

Swampscott Finance Committee
September 17, 2018

Joint meeting with Capital Improvements Committee and Article Six Committee

Attending: Marzie Galazka, Mary Ellen Fletcher, Jill Sullivan, Gail Rosenberg, Cinder McNerney, Tim Dorsey, Joan Hilario, Polly Titcomb.

Also Attending: Mike McClung (Moderator), Peter Spellios (BOS), Rich Raymond (CIC), Kelly Begin (CIC), Jay Sullivan (CIC), Kristin Sciacocio (CIC)

Motion to approve minutes from July 2 and August 20: McNerney/Rosenberg 7-0

Ms. Fletcher reported briefly on the work of the Article 6 committee. Their next meeting is 9/27 and she will report back to the Finance Committee on their work.

Mr. McClung explained to the Finance Committee that the goal of this meeting is to discuss plans to develop fiscal policies for the town in conjunction with the Board of Selectmen. In particular, there is interest in setting specific policies with respect to tax levy increases. We know that the main drivers of tax increases are difficult to control.

Spellios: The administration and BOS are interested in creating policy guidelines that will help guide decision-making going forward. These would also include fiscal goals for sub-sections of the budget. This will allow the finance team to plan budgets going forward. In particular: free cash used to offset the tax levy and new growth.

The administration has been doing a deep dive into what has been driving "local receipts" so that the budget number can be more data based going forward. We want to come out of October having a decent idea of what the tax levy increase should be. We think we are in the final year of short-term fixes. The Article 6 should provide some impetus to implement some of the recommendations that have yet not been implemented. Spellios would like BOS, CIC, Article 6, and the Finance Committee to spend time when not in budget season really digging into ideas for helping to improve the budget conversation. Mr. Spellios believes, given the constraints of time, that the Administration needs additional help driving policy and making decisions.

One idea is to form a committee to advise on major purchases. Ms. Galazka brought up the fact that the school department represents more than half of the budget. Where do they stand on this? Mr. Spellios indicated that the town side of government is interested in providing as much help as the school department needs to do the same kind of analysis for their budgetary process.

Mr. Spellios has asked the TA for 2-3 big ideas that are reflected in the budget produced in December.

Ms. Fletcher wants the Finance Committee to tell the school department how we want to see their budget presented. She feels that getting the level of detail, as well as the historical information over a number of years will allow all of us to better evaluate their budget.

There was discussion around the variety of guidelines that need to be determined in order to effectuate some budgetary control. The goal is to have such guidelines available by December.

Ms. Fletcher asked about the unused tax levy. What is the town's intention for that unused tax levy. She would like us to have an open conversation about it – we could consider an under-ride to get rid of it. Ms. McNerney indicated that we should make sure we understand what our five year needs are before we permanently take it away.

Ms. Sullivan recommended that BOS, CIC, School Committee and Finance Committee have some sort of retreat with plenty of time to discuss the range of topics we want more depth of analysis about and work to narrow the list to a few achievable projects. Mr. Spellios is also planning to have a listening session for the town meeting members and other community members to explain their own ideas about town priorities.

There was then a discussion about CIC's process for making decisions and how it could be improved.

The finance committee members will come to our 9/24 meeting with their wish lists of fiscal policies we want the town to work on in the near term. Mr. Spellios would also like to create working groups where members of the finance committee can be of help to the administration along with members of other boards.

Motion to adjourn: Fletcher/Hilario