

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

**Present:** Maura McGroarty, Sean DeBettencourt, Mike Taus, Bob Malecki, Richard Weiss, Bill Cleary  
Ryan Ruley\* (zoom)

**Absent:** Sherry Countryman, Reuben Fitzgerald

**Others:** Deborah Potter, Kristina West

**Recorder:** Juliet Mulinare

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

**Announcements**

Ms. McGroarty will serve as Acting Chair in Ms. Countryman's absence.

The FinCom meetings will now take place on the first and third Tuesdays of each month.

**Discussion/Q&A with Town Assessor**

The Committee met with Town Assessor Kristina West to get a better understanding of the operations her department conducts. Ms. West explained that the Assessing Department is responsible for valuing all real estate and personal property as well as issuing excise taxes. Ms. West answered questions from the Committee, the first being whether towns could share Assessors. She explained that each town must do their own assessments based on sales that occur within the town, they are not allowed to do regional assessments per MA General Law. The next question for Ms. West was regarding the "overlay". Ms. West stated that the overlay is the amount of money she is allowed to set aside to cover abatements and exemptions that are issued to qualifying residents. The overlay can be minimized if applications are sent out early in the fiscal year so adjustments on tax bills can be made before being sent out. Ms. West stated that Oak Bluffs has more exemptions than any other town; exemptions are mostly for veterans, the elderly and the blind. The Committee then asked Ms. West about the department's budget jump the previous year. Ms. West explained the various reasons for the increase including a historically underfunded department, and costs associated with needing to update software. Ms. Potter further explained that there were costs imbedded in other department budgets that were attributable to the Assessor, which created an inaccurate budget; many of these costs were moved over to the Assessor's Department, which inflated their budget for FY24, but made the line items of the overall budget more accurate.

The Committee then discussed Personal Property tax and how it is determined. The Committee also discussed land value versus building value and how both are factored into a property assessment.

\*Mr. Ruley departed the meeting.

**Approval of 9/7/23 Meeting Minutes**

Approval of the minutes was postponed.

**COLA Discussion and Possible Vote on Same**

The Committee all received a spreadsheet that shows how the COLA is calculated based on a five-year average. The Personnel Board voted to forward a recommended COLA of 3.1% to the FinCom for

review and concurrence before being reviewed by the Selectboard. Ms. Potter explained that voting on the COLA now will help make line items more accurate during the FY25 budget review process. *Motion placed on the floor by Mr. Weiss to recommend a 3.1% COLA increase be forwarded to the Selectboard for approval. Mr. Cleary seconds the motion, no further discussion, vote taken and passed unanimously (6-0-0).*

### **Discussion and Vote on STM Warrant Articles**

Ms. Potter stated that it is very unlikely that Free Cash will be certified by the State prior to the Special Town Meeting (STM) date. If it's not certified, the cash articles will have to be removed from the warrant. Ms. Potter continued that the intention of the November STM is to deal with non-cash articles such as by-law changes and dispositions.

The Committee reviewed the articles on the draft STM warrant:

#1 – Lease of Property at Pennsylvania Avenue for a Solar PV System and Battery Energy Storage System for an initial term of up to 30 years.

*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of STM WIP Article #1. Mr. Taus seconds the motion, discussion:*

Ms. Potter explained that this is the site at the landfill that was previously awarded, however, the awarded vendor stalled the project and the town lost out on inclusion in the top tier for solar credits. The vendor wanted to renegotiate the contract but the Town was not interested. Instead, a consultant was hired to provide options for how to proceed. This article will authorize the town to enter into a land lease, which will provide a stable, regular lease payment instead of payments based on energy production. There will also be a PILOT included with this contract.

*No further discussion, vote taken and passed (5-0-1). McGroarty abstains.*

#2 - \$10k from Sale of Cemetery Lots to Cemetery Perpetual Care.

*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of STM WIP Article #2. Mr. Taus seconds the motion, no further discussion, vote taken and passed unanimously (6-0-0).*

#3 - \$20k from Sale of Cemetery Lots for water line improvements in Oak Grove Cemetery.

*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of STM WIP Article #3. Mr. Taus seconds the motion, discussion:*

Ms. Potter stated that this money will be added to money already appropriated due to bids coming in higher than anticipated.

*No further discussion, vote taken and passed unanimously (6-0-0).*

#4 - \$15k from Waterways for harbor maintenance.

*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of STM WIP Article #4. Mr. Taus seconds the motion, no further discussion, vote taken and passed unanimously (6-0-0).*

#5 - \$20k from Waterways for private aids to navigation.

*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of STM WIP Article #5. Mr. Taus seconds the motion, no further discussion, vote taken and passed unanimously (6-0-0).*

#6 - \$57,300 from Harbor Fuel for department truck

*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of STM WIP Article #6. Mr. Taus seconds the motion, discussion:*

Ms. Potter explained that the Harbormaster currently used her own personal vehicle for town business. She also said this has not yet been vetted by the Capital Committee.

