

Draft Minutes – Acton Finance Committee
September 13, 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 September 13, 2005. The Agenda for this meeting is made by part the Minutes and is attached. The meeting was broadcast on public access television.

Members present for the meeting: Pat Clifford, Pat Easterly, Bob Evans, Herman Kabakoff, Steve Noone, Rheta Roeber, and David Stone, Chair.

Associate members present: Allen Nitschelm and Kent Sharp.

Members of the Public: Maryann Ashton, League of Women Voters Observer

Affordable Housing Subcommittee:

The subcommittee developing a model for analysis of affordable housing costs has met twice with the goal of updating a financial model done in the late 90's found on the FinCom computer to develop information on marginal costs. As part of this process, Ms. Easterly presented an early draft of a spreadsheet that reflected both updated statistical input and qualitative information gathered by the subcommittee. Based on this initial work, the subcommittee believes that the Willow/Central project is feasible and that the three unit plan as presented offered a reasonable financial undertaking by the town. It was emphasized that the cost control of the actual building would be done through a bidding process that the subcommittee believes will result in adequate fiscal management.

The subcommittee expressed some concern over information they had found regarding the amount of property taxes paid annually by the Acton Housing Authority, believed to be \$12,000. This topic has been added to their working agenda.

In response to the Chair's suggestion that the Committee take a position on the ACHC proposal, Ms Easterly indicated that the subcommittee felt the proposal strikes a balance between the town's goal of affordable housing and the value for the funds expended. The strong neighborhood support for the project was also noted by several committee members as positive, along with the concept of making the Town whole for previously expended cleanup costs and back taxes.

Mr. Kabakoff moved the Finance Committee endorse the Willow Central project as proposed by the ACHC and approved by the Board of Selectmen. Ms. Clifford supported the motion which was unanimously agreed to with one abstention (Roeber).

Public Access to FinCom E-mail:

Mr. Stone reviewed a proposal to open communication of FinCom documents and analyses using e-mail and electronic resources to improve the transparency of deliberations. He proposed adding an e-mail address at Yahoo groups to the FinCom town list so that all messages could be posted to a public forum. Following discussions with Mark Hald and Selectman Ashton, he believes that the plan would work within the definition of the Open Meeting law and encourage the public to engage in the FinCom's processes. After a discussion of primarily technical concerns, Mr. Stone agreed to continue to pursue the strategy including any appropriate interaction with the Middlesex District Attorney's office.

FY 07 Budget Process:

As part of the continuing discussion of FinCom's role in the FY07 budget process, Mr. Stone indicated that Selectman Ashton had requested that FinCom hold off meeting with individual departments until labor negotiations are completed. He also suggested that the committee might want to look at a breakdown of the school organization to look for ways to save money. One alternative would be for FinCom members to visit staff in their own environments; another would be to arrange for departments to meet with FinCom. Ms. Easterly suggested that we define what we want to see before inviting people to talk with us. Ms. Roeber commented that the timeframe is always tight at the end and that input needs to be earlier if it is to have impact. Mr. Nitschelm said the budgets needed to be looked at from top to bottom and that some out of the box thinking about such areas as revenue enhancement is in order to mitigate future overrides. Mr. Sharp suggested that as a practical scheduling matter it makes sense to have people come to FinCom. Mr. Stone said he would continue to pursue a combination approach.

Approval of the Minutes for August 2:

Mr. Kabakoff moved approval of the minutes for the August 2 meeting; Mr. Evans supported the motion, which was adopted without objection. Ms. Roeber and Ms. Easterly abstained.

Committee Reports:

ALG: (Stone) Finalized schedule of meetings includes some evening meetings; Town Clerk will be investigating alternative polling places for Conant School; financial calendar (budget cycle) was reviewed; Health Insurance Trust deficit currently expected to be \$300-\$400,000.

BOS: (Kabakoff): Two meetings 8/29 and 9/12. 9/12 A memorial bench honoring Micki Williams will be placed in East Acton Village; Carol Holley will be handling donations. BOS held oversight meetings for Zoning Board of Appeals and the Board of Health. 8/29 Westford closed its hearing on the Woodlands at Laurel Hills without a

mutual aid agreement; during a hearing for a request for a special permit by a local businessman for Post Office Square the Selectmen asked for \$12,000 for 400 feet of sidewalks; fees to plow private ways were increased 4.7%; worked on agenda for October 24 State of the Town meeting – possible topics include the capital plan; role of Town Committees; commercial development; Morrison Property and wastewater treatment; Verizon is completing installation of fiber optic cables throughout town and is seeking waiver of a 60-day application period for licensing in order to begin offering ISP; a local business person has endowed a \$1,000 Municipal Employee of the Year award; 6 mile portion of the Assabet Valley Rail Trail to open.

LAN: Received letter from DEP acknowledging that the administrative review for the application for the post closure permit was complete and that a 20 day review for Technical Review began September 8. Addition material may be requested during that time. Sale of new stickers has begun.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE: (Easterly) Budgets have come in about \$450 thousand under budget; 53 new hires. Mr. Kabakoff asked for information on cost savings of new personnel and Mr. Nitschelm wanted clarification on how many were new positions. A committee has been put together to look at ways to fund projects similar to the Friends of Leary Field; there is discussion about regionalization of the elementary schools; committee is looking at options for funding increased fuel costs for heating and transportation. Mr. Nitschelm asked if there was additional information on the financial impact of Danny's Place as a tenant.

EDC: (Roeber) Meeting Thursday to discuss commercial development and look at data developed for State of the Town meeting.

ACHC: (Clifford) Lottery for two Fort Pond Brook Place affordable units scheduled for October 6.

ADJOURNMENT:

Following discussion of the meeting schedule for the remainder of September, Mr. Kabakoff moved adjournment.

Respectfully submitted,
Patricia Clifford
Clerk

September Meetings:

27 FinCom at 7:30 pm
28 2020 at 6:30 pm