

Finance Committee Meeting

Town Hall, 3 East Main Rd. Peru, MA

Wednesday, March 27, 2024 @ 6:00 P.M.

- 1. Call to order:** Finance Committee Chairman Hickling called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
- 2. Roll Call Finance Committee:** Finance Committee Chairman Hickling present, Finance Committee member Haskins not present, Finance Committee Member Sam Haupt present, Finance Committee Member Robin Wadsworth present, Finance Committee Member Jesse Pelkey present.
- 3. State recording status:** Robin Wadsworth recording
- 4. Pledge of Allegiance:** Led by Fin Comm Chairman Hickling
- 5. Review and Approve 8/27/2023 Joint Select Board/Finance Committee Minutes:** Fin Com Member Haupt motion to approve, seconded and approved by unanimous vote 5-0
- 6. Review FY 2025 budget requests received:** Police Chief Bruce Cullett gave overview of Police Dept budget as presented at Select Board/Finance Committee meeting on March 11, 2024, with +5% in Expenses, +3% Police Chief salary increases from last year; discussed one-time capital expense for Communication equipment and possible funding away from the tax levy. Highway Superintendent Justin Russell also gave an overview of the Highway Dept. budget, again as presented at prior meeting as stated above, with +3% wages across the department, plus adding \$3,250 to H&B Roads and \$5,000 to tree removal accounts from last year. Superintendent Russell also discussed wish list items to be paid for out of free cash as well as concern about replacing the Mack, in the near future. Town Administrator Terry Walker presented her salary request having made a study of some other Town Administrator salaries for comparison. Terry discussed her history of awarded grants over the past several years for other municipalities and desire to be able to focus on bringing in more grants for Peru. Terry stated she works 30+ hours a week, is willing to put in more time, get training for Procurement and would like an equitable salary to the position, increasing from \$30,900 to \$42,000. Terry also discussed her duties as Administrative Assistant and the possibility of reducing that salary line item down to \$3,500, as minute taking for the Select Board is bi-weekly. Chairman Hickling and member Pelkey stated satisfaction with Terry's availability and response to their communications with her. Chairman Hickling also discussed past turnover of Town Administrator's and hope for going in a better direction in terms of retaining people. There was discussion about voting approval of the budgets presented thus far and it was decided that the Finance Committee will wait until all budgets are reviewed, final numbers are plugged into the budget worksheet and the overall budget/levy is determined. Free cash certification is delayed at this time and will need to be part of the final equation also. Discussion regarding scheduling next meeting and including someone to represent the Fire Department, Animal Control, Library and Assessors. Robin Wadsworth stated that she will be on vacation for two weeks in April and requested that the Finance Committee have a joint meeting with the Select Board, Assessors and Tax Collector/Treasurer before her vacation to answer questions related to concern over issue with the Accounting firm that was addressed and in the minutes of the Select Board's March 4, 2024 meeting. Emails attached to the minutes indicate the Accounting firm's desire to resign over frustration of not being able to get their job done because town (appointed) jobs are not being done timely. Meeting dates were discussed, Terry Walker stated that she would ask the Select Board if a meeting could take place on Monday, April 8th; Chairman Hickling asked Robin to send specifics of concerns to fellow committee members and the Select Board prior to the joint meeting. Robin agreed to do that. Chairman Hickling also suggested scheduling our next meeting to continue with other department budget reviews for April 3rd. Terry again stated that there is more information to gather: Assessors, school transportation, insurances, etc. Chairman Hickling also stated that he will be away for the Annual Town meeting on June 1 and that he would put together some information to be read at the beginning of the meeting. Highway Superintendent Russell asked about consideration of adding a building maintenance account for the Highway Department buildings.

7. Public Input: None

8. Adjourn:

Fin Com Chairman Hickling motion to adjourn at 7:25 p.m. Motion seconded, unanimous vote to adjourn 5-0

Items used:

Respectfully submitted,

Robin Wadsworth
Finance Committee Member

Douglas Haskins, Fin Com Member *Douglas A Haskins*

Samuel Haupt, Fin Com Member *Samuel Haupt*

Paul Hickling, Fin Com Chairman *Paul Hickling*

Jesse Pelkey, Fin Com Member *Jesse Pelkey*

Robin Wadsworth, Fin Com Member *Robin Wadsworth*

Date Approved: 4/10/24

Received April 22, 2024 Kim Leach, Town Clerk