*No further discussion, vote taken and passed (5-0-1). McGroarty abstains.*

#7 - \$50k from Overlay Surplus to resolve Assessing Department backlogs, etc.  
*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of STM WIP Article #7.*  
*Mr. Taus seconds the motion, no further discussion, vote taken and passed unanimously (6-0-0).*

#8 – To establish a Wastewater Stabilization Fund  
*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of STM WIP Article #8.*  
*Mr. Taus seconds the motion, discussion:*  
Ms. Potter stated that this article is just to establish the fund; it is not a vote to put money into the fund.  
*No further discussion, vote taken and passed (5-0-1).* McGroarty abstains.

#9 – Declare Assessor’s Map 7, parcel 223 as surplus property for developing affordable housing.  
*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of STM WIP Article #9.*  
*Mr. Taus seconds the motion, discussion:*  
Ms. Potter stated that this parcel has title issues so it can only be used for affordable housing.  
*No further discussion, vote taken and passed unanimously (6-0-0).*

#10 – Declare Assessor’s Map 7, parcel 208 as surplus property for developing affordable housing.  
*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of STM WIP Article #10.* *Mr. Taus seconds the motion, discussion:*  
Ms. Potter stated that this parcel has title issues so it can only be used for affordable housing.  
*No further discussion, vote taken and passed unanimously (6-0-0).*

#11 – Amend Personnel By-law, Schedule A and Schedule B of Classification Schedule.  
*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of STM WIP Article #11.* *Mr. Taus seconds the motion, discussion:*  
Ms. Potter stated that the Personnel Board will hold a special meeting to discuss the existing salary ranges and ranges for new employees; a vote on this article can be postponed until the next meeting.  
*Mr. DeBettencourt withdrew his motion to recommend approval, seconded by Mr. Taus.*  
*Motion then placed on the floor by Mr. Weiss to postpone a vote on STM WIP Article #11 until the next meeting.* *Mr. Taus seconds the motion, no further discussion, vote taken and passed unanimously (6-0-0).*

#12 – Adopt recodified General Bylaws  
Ms. Potter explained that this update is a reorganization of the format of the existing bylaws to make them easier to use.  
*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of STM WIP Article #12.* *Mr. Taus seconds the motion, no further discussion, vote taken and passed (5-0-1).*  
McGroarty abstains.

**FREE CASH ARTICLES:**

\$9,330 to fund Article 16 of the Superior Police Officers contract for dental premiums  
*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of the article.* *Mr. Taus seconds the motion, discussion:*  
Ms. Potter explained that this is a payroll obligation and the town will be sued if it’s not paid.  
*No further discussion, vote taken and passed unanimously (6-0-0).*

\$xxx,000 to pre-fund Town approved FY25 COLA.

*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of the article. Mr. Taus seconds the motion, discussion:*

The Committee took issue with not knowing the exact dollar value of this article. After discussion regarding when the Selectboard will vote on the STM articles (10/10/23), *Mr. DeBettencourt withdrew his motion to recommend approval, seconded by Mr. Taus. Motion then placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to postpone voting on all articles that do not have a specific amount indicated at this time. Mr. Taus seconds the motion, no further discussion, vote taken and passed unanimously (6-0-0).*

\$75k for a second Shellfish Department truck.

*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of the article. Mr. Taus seconds the motion, discussion:*

The Committee discussed the cost of this request compared to the Harbormaster's request; the shellfish truck requires additional gear, which increases the cost. The Committee wanted additional information.

*No further discussion, vote taken and does not carry (0-3-3). Taus, Weiss and Cleary abstain.*

\$25k for replacement of two upwellers for Shellfish Dept. propagation program.

*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of the article. Mr. Taus seconds the motion, discussion:*

The town currently has two upwellers, both of which have reached the end of their useful life. *No further discussion, vote taken and passed (5-1-0).*

\$37,500 from Wastewater Retained Earnings for MVP Grant cash match.

*Motion placed on the floor by Mr. DeBettencourt to recommend approval of the article. Mr. Taus seconds the motion, discussion:*

Ms. Potter stated that retained earnings must also be certified. This article will appropriate match funds for a grant the town received through the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program.

*No further discussion, vote taken and passed unanimously (6-0-0).*

### **Adjournment**

*At 7:06pm a motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Taus and seconded by Mr. DeBettencourt. No further discussion, vote taken and passed unanimously (6-0-0).*

### **Meeting Documents on File:**

1. 20230813 FY24 Estimated COLA
2. 20230906 STM WIP
3. TA-ATA Report 2023.09.12

*Respectfully Submitted  
Juliet Mulinare, Recorder*

Minutes Approved: 10/31/2023