom will have no recommendation.

Article 37 – Outdoor Restaurant Seating

KS move to approve

SN second

Passed unanimously

Article 38 Amend the Zoning Bylaw

KS move to approve.

SN second

Passed unanimously

Article 39 – Senior Residences – Affordable Housing Alternatives

KS move to approve

BE second

KS explained that this zoning bylaw change would allow developers of over 55 housing to put affordable housing under 40B off site from the senior housing thus allowing non seniors to purchase this additional affordable housing. No vote was taken.

Article 40 Wireless Service Facilities

Vote deferred until HK can confirm that all parties concerns have been addressed. HK will meet with Will Tuffin and report back at our pre-Town Meeting.

Article 17 – Budget Transfer

BM move to approve

KS second

Passed unanimously

Article 20 – Remove Deputy Police Chief from Civil Service

BM move to approve

SN second

Passed unanimously

Article 25 and 26 – Sidewalk Easements

HK move to approve both articles

KS second

Vote was deferred. AN will look into. PC pointed out that the work of the sidewalk committee was completed after this article was written.

MA asked what the guidelines are for the presentation of our recommendations at Town Meeting. SN indicated that if a controversy is anticipated then write something to explain our position. Otherwise we can be as short as saying - Fincom recommends.

AN moved: Fincom ask Town and Schools that any money that is deemed available after budget be reviewed by Fincom prior to being spent.

HK seconded

SN indicated that it does not hurt to pass this motion. He is in favor of the motion.

PE noted that this is starting to sound like line item budgeting. She does not support this motion. She asked AN if he agreed not to vote now and let her talk to the BoS first.

AN withdrew the motion and HK withdrew his second. AN asked for a sense of the committee vote.

MA is against this suggestion. She did suggest that the Fincom be advised as to what the spending plans are before decisions are made.

BM is in favor of this suggestion. He suggested that AN amend his proposal to require Fincom review spending only if the total is over \$50K. AN agreed.

BE is against this suggestion. He thinks that there should be no spending and that all unspent money go automatically to Free Cash.

JP thinks that the Fincom should review after budget spending only if it is over a given percentage of the total budget.

The sense of the committee vote:

No – 3 (MA, PC, BE)

Yes – 6 – All others

HK warned that he heard negative citizen feedback due to the lack of numbers in the warrant. SN opined that no numbers are better than wrong numbers. MA observed that the numbers will be in the Municipal Supplement which will be at the Polls.

AN said that he is disturbed with the outcome of this budgeting cycle. There have been no cuts. He will recommend cuts to the budget from the Town Meeting floor. He feels that we are not properly vetting budgets.

SN pointed out that AN should not characterize himself as a minority member of Fincom. MA finds AN's plan offensive. She feels that this is not the way to participate as a member of a board. She feels that the Fincom slowed the rate of spending increase and preserved reserves.

PE agreed with MA.

AN said that his decision was difficult. He feels that citizens are not informed enough to make decisions. He also feels that it is the Fincom's job to cut spending. We should look at proposals and then make recommendations as to what should be cut.

BE said that it is not our responsibility to cut. We are supposed to make recommendations only.

PC advised AN to rethink his decision.

BM moved to adjourn at 10:40PM.

KS Seconded. Passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Herman Kabakoff

Clerk