

## FINANCE COMMITTEE

---

March 10, 2022

FinCom Zoom: 7:30 p.m.

Meeting ID: 781 572 6432

**Members:** Chair: Megan Blackwell Vice Chair: My Linh Truong  
Hafiz Adamjee, Arun Balasubramaniam, Jeff Calabrese, Stefan Carp, Yannis Evrigenis, Bogdan Fedeles, Ruthie Gagne, Patrick Matteson, John Miller, Nicole Soto, Thomas Springer, Enzo Rascionato, Brian Vernaglia,

**Missing:** Nicole Soto, Enzo Rascionato

**Late Arrivals:** Stefan Carp, Arun Balasubramaniam

**Guests:** Rich Mucci, Select Board

### **General Business**

Chair Blackwell called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.

### **Roll Call:**

Megan Blackwell  
Bogdan Fedeles  
Jeff Calabrese  
Brian Vernaglia  
Yannis Evrigenis  
John Miller  
Thomas Springer  
My Linh Truong  
Ruthie Gagne  
Hafiz Adamjee  
Patrick Matteson

**Guests:** None

**Public Comments**-No speakers present.

### **Schedule for Budget Reviews**

Still need dates for presentations for Fire, DPW, and Capital. FinCom Member Patrick Matteson requested that the Recreation Budget which was due for review tonight be rescheduled to another date. Chair Blackwell was in agreement with this as well as having the Recreation Manager participate.

## **Budget Reviews**

FinCom Member Ruthie Gagne motioned to approve the Building & Zoning FY23 Budget for the amount of \$480,889 (includes \$442,969 Personal Services and \$37,920 Expenses). This was seconded by FinCom Member Brian Vernaglia.

FinCom Member Gagne began her review with a brief overview of the Building & Zoning department. The Building Department is responsible for enforcing the Massachusetts State Building code and the Winchester Zoning By-Laws for all construction within the Town. The Building Department issues permits and performs inspections for construction, wiring, plumbing and gas. In addition, the Building Department Commissioner acts as the Zoning Enforcement Officer, making formal determination on the applicable use of land. It also serves as a resource to the Town when designing and constructing municipal buildings and related projects. There is a large number of incoming 40B projects, which will add an additional 243 units to the existing workload.

Detailed FY23 budget information is as follows:

1. No change in Headcount
2. Salary increases of \$3,809 (0.9%) for permanent employees.
3. Maintain buyback increase of \$1263 for both union and non-union employees.
4. Increase overtime from \$5,000 to \$10,000. This was approved by the Acting Town Manager due to the upcoming increased volumes of inspections. It should be noted that there is a 48-hour turnaround for all plumbing and underground building permits.
5. Additional \$3,500 for a specialized filing cabinet. This request was approved by the Acting Town Manager but moved from equipment to expenses.
6. There will be a \$4,400 decrease in annual subscriptions.
7. There are no capital needs.

Overall spending thru March 8, 2022, is \$267,123.82 ,or roughly 61% of the total FY22 budget. On the revenue side, the FY21 deposits for Building & Zoning and Board of Appeals was \$1.442M versus \$2.045M FY22 year-to-date (YTD).

Vice Chair My Linh Troung commented that based on expenses being 61% YTD it appears that the department will be below budget. Chair Blackwell recommended checking the prior year as a benchmark.

FinCom Member Hafiz Adamjee wondered if the revenue side can be considered a targeted profit center. FinCom Member Gagne agreed to follow-up on this.

FinCom Member Jeff Calabrese commented that given the increased volume, the Town should ensure that it is getting fully compensated.

Motion to approve the \$480,889 budget for Building & Services passed unanimously -- 12 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstained.

FinCom Member Thomas Springer motioned to approve the Veterans Services FY23 Budget for the amount of \$52,555 (includes \$10,350 Personal Services and \$42,205 Expenses). This was seconded by Chair Blackwell.

FinCom Member Springer began by stating that the Commonwealth provides a uniform program of financial and medical assistance for indigent veterans and their dependents. Financial Assistance can be in the form of food, shelter, clothing, housing supplies and medical care. Eligible dependents of deceased veterans are also provided with on-going benefits. Assistance to Veterans can include regular financial support for those who qualify. Veterans Services works closely with the Council on Aging, the Department of Public Works, and the Fire Department. Winchester has a very modest case load currently at three out of a total of 500 Veterans residing in Town.

The overall budget increased by \$1,632 from last year due to an increase in the Professional Services budget line. The Town Manager is proposing a modest increase to enable the part time Veterans Service Officer (VSO), Al Wile, to access support from neighboring towns that comparable have full time positions.

Under expenses the major items are:

- \$10,350 in Personal Services to cover stipends for three persons involved with the program.
- \$22,000 in Direct Cash Grants to fund services for the three eligible veterans.
- \$2550 for flags
- \$1,930 for wreaths and flowers.
- \$600 miscellaneous expenses

There is an opportunity to receive state funding but there would need to be a full time VSO. Given Winchester's low case load, a full-time person is not warranted.

Overall spending for FY22 is on target except Professional Services which has not been used thus far.

FinCom Member Vernaglia commented that Winchester used to receive the 75% reimbursement but it ceased when the requirement was instituted that the VSO be full time. One option is to split with other neighboring towns, but the benefits are minimal.

Motion to approve the \$52,555 budget for Veterans Services passed unanimously -- 13 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstained.

