



Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

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Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

Finance Committee

Date: 2022-03-02

Time: 7:00 PM

Building: Reading Town Hall

Location: Select Board Meeting Room

Address: 16 Lowell Street

Session: Open Session

Purpose: General Business

Version: Final

Attendees: **Members - Present:**

Chair Ed Ross, Vice Chair Jeanne Borawski, Eric Burkhart, Geoffrey Coram, Marianne Downing, Jackie McCarthy (remote), Joe McDonagh, Andrew Mclauchlan (remote), Mark Zarrow

Members - Not Present:

Others Present:

Town Manager Fidel Maltez, Fire Chief Greg Burns, Superintendent of Schools Thomas Milaschewski, School Director of Finance Susan Bottan, School Committee Chair Tom Wise, School Committee Vice Chair Shawn Brandt (remote)
Select Board Members: Carlo Bacci (remote), Mark Dockser (remote), Chris Haley

Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Jacquelyn LaVerde

Topics of Discussion:

This meeting was held in-person in the Select Board Meeting Room of Town Hall, and remotely via Zoom.

Chair Ed Ross called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

Select Board Secretary Mark Dockser called the Select Board to order at 7:01 pm.

Vote to Authorize Snow and Ice Deficit Spending:

On a motion by Ms. Borawski, and seconded by Mr. Zarrow, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to take agenda item "Vote to Authorize Snow and Ice Deficit Spending" out of order.

Roll call vote Jackie McCarthy-Yes, Andrew Mclauchlan-Yes, Marianne Downing-Yes, Mark Zarrow-Yes, Jeanne Borawski-Yes, Joe McDonagh-Yes, Geoffrey Coram-Yes, Eric Burkhart-Yes, Ed Ross-Yes.

Town Manager Fidel Maltez explained that the snow and ice removal line item in the operating budget is the only one allowed to run into deficit according to M.G.L. This winter has been rough, and the Town has currently spent \$576,000 on storm cleanup. One more storm could cause expenses to exceed the budgeted \$675,000. Mr. Maltez requested approval to go to Town Meeting and request a replenishment of this line item.

On a motion by Mr. Coram, and seconded by Ms. Borawski, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to approve incurring liabilities and making expenditures in excess of the budgeted expenses amount of \$675,000 for snow and ice removal.

Roll call vote Jackie McCarthy-Yes, Andrew Mclauchlan-Yes, Marianne Downing-Yes, Mark Zarrow-Yes, Jeanne Borawski-Yes, Joe McDonagh-Yes, Geoffrey Coram-Yes, Eric Burkhart-Yes, Ed Ross-Yes.

Vote to Approve FINCOM Reserve Transfer for Ladder Truck and Ambulance Equipment:

On a motion by Ms. Borawski, and seconded by Mr. Zarrow, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to take agenda item "Vote to Approve FINCOM Reserve Transfer for Ladder Truck and Ambulance Equipment" out of order.

Roll call vote Jackie McCarthy-Yes, Andrew Mclauchlan-Yes, Marianne Downing-Yes, Mark Zarrow-Yes, Jeanne Borawski-Yes, Joe McDonagh-Yes, Geoffrey Coram-Yes, Eric Burkhart-Yes, Ed Ross-Yes.

Mr. Maltez noted that at the last meeting, Mr. LeLacheur acknowledged that inflation and equipment costs will be recurring in conversations. This is an example where \$1.3 million was budgeted to replace the ladder trunk in the FY22 Capital Plan. The Invitation for Bids (IFB) went out and bids came back. The lowest bidder was Seagrave, which came in more than \$66,000 over what was budgeted. Fire Chief Burns attempted to negotiate with the vendor, but the vendor cited higher prices of steel and labor, and would not change their figure. The Town can either scrap this bid and rebid it, or request that Finance Committee appropriate the additional funds needed from reserves. Mr. LeLacheur had reached out to the State Delegation and requested a \$90,000 earmark from the next budget for this project, which if received, the funds would be returned to free cash.

On a motion by Ms. Borawski, and seconded by Ms. Downing, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to approve a transfer of \$67,000 from the Finance Committee Reserve Fund to be applied to the purchase of a fire truck as discussed at this meeting.

Roll call vote: Jackie McCarthy-Yes, Andrew Mclauchlan-Yes, Marianne Downing-Yes, Mark Zarrow-Yes, Jeanne Borawski-Yes, Joe McDonagh-Yes, Geoffrey Coram-Yes, Eric Burkhart-Yes, Ed Ross-Yes.

