

Minutes – Acton Finance Committee
March 10, 2009, 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 March 10, 2009 to review various matters.

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

Others Present: Charlie Kadlec, Dick Calandrella, Bob Ingram, Bob Hertz, Sharon Smith McManus, Paul Hoff, Lauren Rosenzweig

Chairman Steve Noone called the meeting to order. Clerk Mary Ann Ashton moved that the committee go into Executive Session under General Laws Chapter 39, Section 23B, paragraph (3), for the purpose of discussing litigation. The committee was polled individually and unanimously agreed to enter into Executive Session. The committee returned to open session at 9:05 p.m.

Chairman Steve Noone offered an overview of the agenda and a preview of upcoming meetings. The Finance Committee will focus on voting recommendations for a number of articles for Town Meeting, so that these can be included in the final warrant. There was no public participation offered.

Approval of Minutes

Mrs. Ashton advised the committee that there were no new minutes drafted for this week, and that she would provide minutes for March 3 and March 10 at the following meeting.

School Budget Articles

Bob Evans moved that the Finance Committee recommend Article 18, Acton Public Schools Budget, and Pat Clifford seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Mrs. Ashton moved that the Finance Committee recommend Article 20, the AB Regional Assessment, and Bill Mullin seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Article 19 deals with the authorization to borrow for the Douglas School roof, at a total cost of \$664,000. It has been submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority for possible reimbursement. If bonded over a ten-year period, the annual cost would be approximately \$96,000, without reimbursement. Herman Kabakoff moved to recommend, and Mr. Evans seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Mrs. Ashton moved that the Finance Committee recommend Article 21, the Minuteman Regional School assessment, and Kent Sharp seconded. The committee has not received a final assessment, but the preliminary estimate is \$710,000. After discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Evans moved that the Finance Committee not recommend Article 22, which authorizes Minuteman to establish a stabilization fund, and Ms. Clifford seconded. Mr. Evans said that this is inconsistent with

our approach to budgeting; as a committee we have adopted the philosophy of “those who use pay.” The motion was approved 6-2 (Kabakoff, Tindal).

Acton Voters Group Warrant Articles and Resolutions

Mr. Mullin moved that the Finance Committee not recommend Article 23, which requests the establishment of a town stabilization fund, and Ms. Clifford seconded. After discussion, the motion passed 6-2 (Sharp, Kabakoff).

Mr. Mullin moved that the Finance Committee not recommend Article 24, which requests the use of funds to reduce the tax rate, and Ms. Clifford seconded. Mr. Mullin said that there is no dollar amount, and that this is contrary to other votes the committee has taken. Mr. Kabakoff said this is a restatement of an article that always used to be part of each annual warrant, and there will be no dollar amount in the article. Charlie Kadlec said that there will be a dollar amount, but cannot say what it will be as it depends upon what happens between now and April 6. The motion passed 7-1 (Kabakoff).

Mr. Mullin moved that the Finance Committee not recommend Article 25, which requests a budget for the Finance Committee, and Ms. Clifford seconded. After discussion, the motion carries 7-0-1 (Kabakoff).

Mr. Mullin moved that the Finance Committee not recommend Article 26, which is a resolution requesting the establishment of a reserve policy, and Ms. Clifford seconded. Mr. Evans stated that the Finance Committee has already adopted a reserve policy. Mr. Kabakoff requested a comment from Mr. Kadlec, who said that it is “debatable whether the Finance Committee’s reserve policy is the one which the town wants.” The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Mullin moved that the Finance Committee not recommend Article 27, which is a resolution to present debt and interest costs as a separate article at Town Meeting, and Ms. Clifford seconded. The committee discussed the pros and cons, and history, of bottom-line budgets and the ways in which transparency could be accomplished. The motion passed 6-0-2 (Evans, Kabakoff).

Mr. Mullin moved that the Finance Committee not recommend Article 28, which is a resolution to present new capital projects to town meeting as separate articles, and Ms. Clifford seconded. After discussion, the motion passed 7-1 (Kabakoff).

Other Warrant Articles

Mr. Evans moved that the Finance Committee not recommend Article 43, which would Amend Town By-laws with respect to the Community Preservation Committee, and Mr. Mullin seconded. Mr. Evans expressed concern about the provision of allowing associate members to vote, and other members expressed the desire to have a consistent group of members deciding on items with a significant financial value. The motion passed 7-0-1 (Tindal).

Mr. Kabakoff moved that the Finance Committee recommend Article 44, Accept Sidewalk Easements, and Mr. Mullin seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Mr. Noone said that although the town entered into arrangements regarding the School Street playing fields several years ago, the arrangements were never ratified by Town Meeting. Mr. Mullin moved that the Finance Committee recommend Article 45, which deal with the School Street playing field lease, and Mr. Kabakoff seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Mr. Mullin moved that the Finance Committee recommend Article 46, with deals with School Street playing field mitigation utilizing the Wetherbee Land, and Ms. Clifford seconded. After further clarification, the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Evans moved that the Finance Committee not recommend Article 47, which addresses the demolition delay bylaw related to historically or architecturally significant buildings, and Mr. Kabakoff seconded. Mr. Evans said he found the article incomprehensible, and that it is not consistent with encouraging development of existing properties. After discussion, the committee agreed that they would like to hear a presentation by the Acton Historical Commission with respect to this article before voting a recommendation. Mr. Mullin moved to table the motion, and Mr. Sharp seconded. The motion to table the article passed unanimously.

Mr. Kabakoff moved that the Finance Committee recommend Article 48, which would amend the town bylaws with respect to a quorum for the Commission on Disability, and Mr. Mullin seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Tindal introduced Articles 49 and 50, which are related to zoning. Mr. Tindal moved that the Finance Committee recommend Article 49 to amend the zoning bylaw and add truck rental as an accessory use, and Mr. Mullin seconded. Mr. Tindal said that the EDC unanimously recommended, and that the Planning Board had discussed and it had been vetted by Town Counsel. Motion passed unanimously. Mr. Tindal moved that the Finance Committee recommend Article 50 to amend the zoning bylaw with various housekeeping issues, and Mr. Kabakoff seconded. Motion was approved 6-0-2 (Mullin, Clifford).

The committee addressed the items on the Consent Calendar which were complete in the draft of the warrant. After discussion, Ms. Clifford moved that the Finance Committee recommend Article 10, and Articles 29-41 (all on the Consent Calendar), and Mr. Sharp seconded. After further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

Mrs. Ashton moved that that the Finance Committee recommend Article 17, which requests funding for the first year of the community shuttle, and Ms. Clifford seconded. After discussion, the committee agreed that they would like to hear from someone from the Transportation Advisory Committee, and Mrs. Ashton withdrew her motion.

ALG Report

Mr. Noone said that the deadline for the warrant is Wednesday, March 11. The ALG plan in the warrant assumes budget increases of 3 percent per year on average.

Mr. Sharp moves that the Finance Committee adjourn at 10:50 p.m., and Mr. Kabakoff seconded, and the motion approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Ann Ashton, Clerk