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Town of Adams Massachusetts 01220-2087

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

21 MAY 12 AM 8:42

TOWN HALL BUILDING

TOWN CLERK
ADAMS MASS.

8 PARK STREET

CLERK

Thursday, April 15, 2021, 6:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

CALL TO ORDER: On the above date the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee held a meeting on the first-floor gymnasium of Adams Memorial School. The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Board of Selectmen Chair Hoyt and Finance Committee Chair Burdick. Present from the Board of Selectmen were Chairman Hoyt, Vice Chairman Blanchard, Members Duval and Nowak. Present from the Finance Committee were Chairman Burdick, Vice Chairman Cowie, Members Butler, Cushenette, Duval, Foster, Johnson, Kline, Kupiec, Melito, Meczywor, Mucci and Tomkowicz. Also present were Town Administrator Green, Finance Director Wojcik, Town Assessor MacDonald, Town Clerk Meczywor, Town Treasurer/Tax Collector Rice, Board of Assessors Member Haddad, Town Clerk Staff Member Wheeler, and iBerkshires staff. Administrative Assistant Dunlap arrived at 6:27 p.m. *Finance Committee Member Nocher was absent.*

MOMENT OF SILENCE: Chairman Hoyt asked for a moment of silence in memory of William "Billy" Evans.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

April 13, 2021 Minutes Board of Selectmen Meeting: *Motion made by Vice Chairman Blanchard to table the minutes for April 13, 2021, second by Member Duval. Vote: unanimous. Motion passed.*

April 13, 2021 Minutes Finance Committee Meeting: *Motion made by Vice Chairman Cowie to table the minutes for April 13, 2021, second by Member Tomkowicz. Vote: unanimous. Motion passed.*

FY2022 BUDGET REVIEW

Chairman Hoyt turned the meeting over to Administrator Green to start the FY2022 Budget Review. A review was done of the Finance Committee budget page 13 and 14. Finance Committee Vice Chairman Cowie inquired about education for the new finance committee members, and it was pointed out that the Finance Committee Handbook link was sent to everyone. The Reserve Fund was briefly explained. Finance Director Wojcik gave an overview of the Employee/Retiree Benefit budgets. Inquiries were made about the number of retirees and the number of employees. Finance Director Wojcik will provide those numbers at a future meeting. Town Administrator Green gave an overview on the quarterly tax billing status. The Town Accountant position moving from a Grade 12 to a Grade 14 was questioned, and it was explained that this position is now a Finance Director/Town Accountant and that it is a competitive salary.

Finance and Technology:

The *Finance Committee* operating budget was reviewed and it was noted it is consistent with previous years.

The *Accountant* budget line for Education/Conferences/Meals was noted as having increased for Finance Director Wojcik to do training.

The *Technology* budget was explained as being for Rob Wnuk to provide services for the technology of the town. Operating Expenses and Management and Consulting was noted as being at \$74,500 this year. It was explained that the funds for technology come from the cable company and some Town buildings are on Spectrum services while others are on Mass Broadband. An inquiry was made about the Library and Capital Installation of donated projectors. It will be looked into more in depth and reported back. An inquiry was made about whether any data left the building from a recent software attack, and it was confirmed that no data was lost, but just encrypted and documents left with corruption residue that is being cleaned up. It was clarified that Town Clerk Meczywor is responsible for the Town website.

Property & Liability Insurance was noted as having a 7% increase due to the number of claims. In addition, the Town is losing dividends as a result of the pandemic. The numbers are estimated from MIIA, the insurance company. An inquiry was made as to what the Town is doing to correct the high number of claims, and it was noted that there has not been any specific pattern seen and once the pandemic dissipates a meeting with the Finance Director will take place to take a look at it more in depth.

General Government

The *Town Assessor* budget was reviewed by Assessor MacDonald, and she noted no increases in the small budget. Brief discussion took place about the reduction in stipends at Town Meeting last year and it was noted that they were surgical cuts to the budget that were kept this year due to predictions that this year will not be a strong year due to the pandemic. Town Administrator Green noted that he had served on multiple commissions and a Board of Health and had never received a stipend. He explained that the trend is for commissions in communities with more wiggle room in the tax rate to offer stipends. He noted that it is difficult to recruit people for positions on boards and commissions, so it is a double-edged sword. It was pointed out that the Assessors provide more work than other boards and commissions, but it was left the same for cost control. An inquiry was made about whether there was any significant loss to revenue from last year. It was explained that Free Cash is not as robust but due to management decisions the Town is ending the year solidly. It was noted that some people were not able to pay their real estate taxes. Revenue sources were reviewed, including excise and real estate taxes, receipts and fees. Having control over contracts was asked about to manage costs. It was explained that fixed costs are known in accordance with collective bargaining agreements. It was explained that the five-year revaluation will take place in 2023, and it is predicted that there will be higher values in the fall. It was noted that some sales are showing \$50,000 to \$100,000 over assessment. With the new Assessor coming in there is a lot of work to be done, and the Town is looking for a good amount of new growth this year. It was pointed out that at this time there are low interest rates and values are going up, and the whole state is expected to show an increase in the next year. It was clarified that at the three-year and five-year valuations there is no consulting firm but at the ten-year valuation one is hired. The status of the Rochester Paper Company land court suit was noted as being in process. Assessor MacDonald advised she would bring the percentage of homeowners versus renters to the Committee and Board for next week. She advised she will also send out the last six months of sales records if anyone was interested. The process to assess new growth was reviewed, and it was explained that it plays an important part in how high the levy can grow. It was further emphasized that new taxable property is not taxed in the last cycle. The levy number calculation was explained and it was noted that the numbers for calculation come from the Assessor's estimate from the spring but it isn't known for sure until the fall. It was noted that there are five new homes and possibly more before June 30th.

