

**Finance Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**April 29, 2021**

RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERKS OFFICE  
2021 JUN 18 A 8:13

**Present:** Mr. Brian Eagle, Chairman; Ms. Sara Walsh, Vice-Chairman; Mr. Scott Feely; Mr. Walter Wilk; Mr. Michael DeSantis; Mr. Michael Flaherty; and Mr. Jack Cooney, Clerk

**Also Present:** Mr. Kevin Dumas, Town Manager and Mr. Barry LaCasse, Assistant Town Manager and Finance Director

**Not Present:** None

**1. Call the Finance Committee meeting to order and review the agenda**

Chairman Eagle called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

**2. Specific Agenda items- See Minutes summary below**

- Join other committees for the Budget meeting

**3. Items not known within 48 hours**

- None

**4. Audience Q&A**

- None

**5. Adjourn**

**Motion:** To adjourn the Finance Committee meeting of April 29, 2021 at 6:47 p.m.

(Feely/Cooney)

**Pass 6:1**

**John Cooney**

Finance Committee Clerk Signature



Date

6/17/21

Minutes Clerk Signature

Date

*Minutes Prepared by Jack Cooney*

**Summary of 4/29 Joint Budget meeting with FinCom, Select Board, School Board and Budget Subcommittee.**

The \$104.75M budget (a 1.8% increase over FY 21) is balanced, relying on almost \$3M of federal funds directed to the schools, town and county to close our original budget gap. The Town Manager and staff took a conservative approach on revenue expectations in light of continued uncertainty from the pandemic. The Finance Committee expressed concern over the lack of new growth and all groups agreed on need to fund the special education stabilization account and meet previous OPEB commitments with free cash available come fall. The groups will also continue discussing how previously received funds are being used for town employee health care cost relief. As a reminder, this summary reflects my own views and notes, not those of the Finance Committee or any other meeting attendees. The Finance Committee, Select Board and School Committee heard from the Town Manager, Sat Town Manager, School Superintendent and Asst Superintendent (Finance) on the budget. While I'll provide some high-level points, materials posted online for the schools and town provide additional details on where each side's budget.

The schools are proposing a \$54M budget, a 4% increase over FY '21. The main drivers are contracts, special education costs and bringing technology and text books back into the budget (previously included in Capital Improvement Plan). Costs related to Covid are being covered by federal funds, helping the schools reduce their original budget request. The schools are proposing 4.6 additional FTEs – 3 new (1.0 District-Wide tech instructional coach; 0.2 Robinson physical therapist and 0.6 Roland Green psychologist) and 3 restorations (MHS Science; MHS World Language and QMS World Language). The schools are using about \$900K in federal aid to help their budget, leaving another \$750K for next year. Various participants raised the issue of putting money in the budget for the existing special education stabilization account (think special fund to offset special ed cost spike). There was agreement that funding the account created at a past Town Meeting was important, but more discussion was needed on the best way to protect the town from such a spike. The expectation is a proposal will be made for Fall Town meeting.

Overall budget growth was restrained by limited increases in projected revenue, state aid that remains relatively flat (increases by .93%) while our state assessment went up (7.5%) from last year and a continuing decline in new growth. There were some increases in insurance (at this time they seem in-line with other towns experience) and the usual increase in employee costs related to contractual salaries, but no other significant drivers stuck out. The town is not hiring any additional staff this year, nor has staff been reduced. No other spending reductions were found. The town will be utilizing \$2.25M in federal aid for this budget, leaving almost \$3.6M for use in the fall/next year. This includes funds directed to Mansfield and our portion of those given to Bristol County. While there is a continued reduction in contributions to the Other Post-Employment Benefits Fund (OPEB), there was a commitment that at Fall Meeting, appropriations of about \$560K be made to catch the town up on our shortfalls from the past 2 years. There was extensive discussion on the use of \$138K from the Town's Health care Stabilization Account in the budget. Some suggested not using these funds this year as the health care costs saw a minimal increase. The funding level was not removed from the budget, but the parties did agree to continue discussions of the proper use of this funding source. A separate warrant article will be made to repay \$1.5M borrowed from the Town's Stabilization Fund (rainy fund) for last year's budget. Consistent with the parties Memo of Understanding, this will help return some of our financial reserves to where they were pre-Covid.

The Select Board and FinCom voted to move forward with the budget as is (School lacked a quorum) and will take final votes on the budget and other relevant warrant articles at their next meetings.