

**Town of Oak Bluffs Finance and Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, January 19, 2023, 5:00pm
OB Town Hall Meeting Room/Zoom Conference**

Present: Chair – Sherry Countryman (zoom), Richard Weiss, Maura McGroarty, Reuben Fitzgerald, Bill Vrooman, Sean DeBettencourt, Dion Alley, Mike Taus*, Mimi Davisson (zoom)

Others: Deborah Potter, Carrie Blair, Ryan Ruley, Emily DeBettencourt, Garrett Albiston, Donovan McElligatt, Richie Combra, Maura Morrison, Bob Laskowski

Recorder: Juliet Mulinare

*Committee members that either arrived late or departed early.

5:00pm Ms. Countryman called the Oak Bluffs Finance and Advisory Committee meeting to order.

Announcements

Next week’s meeting will be Schools only (MVRHS, Shared Services & OB School).

Ms. Countryman spoke with Senator Cyr’s office, the embarkation fee bill was filed on 1/15/23 with updated fee at \$2.00. Ms. Countryman will get the bill number so progress can be tracked.

Approval of Minutes

None.

Budget Review Harbor/Marina

Ms. Emily DeBettencourt was present to discuss the Harbor FY24 budget request. Ms. DeBettencourt stated that there were not many changes; the Repair and Maintenance line is level-funded. There is a \$26k increase requested for the Other Charges and Expense due to that line being overspent in past years. The additional funds will cover upgrades to the dock and mooring reservation system (Dockwa), the mooring database and fees associated with the use of Dept. iPads. There are no personnel changes for FY24. The total budget requested is \$297,057. Ms. Davisson congratulated the Harbor Dept for growing less than inflation over the past decade or two.

Budget Review/Discussion of Presenters at 1/12/23 Meeting

The Committee began by discussing the request from the Oak Bluffs Association (OBA) to raise the FY24 budget request to \$27,500 from \$20,000 in FY23. The Committee was not opposed to the raises that the additional funding would support, but was not in favor of the \$2,500 payroll processing administrative expense that was included in the increase. The Committee discussed how this administrative fee could be avoided, including making OBA employees town employees. Ms. Potter clarified that the Town and the OBA are two completely separate organizations with separate employees. The Committee also discussed who owns the kiosk building that the OBA operates out of which brought up a discussion of the original agreement between the OBA and the Town for these services. Ms. Potter said she has never seen a contract or MOU for this arrangement. Mr. Alley also asked whether use of the building, if owned by the Town, had been put out to bid. Mr. Ruley requested further research on the issue to make sure the Town was not straying from best business practices. Ms. McGroarty will begin looking into this on the Committee’s behalf.

The Committee started to discuss the County budget but Ms. Potter requested that the review of the County budget be pushed to the end of the agenda and Departmental budgets be reviewed first as there were many Department Heads in the room waiting to present their budget requests.

Mr. Taus made a motion to move budget discussions with Department Heads to the beginning of the agenda and reserve discussion of previous budget presentations for the end of the meeting. Mr. Alley seconds the motion, no further discussion, roll call vote:

Davisson – Aye, Countryman – Aye, McGroarty – Aye, Taus – Aye, Alley – Aye, Fitzgerald – Aye, Weiss – Aye, DeBettencourt – Aye, Vrooman – Aye.

Motion passes unanimously (9-0-0).

Budget Review ConCom/BOH

Mr. Garrett Albiston, Conservation Agent and Health Agent, was present to discuss the FY24 budget requests for both Departments. Mr. Albiston began with the ConCom budget: all expenses are level-funded with the exception of the building maintenance line. He is asking for a slight increase to address issues with the Sailing Camp building. Mr. Albiston stated that the Sailing Camp brings in around \$65k per year but that money goes directly to the General Fund. For the salary line, Mr. Albiston is requesting the addition of an administrative position.

Mr. Albiston moved on to the Board of Health budget request. He is not requesting any major increases, just a few modest line item increases (ie \$225 more for waste disposal). Ms. Countryman asked about funding for PFAS testing and the Committee discussed the monitoring of bodies of water considered “bathing areas”, which is determined by the DEP.

