

Minutes – Acton Finance Committee
December 2, 2008, 7:30 p.m.
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 p.m. on December 2, 2008 to review various matters.

Members present for the meeting: Steve Noone, Herman Kabakoff, Mary Ann Ashton, Pat Clifford, Pat Easterly, Bob Evans, Kent Sharp, Doug Tindal, Associate Member Maynard (Brandy) Brandon

Others Present: Doré Hunter, Jo-Ann Berry, Bob Hertz, Sharon Smith McManus, Clint Seward, Dick Calandrella, Allen Nitschelm, Paulina Knibbe, Charlie Kadlec, Al Hoff

Chairman Steve Noone called the meeting to order and offered an overview of the agenda and a preview of upcoming meetings. Steve Ledoux, the Town Manager, will present his budget to the Board of Selectmen on December 15, and will attend the Fincom meeting on December 16 to provide a quarterly update. Also on December 16, Kent Sharp will present on the SPED Financial Task Force. There was no public participation offered.

Approval of Minutes

Mary Ann Ashton presented minutes from the November 18, 2008 meeting. Pat Clifford moved, and Bob Evans seconded. Minutes were approved 7-0-1 (Pat Easterly abstained).

Acton Voters Group Presentation

Chairman Noone introduced Clint Seward who made a presentation suggesting changes in the Finance Committee's Point of View document. Mr. Seward suggested that the Finance Committee should ensure that there are two budgets offered to voters at Annual Town Meeting: one would require a 2-1/2 percent tax increase and one would require a 0 percent tax increase. He suggested that the Finance Committee should consider changing the Point of View document to require a "hard and fast" attrition policy and also suggested that the language about "hard reality" relative to salaries be more specific.

Mr. Noone clarified that this is the third year the Finance Committee has prepared a Point of View, and that the Finance Committee serves as an advisory committee. Finance Committee members asked questions and discussed some of Mr. Seward's points. Herman Kabakoff agreed that voters should be offered a choice. Mr. Sharp said that his thought from the fall's Special Town Meeting was that voters wanted to preserve reserves to provide flexibility to weather the storm if state funding comes in at a lower level than what we had expected. He believes that the Fincom POV document provides some flexibility in difficult times and is intended to drive the discussion and set expectations. Mr. Evans said that while these are interesting points for discussion, until we see the governor's budget on January 21 it is impossible to predict what we'll have available. He reminded the audience and committee that while we need to be as prudent as possible, the benefits which the town and schools provides its employees are governed by state law.

Ideas for Cost Reduction Initiative

Mary Ann Ashton discussed a spreadsheet which Chairman Noone had distributed which summarized the main initiatives that were proposed as part of the Re-Engineering study in 1999. The majority of the

“big bang for the buck” initiatives were implemented at the time, and each produced at least, if not more than, the estimated savings. She thought it was important that everyone understand that there were very few ideas left to be implemented except for shared services between town and schools and emphasized again the amount of time and cost of undertaking this effort at this time.

Committee members discussed some of the ideas in the Re-engineering study as well as some of the cost-saving initiatives that Chairman Noone had put on paper. Mr. Kabakoff commented that the ideas still to be implemented would require political cooperation, and that he is continuing to work hard on shared utility contracts. Mr. Evans asked about cooperative purchasing versus state bid lists, and asked for information about what percentage of purchasing at the schools is done through each. Mr. Sharp observed that accepting payments on-line adds functionality but usually does not result in savings. Pat Easterly suggested that there might be a few key departments or areas where we could check how efficiently we’re providing services. Ms. Clifford recommended that the new Human Resources Director could look at some of these items, for example, should the town buildings be open as many hours as it currently is? She suggested that we consider taking input from the public about what citizens don’t want, or don’t need. As a town we often take surveys about what people want and should consider adding, but we never ask whether there are services people don’t want. This would be a suitable role for Fincom. Mrs. Ashton added to Mr. Noone’s list the idea of providing Special Education programs in-house rather than out-of-district.

Mr. Noone concluded by saying that he would like to develop a list of cost-saving initiatives, vet them, and determine which ones are worth pursuing. He would prefer to focus on what can be accomplished immediately.

Guidance to ALG Reps

The members concurred that the Point of View document would provide ample guidance to the representatives.

Committee Reports

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| BOS | 12/1 – Tax rate approved, unitary tax continues. TM is filling police officer and COA van driver position. BOS provided generally favorable comments about POV. Herman Kabakoff asks whether Fincom should weigh in on the filling of positions. Some discussion; Pat Clifford suggests that Steve alert Steve Ledoux to the deep concern of the committee so that he is prepared to respond at our next meeting. |
| ABRSC | 11/20 – ABRHS Principal Alixe Callen presented her education report, and then presented budget priorities for the coming year. RJ Grey Principal Craig Hardimon presented his budget priorities. After these presentations, Superintendent Ryan said that while all these items were necessary, none of them would be added as he was |

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| | preparing a level-service budget, which he hopes will be approximately a 4 percent increase over the FY09 budget. |
| SPED Financial Task Force | Report complete and will be presented to the School Committee on Thursday, December 4 and to Fincom on December 16. |
| Sewer Action Committee | 11/18 – Next meeting on 12/9/2008. |
| Economic Development Committee | EDC is collating comments from 20+ people about ideas and boiling these down to subsets of “challenges.” These challenges need a constituency. The document will be published when complete. |

Mr. Sharp moved to adjourn, and it was seconded and unanimously approved.

Next Finance Committee meeting: December 16
Town Manager’s Budget Presentation: December 15
ALG, December 8

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Ann Ashton, Clerk