

**Town of Oak Bluffs Finance and Advisory Committee**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 5:00pm**  
**OB Town Hall Meeting Room/Zoom Conference**

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

**Absent:** Bill Vrooman, Dion Alley

**Others:** Deborah Potter, Ryan Ruley, Michael Watts (AISC), Kris O’Brien (OBSC/AISC), Kathryn Shertzer (OBSC/AISC), Joe Mikos

**Recorder:** Juliet Mulinare

**5:02pm** Ms. Countryman called the Oak Bluffs Finance and Advisory Committee meeting to order.

**Announcements**

The next meeting will be on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023; annual officers will be elected then.

**Approval of Minutes**

The Committee reviewed the draft minutes from the February 23, 2023 meeting.

*Mr. Weiss moved to approve the 2/23/23 minutes, seconded by Mr. Fitzgerald.*

Brief discussion to clarify vote counts.

*No further discussion, roll call vote:*

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

Motion carries **(6-0-1)**.

The Committee reviewed the draft minutes from the March 9, 2023 meeting.

*Mr. Weiss moved to approve the 3/9/23 minutes, seconded by Mr. Fitzgerald. No further discussion, roll call vote:*

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

Motion carries **(6-0-1)**.

**Discussion Regarding Post-Budget Process, Recommendations to Selectboard**

Ms. McGroarty stated that there needs to be more clarity around which town boards receive stipends as there have been changes in recent years and stipends for some boards were removed while others remain. The Committee discussed the need for a policy to be developed on who received stipends so that it does not appear arbitrary.

*Motion placed on the floor by Ms. McGroarty to send the stipend discussion to the Personnel Board so they can generate a consistent policy. Mr. Weiss seconds the motion.*

Discussion: The Committee discussed whether the Personnel Board was the appropriate entity to make this recommendation to.

*Motion placed on the floor by Ms. Davisson to amend Ms. McGroarty’s motion to send the stipend discussion to whichever board the Selectboard determines is the most appropriate board to review this.*

*Mr. Weiss seconds the motion, no further discussion, roll call vote:*

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

Motion passes unanimously **(7-0-0)**.

Ms. Davisson then brought up the information kiosk and the fireworks and stated that the business community should be more involved in the funding of these two items. She suggested that other towns should be asked to contribute to the fireworks and that a letter should be sent to the Oak Bluff's Business Association that the town will be phasing out funding of the information kiosk over the next few years. The Committee discussed whether it would be appropriate for other towns to help fund the fireworks, which some members disagreed with; a suggestion was made to form a Committee that would be responsible for reaching out to businesses and other private entities for funding support.

*Motion placed on the floor by Ms. Davisson to recommend to the Selectboard that the Town Administrator make a concerted effort to get private fundraising to fund the information kiosk, the fireworks and the holiday lights. Mr. Weiss seconds the motion, no further discussion, roll call vote: Davisson – Aye, DeBettencourt – Aye, Fitzgerald – Aye, Weiss – Aye, McGroarty – Aye, Countryman – Aye, Taus – Aye,*

**Motion carries (6-0-1).**

Mr. Weiss stated that the town should always be thinking of ways to reduce costs and increase revenue and that it might be advantageous to bring in a consultant to evaluate how best to do this. The Committee discussed where resources and/or programming could be combined to reduce costs. Mr. Ruley stated that this is on the Selectboard's radar and they have a strategic plan that includes initiatives like cross-training employees with seasonal responsibilities. Ms. Davisson expressed concern that the soon-to-be newly elected members of the Selectboard will keep up with the town's strategic planning efforts; Mr. Ruley assured her they would. Ms. Countryman suggested a recommendation to the Selectboard to continue looking at how to combine personnel, services and/or buildings to make the town more efficient. Ms. Potter stated that the town is facing a problem finding qualified employees as standards are increasing for many town jobs. Mr. Weiss continued that an outside consultant would be able to look at and assess issues specific to Oak Bluffs.

