



# Town of Acton Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: July 12<sup>st</sup>, 2016

Acton Town Hall • Room 204 • 7:30 pm

.....

Members in attendance: Bob Evans, Jason Cole, Mike Majors, Margaret Busse (Chair), Roland Bourdon, Shuyu Lee, Doug Tindal (Vice-Chair), and Steve Noone.

Members absent: David Wellingshoff (Clerk), John Benson (Associate)

Other: Janet Adachi (BoS), Bill Mullin (FINCOM Emeritus)

Chairwoman Busse called meeting to order at 7:34

**Public participation** – None.

**Approve minutes** – Minutes of June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016 amended to reflect that the committee would like as much specification in the warrant articles as possible sent to FINCOM two weeks prior to the warrant going to print and no later than March 1<sup>st</sup> with regard to the Annual Town Meeting. Doug Tindal proposed approval as amended. Mike Majors seconded the motion. The motion was approved with all affirmative votes, save for that of Steve Noone, who abstained.

Minutes of December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016, and February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016, which had been previously emailed to committee members for their input were taken in tandem. Mike Majors moved to approve the minutes. Steve Noone seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

A draft of the minutes of the March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016 meeting was circulated, but we did not return to vote on those minutes during this meeting.

**Finance Committee Best Practices** – Chairwoman Busse had asked previous FINCOM Chairs to come and discuss best practices with the committee. A series of questions were

sent to Bill Mullins, Steve Noon, Bob Evans, and Mike Majors (perhaps among others) – previous Chairmen all.

- 1.) How can members stay on top of the relevant pertinent issues? Bill Mullin stated that he liked to go to the MA DoR website. He also suggested that each of us pick one subject to become specialized in it. Steve Noone added that good sources of information are the Pew Institute, the Beacon, and the minutes of the other board/committee meetings. Steve asked that we do a better job of being liaison with other committees. He also mentioned the Association of Town Finance Committees and recommend that we get out of Acton from time to time to see how other towns/cities look at similar issues. Doug Tindal added the State Finance Officers Website as well as a number of other special purpose websites. His take away was, that if you see something of interest, send it to the rest of the committee for their review.
- 2.) What is the most effective way to communicate with other boards? Bill Mullin complimented our goals but said that the best thing we can do is to reach out and talk with other people. Beer and coffee came up at multiple times in the conversation. The message clearly stated is that going and talking with members of other committees, boards, and interested parties is the best way to engender trust and respect. Bill also suggested greater use of sending letters to the other boards/committees on behalf of the whole FINCOM. He likes the Point of View document and has found it useful. Steve Noone agreed with the PoV document, but lamented that the multi-board meetings are too few and far between. He reiterated that you have to go to all the meetings of the entity to which one is a liaison, but he said not to speak at those meetings – “do your opining back here.” He stated that there have been waves of communication highs and lows, and that we are currently in one of those valleys.
- 3.) And 4.) How to influence other boards, and town meeting? Bill Mullin reminded us about coffee and beer and added that ALG is a very good device. He said to get your position stated clearly and early as a stake in the ground. Make sure to have facts on your side, not just opinion. Build political support for a position (back to beer and coffee). Be clear when you are speaking on behalf of the committee and when you are speaking for yourself. Do not be afraid to speak your own opinion and defend it, “Take a strong position, be an advocate, communicate strongly and then go fight for it.” Steve Noone added, get on their agenda, and go and present to them. Don’t just email out a request for feedback/comment, as they likely will never come. With regard to the Town Meetings, Steve requested that we be either FOR or AGAINST the topic – nuance from the Committee is lost on the larger community. If we are FOR something that is already presented by another board or committee, we should not try and bracket our position around theirs, we should be FOR it. Similarly, if we are AGAINST something, we should clearly state why. He also stated that we lose our effectiveness the farther away we get from financial topics. Shuyu asked at this time how to foster a one-community approach, instead of different boards having

different directions. Steve Noone commented that the multiple capital committees are a new phenomenon, but that any override is hard to get approved, so it is best for overlapping committees, such as the one for the Schools and the one for the Town to be in coordination. Bill Mullin added that a successful override usually requires something for more than one interest group at a time, i.e., a new school AND a new fire station. He advised us to become experts at Proposition 2 ½ to fully understand the law and the workings of how to get things done. Chairwoman Busse asked a this time that a review of Prop 2 ½ be provided by the town at a subsequent meeting.

