

**Town of Oak Bluffs Finance and Advisory Committee**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, January 26, 2023, 5:00pm**  
**OB Town Hall Meeting Room/Zoom Conference**

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

**Others:** Deborah Potter, Carrie Blair, Ryan Ruley, Richie Smith, Mark Friedman, Suzanne Cioffi, Sara Dingley, Sam Hart, Hope MacLeod, Megan Farrell, Kris O’Brien

**Recorder:** Juliet Mulinare

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

**Announcements**

Ms. Countryman emailed the schedule for the remainder of the budget hearings. She has asked for one additional meeting to make sure there is enough time to review everything. Recommendations are due to the Town Administrator by 2/16/23.

**Approval of Minutes**

The Committee reviewed the draft minutes from the January 12, 2023 meeting.

*Mr. Taus moved to approve the 1/12/23 minutes, seconded by Mr. Vrooman. No further discussion, roll call vote:*

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

Motion carries **(8-0-1)**.

**Budget Review Schools**

Mr. Richie Smith, Superintendent, and Mark Friedman, Finance Manager, for the MV Regional School District, gave an introduction to the three budgets being presented tonight. Mr. Smith said it was a challenging year for school budgets as the collective bargaining unit contracts were negotiated and contract increases implemented. Mr. Smith stated he aware of and understands the high impact of these budgets on town budgets and has worked hard, through numerous meetings, to keep them as close to 2.5% as possible. With all bargaining units receiving significant pay increases, and with 300 people in the teacher’s unit alone, the new contracts account for a significant portion of the budgets being presented.

- MVRHS: Sara Dingley, Principal

Ms. Dingley presented the FY24 budget request for the High School. The operating budget is being increased overall by 2.11%. Union contractual increases amount to \$823k and two new positions have been added. One of the new positions is being funded with a Title 1 grant. Ms. Dingley stated that enrollment at the High School has increased by around 100 students in the past two years. She is looking to expand offerings such as Driver’s Education and is also hoping to offer stipends to out-of-season coaches to assist in other areas of the athletic programs. Ms. Dingley went through the proposed budget line by line, identifying the lines where reductions were made. After being asked about class sizes, Ms. Dingley said that despite the increase in students, she remains satisfied with the class sizes and student to teacher ratios, which are still

under the contractual maximum allowed. Ms. Dingley stated that Oak Bluffs students make up 28.61% of the student body (218 students as of 10/1/22). The Committee discussed various topics including transportation, grant funded programs and the percentage of children in Special Education programs.

Ms. Kris O'Brien, OB School Committee member, recognized Danielle Charbonneau, MVRHS English teacher, for receiving Teacher of the Year in Massachusetts. Ms. Charbonneau runs an alternative education program at the High School called Project Vine.

- **SHARED SERVICES:** Hope MacLeod, Shared Services Director

Ms. MacLeod provided an overview of the Shared Services programs, each of which caters to and provides support for different areas of special education. Mr. Smith then went over each of the line items in the proposed budget, which has an overall increase of 5.79% for FY24. The Committee discussed how the town's budget allocation is determined (per pupil) and federal funding received by the program.

- **OAK BLUFFS SCHOOL:** Dr. Megan Farrell, Principal

Dr. Farrell presented the FY24 budget request from the Oak Bluffs School. Dr. Farrell explained that she is presenting a higher budget, increased 4.95% from FY23, but it is based on need. Mr. Smith had previously explained that Dr. Farrell must absorb aspects of the Shared Services budget that she has no control over into her budget, as well as absorbing the union's contractual increases. Dr. Farrell described her extensive work in securing grant funding to offset costs to the taxpayers; she has been very successful in getting grants for a variety of projects and purchases. Dr. Farrell described some of the capital projects that are in the pipeline, the biggest of which is the replacement of the boilers. The Committee discussed the line item for building maintenance (\$30k) and questioned whether that was enough. Dr. Farrell stated that cuts had to be made somewhere and while she would like to see the building maintenance line at closer to \$90k, she is prioritizing the needs of the students and the services being provided to them. She recommended that the town look into a Facilities Manager to help with the School and all of the Town's infrastructure. The Committee also discussed the School and its status as the town's emergency shelter.

Mr. Friedman presented the High School's warrant article request for funding to conduct a feasibility study for a new High School. The total cost would be about \$2 million, of which 38% would be reimbursable by the MSBA. Currently, the article request is a placeholder as the All Island School Committee will be voting on this in March. The study is expected to take two years to complete.

The Committee took a five minute recess. Everyone departed the meeting except the members of the FinCom and the Town Accountant.

### **COLA Discussion**

The Committee discussed the 3.1% COLA proposed by the Personnel Board. Ms. Countryman stated that the Town is in the middle of a compensation study and until that is completed, she feels compelled to go with the recommendation of the Personnel Board and to compensate with stipends, if needed. Mr. DeBettencourt stated that other towns have a noticeably higher COLA; Ms. Davisson agreed that Oak Bluffs should offer a higher COLA and was concerned that OB employees would take note of the larger COLA's being given in other towns. The 3.1% COLA was derived from a five year average of CPI increases.

*Mr. Taus made a motion to approve the proposed 3.1% COLA, seconded by Mr. Alley. Further discussion:*

Mr. DeBettencourt stated that the actual cost of living has increased more than 3.1%. Ms. Davisson said she would prefer to take \$75k out of other budgets to put towards a 4.1% COLA [based on Ms. Potter's statement that each 1% COLA increase amounts to ~\$75k].

*Roll call vote taken:*

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

Motion carries **(6-2-1)**.

### **Budget Review/Discussion from 1/19/23 Meeting**

The Committee reviewed the budgets presented at the 1/19/23 meeting, including the ConCom and BOH, Harbor, Parks & Recreation, Highway and Shellfish. There was some discussion about the growth of the Shellfish Department and the need for increasing the budget to do that successfully. The new Constable is motivated to do more with the Department.

### **Additional Budget Review**

In addition to the budgets presented at the 1/19/23 meeting, the Committee also reviewed the Selectboard, FinCom and Accountant's FY24 budget requests. The Committee discussed the legal expense line item in the Selectboard budget and asked Ms. Blair about the line item for the Assistant Accountant. Ms. Blair said that line is a place-holder for this year as they do not intend to fill the position.

The Committee discussed the proposed amendment to the Financial Policy but were still unclear about the request and decided to wait until a member of the Selectboard was present to explain.

Ms. McGroarty stated that the Chief will bring a report on the Ambulance Reserve money to the next meeting.

### **Committee Updates**

Mr. Vrooman stated that the Capital Plan is presenting Free Cash expenditures of just over \$1million. The town is 16<sup>th</sup> in line for free cash certification.

### **Town Administrator/Accountant Comments**

None.

### **Member Comments**

Ms. McGroarty stated that she looked into the ownership of the OBA Information Kiosk and neither the Town nor the OBA owns the structure. She checked with the Building Inspector who said that no one owns it because it's in a roadway. The Assessor says there is no map and parcel for the property.

### **Public Comments**

None.

## **Adjournment**

*At 8:20pm a motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Taus and seconded by Mr. Fitzgerald. No further discussion, roll call vote:*

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

*Motion passed unanimously (9-0-0).*

## **Meeting Documents on File**

1. FY24 OB School Budget
2. FY24 01122 Select Board Budget Form
3. FY24 01135 Accounting Budget Form

*Respectfully Submitted*

*Juliet Mulinare, Recorder*

Minutes Approved: 2/2/23