*Motion placed on the floor by Ms. Davisson to support and encourage the Selectboard to continue their work on optimizing and streamlining administrative activities and building and personnel efficiencies.*

*Mr. Weiss seconds the motion, no further discussion, roll call vote:*

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

**Motion passes unanimously (7-0-0).**

Ms. Davisson identified the town's relationship with the Martha's Vineyard Commission as an area for improvement and said the relationship needs to be strengthened. She suggested that the Oak Bluffs representatives on the Commission take a more active role in keeping the town updated on the Commission's business and budget. The Committee discussed meeting with the Commission before budget season to make things go smoother. Ms. Potter stated that the town's relationship with the MVC is strong, even though there are some differing opinions. No further action was taken.

Ms. Countryman brought up the Harbor as a potential area for increased revenues. Specifically, the discounted resident slips awarded by lottery each year. The discounted slips are \$2,550 for the season, whereas the regular rate is \$14,000; with the discounted slips, the town is losing \$140k in revenue, which only the ten awarded residents benefit from. The Committee agreed to reach out to the Harbormaster and the Harbor Committee to discuss further.

The Committee then discussed whether to include explanations on the Annual Town Meeting Warrant regarding the votes that were taken as the final votes don't always reflect the depth of the discussion that was had. The Committee discussed the different roles of the FinCom and the Capital Committee when it comes to making recommendations on articles and the budget.

Ms. Countryman will draft a memo of the ideas that were discussed so the conversation can be continued.

## **Discussion Regarding Financial Implications of MVRHS/Planning Board Lawsuit**

The Committee discussed the recent vote by the All Island School Committee (AISC) to continue funding the appeal of the Oak Bluffs Planning Board's denial of the turf field. The main issue is that the School Committee voted to continue the lawsuit without a cap on potential spending; members of the Committee took issue with this as the lawsuit is funded with tax payer dollars on both sides. Mr. Weiss stated that he had a real problem with the School Committee suing the Planning Board and questioned if there was any effort made to engage a mediator. Mr. Weiss continued that it is absurd to obligate the tax payers to continue funding the appeal of a process where nothing illegal happened. Mr. Watts, School Committee member, responded that the appeal is about maintaining the School Committee's rights under the Dover Amendment, which allows the AISC to circumvent town boards when undergoing projects for educational purposes. Mr. Watts stated that if the AISC does not go through with the appeal to confirm the School's rights under the Dover Amendment, those rights will be in question on future projects. Ms. Countryman stated that the situation never should have gotten to this point and that the outcome of a lawsuit would be a bad precedent and a "win" for either side would be bad for the other side, for the taxpayers, the children and the Island; she suggested that the AISC and the Oak Bluffs Planning Board work this out amongst themselves, without involving lawyers. Ms. O'Brien, School Committee member, said that was a reasonable suggestion.

Some members of the FinCom felt that the conversation was outside the purview of the Committee until there was a specific financial ask; others felt strongly that voting to remove a cap on spending was a financial issue well within the Committee's purview. The Committee discussed various options for moving forward and how important it was to get all the parties in the same room for a discussion. After further discussion, Mr. Weiss made a motion to recommend that both parties cease with the lawsuits and sit down with a third party to get the situation resolved as quickly as possible. Other members of the Committee felt that a recommendation of that nature was not appropriate for the Committee to make. Ms. Countryman stated that the AISC members present have heard the concerns of the Finance Committee and that a motion isn't necessary; she thanked Mr. Watts, Ms. O'Brien and Ms. Shertzer for attending the meeting.

## **Committee Updates**

Ms. Countryman encouraged everyone to write to legislators in support of increasing the embarkation fee and said it's important to keep the pressure on.

## **Town Administrator/Accountant Comments**

None.

## **Member Comments**

None.

## **Public Comments**

Mr. Mikos made comments on the turf field litigation.

## **Adjournment**

*At 7:15pm a motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Taus and seconded by Mr. Fitzgerald. No further discussion, roll call vote:*

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

Motion passes unanimously **(7-0-0)**.

*Respectfully Submitted  
Juliet Mulinare, Recorder*

Minutes Approved: 5/18/23