Budget Review Parks/Recreation

Mr. Tony Lima was present to discuss the FY24 Parks and Recreation budget request. The Department has added a position called Director of Recreation, which has increased the salary line by \$55k. The position has not been filled. For expenses, the major increase is to the Maintenance of Ocean Park line item. This was put to bid last year, after the appropriation was already voted. The low bid came in around \$35k higher than what was appropriated, so the line item has been increased to cover the contract amount (the deficit from FY23 will be made up with a warrant article). Ms. Potter emphasized that this is not a cost overrun, and that the contract will be re-bid every three years. Other areas included under the maintenance contract (in addition to Ocean Park) are the grounds at Town Hall and the Library, the Harbor areas, the whiskey barrel planters downtown and various mowing locations. Mr. Lima stated that the contract price is very reasonable considering the scope of work. The Committee discussed the fee structure for renting space in the parks for events; Mr. Lima explained that for events with under 50 people, the cost is \$300 per day, for events over 50 people, the minimum cost is \$1,000 per day. All services associated with any event are the responsibility of the applicant, as are any repairs that are needed once the event is over.

Budget Review Highway

Mr. Richie Combra, Highway Superintendent, was present to discuss the FY24 Highway budget request. Mr. Combra stated that there are a few small increases on line items that were overspent last year (ie. recycling and fuel) but the FY24 request is mostly level-funded. The Committee discussed that Oak Bluffs is the only town on island that provides curbside trash and recycling removal, and whether it’s worthwhile to continue. Ms. Davisson commended the Department for staying within the percentage of inflation as it relates to budget increases.

Budget Review Shellfish

Mr. Donovan McElligatt, Shellfish Constable, was present to discuss the FY24 Shellfish budget request. Mr. McElligatt explained that the budget has grown compared to past years as he works towards updating the Department and transitioning to a year-round operation. Under salaries, he is proposing that a part-time, year-round deputy be changed to a full-time, year-round, senior deputy to enhance the Department's capabilities and coverage. The Committee discussed a variety of topics including the contribution to the town of summer interns by the Friends of Senge; the areas that are overseen by the Shellfish Constable and how those compare to other towns; how to expand the program and also the need to address issues of succession and the importance of having someone in place who can step up when needed or upon the departure/retirement of the current Constable.

Mr. McElligatt explained the increase requests for his operating budget. The biggest increase is the addition of a vessel maintenance line at \$10k. Other smaller increases are for uniforms and equipment, training and shellfish propagation.

The Committee took a five minute recess.

*Mr. Ruley and Mr. Taus departed the meeting.

Budget Review/Discussion of Presenters at 1/12/23 Meeting

The Committee discussed the disorganized nature of the County budget presentations and the seemingly redundant administrative fees included with the various programs' requests. The Committee felt the County budget should be rolled into one and presented as such, with a central administrative structure for the various programs. Ms. Potter commented on the consistent inability to keep budget increases within the 2.5% tax levy.

The Committee discussed the County's disbursement of ARPA funds and questioned whether those funds could have been used for capital improvements to the HCA Building, for example. Ms. Potter stated that ARPA money is very restricted and it's easier for the County to just ask the Towns, who rarely, if ever, say "no". Ms. Potter continued that she had submitted six requests to the County for ARPA funds and was rejected every time. The Committee discussed what various actions can be taken in the future to try and rein in the County's annual funding requests.

Committee Updates

None.

Town Administrator/Accountant Comments

Ms. Potter stated that, based on the poor turnout for budget meetings, the Selectboard has decided to hold a public forum and information session on a variety of town issues including the budget process, as well as how to run for office. Ms. Potter will be accompanied by Town Moderator Jack Law, Selectboard Chair Ryan Ruley and a member of the FinCom. Ms. Potter would like to generate interest in the forum to increase attendance. There will also be a virtual option for attending.

Member Comments

None.

Public Comments

Mr. Laskowski thanked the FinCom members for their diligence in reviewing the budget and said he was provided a great education by attending the meeting.

Ms. Maura Morrison, representing Harbor Homes, asked what she should report back to them. Ms. Countryman thanked Ms. Morrison for attending and said the Committee will review the information that was presented to them.

Adjournment

At 8:35pm a motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Weiss and seconded by Mr. Fitzgerald. No further discussion, roll call vote:

Davissou – Aye, Countryman – Aye, McGroarty – Aye, Alley – Aye, Fitzgerald – Aye, Weiss – Aye, DeBettencourt – Aye, Vrooman – Aye.

Motion passed unanimously **(8-0-0)**.

Meeting Documents on File

1. FY24 01249 Marina Budget Form – PROPOSED_1
2. FY24 01171 CON COM Form DP
3. FY24 01519 BOH Budget Form 1 DP
4. FY24 01630 Parks Budget Form
5. FY24 01421 Highway Budget Form
6. FY24 Shellfish Budget Form & Budget Narrative

Respectfully Submitted
Juliet Mulinare, Recorder

Minutes Approved: 2/2/2023