

Town of Oak Bluffs Finance and Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, January 5, 2023, 5:00pm
OB Town Hall Meeting Room/Zoom Conference

Present: Chair – Sherry Countryman, Richard Weiss, Maura McGroarty, Reuben Fitzgerald, Bill Vrooman, Sean DeBettencourt, Mimi Davisson

Absent: Mike Taus, Dion Alley

Others: Deborah Potter, Carrie Blair, Ryan Ruley, Police Chief Searle

Recorder: Juliet Mulinare

5:03 pm Ms. Countryman called the Oak Bluffs Finance and Advisory Committee meeting to order.

Announcements

Ms. Countryman informed the Committee that there are two members up for re-election this year, herself and Mr. Vrooman. The deadline to submit nomination papers is February 21st.

Approval of Minutes

None.

Police Budget Review

Chief Searle joined the Committee to present the FY24 Police Budget and answer questions. He stated that the expense fund is being level-funded and that salary contract negotiations are currently underway. He has accounted for a step increase as well as a 3.1% COLA in the salary budget he submitted. He is also requesting funding for one additional patrol officer whose primary role would be as a School Resource Officer (SRO) but who would also provide an extra set of hands during the busy summer months. The Committee discussed the arrangement of the SRO at the High School, a position that is paid by the School District. The Committee questioned whether it was more cost effective to hire a new officer or to pay overtime to the existing officers. Chief Searle stated that he still has two unfilled officer positions in the Department so he does not have the staff to work overtime. The Committee discussed the changes that were instituted with the Police Reform Act that went into effect on July 1, 2022. The Act created some staffing challenges as Special Officers are now required to undergo full Police Academy training and non-benefitted employees are no longer eligible for overtime. Chief Searle commented that he is having a hard time retaining officers due to the lack of available housing and also on the importance of retaining employees with long-term commitments to Oak Bluffs and the Island. The Committee discussed the required retirement age for Police Officers, noting that they must start working prior to age 45 in order to be eligible for retirement benefits at 65, when they are forced to retire. This limits the workforce pool. The Committee discussed the possibility of sharing services with other towns and how it would be good to create consistency with police salaries across the island.

The Committee then looked at the budget. Ms. Potter explained that the increase to the expense line is due to the transfer of computer related expenses to the Police Dept. budget from the IT budget. It's not an increase, the money is simply being moved out of IT over to the Police due to the fact that the technology is specific to the Police Department. The salary budget increase of 11% is to give a cushion for the union negotiations. Ms. Potter explained that it is very difficult with a personnel-heavy department, like the Police Dept., to keep their budgets under 2.5%.

The Committee discussed ways to incentivize potential officers to attend the Academy and then return to Oak Bluffs for employment. The Committee discussed the Police Station and its shortcomings; Chief

Searle stated that he is asking for funds for a feasibility study to determine the best course of action for the Station.

Fire/Ambulance Budget Review

Postponed.

Library Budget Review

Ms. Countryman asked the Committee to share their thoughts on the presentation made by Ms. Malik at the previous meeting. She stated that she had some concerns with the number of employees the library had but after doing some research about the other libraries on island, she determined that it was a reasonable amount and Oak Bluffs actually spent significantly less than Tisbury does staffing its library. The Committee discussed the parameters of the State aid the library receives.

Review of FinCom Budget Responsibilities

Ms. Countryman said she distributed the town by-laws as they pertain to the FinCom's responsibilities and asked that each of the members take the time to review their responsibilities during the budget process.

The Committee discussed the hypocrisy behind asking the High School to stay within the 2.5% limit but not holding town departments to the same standard. Mr. Weiss commented that it was not the FinCom's responsibility to hold requests to under 2.5%, it is the Committee's responsibility to make those who request more than 2.5% defend that request. The idea to reestablish the All Island FinCom was floated; Ms. Countryman said she would speak with the Tisbury FinCom Chair about this.

Committee Updates

Ms. Countryman reported on the status of the Embarkation Fee Legislation: she spoke with Cyr's office today, the bill did not go through so it must be refiled before the 20th of January. Legislators are still speaking with the other port towns, and Senator Cyr said there is nothing for Oak Bluffs to do at the moment. Ms. Countryman will keep checking in.

Ms. Countryman encouraged the other members of the FinCom to visit town buildings and talk to the people working there. It gives the FinCom more context about what is needed and gives the employees a chance to advocate for their needs one-on-one.

There were no Committee updates from Capital Programs or Personnel.

Ms. McGroarty reported that the High School is ready to certify its budget and the OB School is still working on some adjustments.

Town Administrator/Accountant Comments

None.

Member Comments

None.

Public Comments

None.

Adjournment

At 6:40pm a motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Fitzgerald and seconded by Mr. Weiss. No further discussion, roll call vote:

Weiss – Aye, McGroarty – Aye, Fitzgerald – Aye, Alley – Aye, Vrooman – Aye, Debettencourt – Aye, Davisson – Aye, Countryman – Aye.

Motion passed unanimously (8-0-0).

Meeting Documents on File

1. FY24 01210 Police Department Budget Form
2. FinCom Budget Season Bylaws-General Laws

Respectfully Submitted

Juliet Mulinare, Recorder

Minutes Approved: 1/12/2023