Liaison Reports:

Marianne Downing recapped some financial related actions from last night's Select Board meeting. The Select Board voted 4-1 to offer a one-month bonus salary, of about \$17,000, to former Town Manager Bob LeLacheur, subject to appropriation of funds. The Select Board also discussed potential \$19 million in water and sewer capital projects, and whether to consider using ARPA funds for them. Temporary lights will be installed at Coolidge Middle School while Turf 1 at the High School is offline for replacement. The costs for the lights will be shared by the Recreation Division, Soccer, and Lacrosse leagues.

Jackie McCarthy stated that RMLD will present before the Finance Committee at the March 23rd meeting.

FY23 Budget Presentation – Schools:

School Superintendent Thomas Milaschewski, School Director of Finance Susan Bottan, and School Committee Chair Tom Wise presented a high-level overview of the FY23 recommended budget, and noted they will be discussing needs beyond FY23. The recommended FY23 budget reflects a 4.2% increase of \$2,087,365 to a total of \$51,783,363. Of the incremental increase, \$871,000 focused on new investments and priorities. The baseline budget of \$1.2 million supports all contractual obligations and legal mandates of the School Department. The three priorities include: improve academic outcomes for students, as gaps have emerged as a result of disruptions caused by the pandemic; support students social and emotional needs; and streamline adult practices and operations to be a more effective district at the top. Some important changes, investments, and highlights for these three priorities include: reducing the cost of full day kindergarten

from \$4,450 to \$3,600, increase 1.2 FTE support for English-Learning students, \$20,000 for the Endicott Fellows Program, 1.0 FTE for Coordinator and two teaching fellows, .2 FTE increase for academic support for students returning from hospital settings, increase .4 FTE for computer science courses, adding 1.0 FTE for an adjustment counselor at each elementary school for METCO, 1.0 FTE social worker for the REACH program, 2.0 FTE increase for adjustment counselors at the middle schools and High School, increase 1.0 FTE nurse, invest ESSER grant funds in Team Chairs, increase data specialist by .4 FTE to help better organize student data, and shift funds for more development of teachers.

Discuss Future School Budget and Capital Needs:

Dr. Milaschewski presented comparison data from Reading with comparable communities as designated by DESE. In many cases, Reading has similar rates, or is slightly behind some of the comparable districts. While there are a lot of positives, there is work to do to improve academic outcomes and push Reading to the top of the list. Future opportunities include: using learning time effectively to close gaps for students, aligning to student interests, investing in development of school leaders, and investing in literacy programs. Future considerations for FY24 include: \$471,500 of ESSER funds to invest in 2.5 FTE Team Chairs, 2.0 FTE Adjustment Counselors, 1.0 FTE SPED teacher, and Elementary paras and tutors; \$280,000 for 466 new laptops; and \$411,000 for Full Day Kindergarten.

Dr. Milaschewski explained that after listening to stakeholders across the community, the revised strategic plan was released this summer. A priority is Full Day Kindergarten. He provided the rationale for universal Full Day Kindergarten, as it provides the foundations for future district improvement, provides more exposure to core academics and social and structured play, and provides community impacts for families and the local economy. In the state, only 23 of 354 districts charge for full day kindergarten, and the average tuition was \$3,318. Reading is one of them with the second highest tuition.

School Committee Chair Tom Wise reviewed the options that the School Committee considered in eliminating the costs for Full Day Kindergarten. Ultimately, they agreed upon a high-need model, and a three-year stepped-down model with decreasing tuition rates. This would draw down the revolving fund, and next steps are to identify potential sources of funding in collaboration with Town staff.

**On a motion by Chris Haley, and seconded by Mark Dockser, the Select Board voted 3-0-0 to adjourn at 9:08 pm.
Roll call vote: Chris Haley-Yes, Carlo Bacci-Yes, Mark Dockser-Yes.**

Approve Meeting Minutes: February 16, 2022:

On a motion by Ms. Borawski, and seconded by Mr. McDonagh, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to approve the meeting minutes of February 16, 2022 as written.

Roll call vote: Jackie McCarthy-Yes, Andrew Mclauchlan-Yes, Marianne Downing-Yes, Mark Zarrow-Yes, Jeanne Borawski-Yes, Joe McDonagh-Yes, Geoffrey Coram-Yes, Eric Burkhart-Yes, Ed Ross-Yes.

On a motion by Ms. Borawski, and seconded by Mr. Zarrow, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to adjourn at 9:09 pm.

Roll call vote: Jackie McCarthy-Yes, Andrew Mclauchlan-Yes, Marianne Downing-Yes, Mark Zarrow-Yes, Jeanne-Borawski-Yes, Joe McDonagh-Yes, Geoffrey Coram-Yes, Eric Burkhart-Yes, Ed Ross-Yes.