

Minutes – Acton Finance Committee
July 14, 2009, 7:30 p.m.
Room 204
Town Hall

Pursuant to a notice duly posted with the Town Clerk and with a quorum of members present, the Acton Finance Committee convened at 7:30 p.m. on July 14, 2009 to review various matters.

Members present for the meeting: Herman Kabakoff, Chair, Mary Ann Ashton, Vice Chair, Bill Mullin, Clerk, Pat Clifford, Bob Evans, Steve Noone, Kent Sharp, Doug Tindal, Brandy Brandon, Associate Member and Karen Kucala, FinCom Staff Liaison

Chairman Herman Kabakoff called the meeting to order at 7:30pm.

Public Participation

None.

Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of the 6/9/2009 and 6/23/09 meetings were approved unanimously, with Pat Clifford abstaining with respect to the 6/9/09 session.

Building Department Fee Increase Proposal

Frank Ramsbottom, Building Commissioner, presented the case for a Building Permit fee increase from \$7/\$1,000 of construction to \$14.50/\$1,000 of construction. The FinCom was presented this information as a courtesy, as the purview for this decision resides with the Board of Selectmen.

Mr. Ramsbottom stated that the reason for the increase was due to a full allocation of all direct and indirect costs in his department. In a survey of 16 surrounding towns, Acton's fee was the lowest and the new increase would make it the highest except for Wayland and Westford.

Mr. Noone asked if all departments use the "full cost allocation method" and Mr. Ramsbottom said that he believes that they do, but cited the Nursing Services as a specific example of a department that does so. Ms. Clifford asked if credit cards could now be used and the answer was in the affirmative. Mr. Mullin, who reminded members that he is in the construction business, expressed his opinion that the increase is dramatic and will simply add to the cost of people who are remodeling or purchasing their homes. Mr. Evans felt that the full cost allocation method should be used.

No action was taken.

Continued Discussion of Local Meals Tax

Mr. Kabakoff informed the committee that he had presented our views on this subject to the Board of Selectmen the previous night. He also said that BoS Chair Knibbe said that no decisions would be made soon, that the Board is performing "an information gathering exercise".

Space Study Committee Report

Mr. Tindal reported about the Space Study Committee. He discussed the process to date, some background on the constraints of the properties owned and that much has changed in the economic climate since this subject was first broached. Until the overall economy settles, a building specific action plan is not anticipated. He said that Town Manager Ledoux is pulling in the Department Heads to gather their views of the best uses for both Town owned

property as well as the possibility of using vacant commercial space. Chair Kabakoff asked if an inventory is part of this process and Mr. Tindal said “yes”.

Cost Reduction Committee Report

Ms. Ashton reported about the Cost Reduction Committee. She discussed the process to date and the current status. The business cases have been divided among the committee members as follows:

- Mr. Brandon: Energy, water, transportation and capital
- Mr. Noone: Health insurance, labor costs
- Ms. Ashton: Government restructuring, fees

Ms. Ashton said that there are “40 something” analyses and after the committee is done vetting them, the Finance Committee needs to decide what the next steps might be. It was her opinion that a larger group of stakeholders should be convened for refining.

Planning for the Year

Mr. Kabakoff discussed the calendar for the year and the timing of the FinCom Point of View. There may be a need for a Special Town Meeting if there is to be a change in the FY2010 budget. Consensus was that the FY11 Point of View must await these decisions about FY10. Mr. Mullin asked Ms. Kucala if she could send us a link to the DOR website for the best information on setting the tax rate, changing budgets, etc., and she said she would do so.

Solar Panels on Roofs

Mr. Tindal reported about his discussions with BoS Chair Knibbe. He reiterated the FinCom’s feelings that the granting of such leeway for long term financial agreements without any sort of financial analysis was not appropriate, but, the voters have spoken. Ms. Knibbe reminded the FinCom that the Town Manager would be reviewing these leases and said that she would welcome another “FinCom Point of View” document on this. The reaction to this proposal was decidedly mixed. Mr. Mullin said he thought it was a good idea, but Mr. Noone, Mr. Evans, Ms. Ashton and Ms. Clifford offered varying dissents. Mr. Noone felt that we should not get in the middle of the Selectmen’s responsibilities with respect to agreements. Mr. Evans felt that the School Committee will be making these decisions, not the Board of Selectman, so he advised Mr. Tindal to discuss it with the Schools. Ms. Clifford did not like the idea of another point of view document, acting as a form of minority report, a sentiment with which Ms. Ashton agreed.

Other

Ms. Clifford agreed to attend the South Acton Train Station Committee.

Adjourned

Mr. Sharp moved to adjourn (seconded by Mr. Noone) and the meeting was adjourned sometime around 9:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted by William C. Mullin, Clerk.