The *Tax Collector / Treasurer* budget was reviewed by Treasurer Rice. She noted that the Operating Budget decreased by \$300. It was pointed out that there has not been a drop in the payment of property or excise taxes except an increase in people leasing vehicles due to the pandemic, but vehicles are still being bought. It was explained that May 5th is the deadline for payment of property taxes, and 52% is the amount of the first half. It was pointed out that mortgages pay right before they are due so the numbers are not clear yet. An inquiry was posed about how many properties are currently owned by the town. It was explained that there are liens on 80 properties currently, but the Town only owns 14. She noted that 12 of the properties are ready to go to auction, and there are 30 parties on payment plans. 15 are going to land court for ownership. She explained she hopes to get an auction underway in October to get them back on the tax roles. For those under ownership, if they

are sold in less than a year it requires cash payment, but if it is in ownership over a year the purchasing party can borrow for ownership. It was pointed out that in the last auction of the 12 properties available 11 of them were sold. A quarterly tax system was discussed and quarterly billing would cost double postage, to the amount of approximately \$7,000. For those unpaid, the interest would keep the payment increasing until it is paid, at 14%. Having a slightly longer grace period was discussed and it was noted that laws must be followed with the due dates. It was noted that if trying the quarterly billing and people are not adapting a cost benefit analysis will be done. The perception of payments from quarterly billing versus bi-annual billing was noted as being an interest, and it was pointed out that it was in the best interest for the Town to level the playing field. The option of emailing residents the tax bills was requested, and it was noted that the company doing the billing would have to gather the information first. *Debt Service* was outlined and the bonds are due to mature in 2025, 2028 and 2033.

The *Town Clerk* budget was reviewed by Town Clerk Meczywor. At 7:14 p.m. *Finance Committee Member Meczywor stepped away from the table and sat in the audience to recuse himself.* Town Clerk Meczywor noted there are two staff members in her department, and reviewed the operating expenses. She noted that *Elections* reduced because there will only be one election in Fiscal Year 2022 in May. *Member Foster* asked what the census was, and the annual census was explained. *Registrations* was explained as a four-member Board of Registrars, which include a Chair, two Members and a Clerk. *Codification* was explained as being in the budget to update the Town Code every year. There were no further questions on this budget. At 7:17 p.m. *Finance Committee Member Meczywor returned to the table.*

Executive

The *Board of Selectmen* budget was reviewed. *Finance Committee Member Duval left the table at 7:17 p.m. and sat in the audience to recuse himself.* It was noted that the Board of Selectmen budget is level-funded. A court judgement was explained as a claim going back to the early 1970's, and it was noted that the funds are coming from Free Cash for a one-time payment.

The *Town Administrator* budget was reviewed. It was noted that there is a \$10,000 amount under Temporary Employee which will allow for on the job training for the new Accountant and Assessor as there were two significant retirements. The Town Administrator office will manage the funds. Finance Committee Vice Chairman Cowie noted he was not comfortable with the way the Town Administrator raises were done, and discussion took place on how it came to be through the contract, process, vote, and budget. It was pointed out that the raises were performance based, and provided annually per contract. Due to the pandemic, there was a delay and it would be provided retroactively. It was confirmed by the former and current Town Accountants that there is sufficient money in the budget to fund retroactive payments and the next fiscal year will absorb the payments. Discussion took place on where the funds came from to cover legal services on the Town Administrator evaluation process.

The *Town Counsel* budget was explained and it was noted that a 2% cost of living raise takes place like any other employee. The pros and cons of having a local attorney were weighted and it was not clear whether legal services could be put out to bid. It was explained that it would be hourly work and that by having Town Counsel St. John III handling what comes in it saves the Town money. It was noted as an asset to have him also familiar with the Town and local situations to be able to handle them better than someone from out of the area.

The *Moderator* budget was noted as being unremarkable and there were not questions.

The *Town Report* budget was noted as level funding and only for printing and binding.

Member Nowak inquired about the millions of dollars the Town lost in the retirement funds due to the pandemic and it was clarified that the funds have been recouped. Finance Director Wojcik and Library Director Jayko are working with the Retirement Board on this but it was noted it would be beneficial to have a presentation on it.

ADJOURNMENT: *Motion made by Vice Chairman Blanchard to adjourn the Board of Selectmen Workshop, second by Member Duval. Vote: unanimous. Motion passed. Board of Selectmen Meeting Adjourned at 7:41 p.m.*

Motion made by Vice Chairman Cowie to adjourn the Finance Committee Workshop, second by Member Johnson. Vote: unanimous. Motion passed. Finance Committee Meeting adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by Deborah J. Dunlap,
Recording Secretary

Joseph Nowak, Member

John Duval, Member

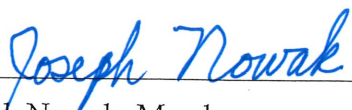
Christine Hoyt, Chair

Richard Blanchard, Vice Chair

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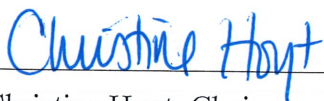
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