FinCom Member Calabrese motioned to approve the Assessor FY23 Budget for the amount of \$364,280 (includes \$279,450 Personal Services and \$84,830 Expenses). This was seconded by FinCom Member Stefan Carp.

FinCom Member Calabrese began by stating that the Board of Assessors consists of three members elected by the voters for three-year terms. The Board is part time and meets weekly. Assessors are tasked to value all real and personal property within the community. There are 8000 parcels in town supported by one Manager and two secretaries. They also oversee motor vehicle excise tax bills. By keeping values at market standard, the Assessors assist in maximizing available resources to fund municipal services.

The FY23 goals are as follows: inspect exempt properties, review data for the state-mandated FY23 revaluation and expand the Circuit Breaker Rebate Program for Seniors. It should be noted that the state mandates that each property be re-evaluated every nine years. The town takes 4-5 years to do a re-evaluation.

Annual subscription costs of \$14,380 were re-allocated to the Assessor's office and will be recurring. This money will also be used to cover the Patriot Properties contract. In addition, a four-year \$20K increase was approved under Professional Services to be used for re-evaluation work. This will be removed in FY26. The Personal Services line item includes contractual increases as well as the sick leave buyback program, which kept costs high due to under usage.

FinCom Member Matteson asked how many seniors are participating in the circuit breaker program today. FinCom Member Calabrese responded by stating that only 1,700 are currently participating.

Vice Chair Truong and FinCom Member Stefan Carp asked why not re-evaluate every two versus four years, as it might generate more revenue through higher appraisals. Conversely, the office could assess every nine years to save money. Another related question was whether a process existed to re-value a property once sold. FinCom Member John Miller added that not doing assessments in a timely manner can lead to a fairness issue. In response to FinCom Members Adamjee's question, it was confirmed that using realtor's assessments is not an option because they need to be licensed. Chair Blackwell asked if using drones to do assessments is feasible.

FinCom Member Vernaglia stated that his own home's valuation is increasing annually. He thought that maybe there is some sort of metric applied given that no one visits from the Assessor's office.

FinCom Member Calabrese agreed to follow-up on all of the above questions.

Motion to approve the \$364,280 budget for Assessor passed unanimously -- 13 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstained.

### **New Business**

As follow-up from the last meeting, FinCom Member Yannis Evrigenis clarified the meaning of Encumbrances. He stated that it is a state requirement that those persons injured on duty be kept separate. In response to FinCom Member Adamjee's question as to who is covered under Workers Compensation, FinCom Member Evrigenis explained that the coverage applies to both residents and visitors.

## **Working Groups**

### **Capital**

FinCom Member Carp gave an update from the Capital Planning Committee. He advised that Capital Planning is sending all equipment maintenance fund requests directly to Capital for approval and bypassing FinCom. FinCom Member Carp felt that FinCom should review prior to final approval by Capital. Mr. Mark Twogood concurred that another set of eyes would be beneficial. Some of these requests are quite large. (\$100K+) He added that the requests are part of the yellow sheet. Chair Blackwell thought that given this maybe it does not belong in Capital. FinCom Member Balasubramaniam commented there is a need for "fresh blood" and new ideas. One thought is to change the dollar threshold for approval levels and keep the smaller requests at the local level. Also, FinCom Member Carp advised that there is no competitive bidding on requests less than \$50K. This may be an opportunity to reduce costs. He added that having a standardized request template would be helpful.

FinCom Member Calabrese asked if the Town had a formal Asset Database tracking system. FinCom Member Adamjee replied there is only a database for buildings and there is not enough budget to do everything. Having a five-year plan would be beneficial whereby monies could be prioritized and appropriated. Currently it is a catch all for everything much of it unfunded. FinCom Member Adamjee advised that there is \$12.5K adjustment on the yellow sheet coming from the General Fund and related to debt service. More information to follow.

Vice Chair Truong stated that the State has \$10 billion in funds that are to be used for infrastructure projects. There should be an effort by the Town to determine which capital projects will fall under this funding. Both FinCom Members Carp and Adamjee agreed to follow-up on this.

Chair Blackwell commented that maybe ARPA funds could be used for some of the proposed capital projects. Mr. Richard Mucci from the Select Board advised that there is currently no defined process or policy for ARPA but there are Capital projects on the list. He further added that \$800K of ARPA funds have been allocated mainly related to COVID. He did say that the new Select Board will be distributing funds.

FinCom Member Evrigenis commented that there are ARPA requests coming in and money is going out.

### Undistributed Breakouts

Chair Blackwell advised that she has received information that breaks out the undistributed health insurance, energy and retirement for Schools and Municipal. These spreadsheets are in Dropbox.

FinCom Member Vernaglia questioned the value of receiving this information. For example, we are currently getting information on the schools from Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Vice Chair Truong and FinCom Members Evrigenis and Adamjee felt that this information is important because it provides cost transparency, especially on the Town side. Also, the undistributed account is growing so it is something that needs to be understood.

### Review Meeting Minutes

The March 1 minutes were moved by Yannis Evrigenis. Seconded by FinCom Member Vernaglia.

Vice Chair Truong agreed to follow-up on the open School Committee questions. Of particular concern is Special Education.

Minutes approved as amended 6 in favor, 4 abstained, and 0 opposed.

### Adjourn

FinCom Member Matteson moved to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting and the motion was seconded by FinCom Member Vernaglia. The motion passed unanimously with 10 in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstained. FinCom adjourned at 8:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Gary Lozowski, Recording Secretary of Finance Committee

Approved by:   
Megan Blackwell, Chair of Finance Committee