- 5.) Open forum? Bill Mullin advised us not to be in a cocoon. He stated that we need to be more political – cannot be cut and dried on the numbers of finance. He went on to point out what he likes to call the “Acton Way” of making sure all parties are pleased with the outcome – he pointed to the painting of Town Hall and the color kerfuffle during the last ATM. He suggested that if requested quotes for painting the Town Hall white, and a separate quote for historical colors, we could then go back to the town and ask for donations/interested parties to make up the difference in cost. That way, the base cost became the responsibility of the town, protecting the larger tax base, and the incremental cost would be borne by those willing to pay the extra expense to change the color. Steve Noone stated that we should always act as though we are spending our own money. He stated that he really would have liked the BoS to come to us with quotes in hand and/or at least stated what color they were planning on painting the Town Hall. Steve also noted that the margin of victory for override votes has been diminishing over the previous number of votes. It has been, however, a number of years since the last override and the demographics of the Town have been shifting. Bill stated that there will be no override vote if there are any reserves. Bob Evans stated that overrides will likely always be approved IF there is a clear statement of the longer term plan. In his memory, the only capital override that failed did not show what the longer term plan was.

**Overview of Health Insurance Trust** – Bob Evans was asked to give a ten minute overview of the Health Insurance Trust. The trust is a form of self-insurance for our employees, both from the Town and from the RSD. Benefits are negotiated by the BoS and are now standardized between the Town and the RSD. Plans come from both Harvard Pilgrim and Blue Cross. 1500 people are covered, plus 400 retirees, which are also covered by Medicare Supplement plan with Blue Cross. As a result of Obamacare, there is also a drug coverage benefit. Family plans are based on 2.4 people per family. There is also stop-loss insurance, so that if a person uses more than \$125k/year in benefits, we are not responsible for the extra cost. Some years we make money on the stop-loss insurance, some years we do not. We keep about 20% of the yearly cost in reserve, as claims come in after the end of the fiscal year due to delayed billing cycles.

**Overview of the Economic Development Committee** –Doug Tindal was asked to give a ten minute overview of the EDC. Similar to the ALG, the plan at the genesis of the EDC was to

have two members of each of the three main committees/boards to be a part of the EDC so that if/when there was agreement on a project, it could move with greater speed. Unfortunately, it was hard to get that many people to join the EDC, so there was a first reboot in 2009. In Doug's opinion, the committee became sidelined by being involved in too many little items instead of focusing on larger, more impactful projects. The guiding principle of the EDC are to help attract new businesses/industry to the town. To protect/foster good relations with the businesses we already have. The Metrowest Chamber of Commerce is half populated with Acton businesses, though the Chamber represents 8 towns. A business database is being fleshed out – cannot just get it from the Town tax rolls, as there are too many small, single-proprietor business to be an effective measure of the Town's industry. Matthew Selby is the spear head of this effort from within Town Hall and Doug spoke very highly of his being hired.

**Review Committee Updates** – Roland Bourdon reported that the BoS and the CPC had an executive session meeting due to the lawsuit against using CPC funds for updates to church buildings. Shuyu reported that the BoS is negotiating an electrical aggregation plan. The closing of the Town Meeting warrant for a fall meeting has been postponed. Acton 202 is now a five member entity instead of 7 members. There might be a three boards meeting in September. One of the BoS members stated that now might not be the time to double the CPC surcharge rate. Steve Noone reported that the School Committee had a public outreach meeting to review the findings of Dore and Whittier with regard to school size and condition. A letter of interest was sent to the MSBA, we are due to hear back in November. Mike Majors reported that a region-wide vote for the Minuteman school building project will be in September. Margaret Busse reported that the Planning Board had a meeting of sorts with regard to Kelley's Corner to decide if anything else should be brought back to a future town meeting. She also stated that a more informal three board meeting was being discussed.

**Finance Committee Business** – Chairwoman Busse informed the committee that another open Associate Position is being discussed between herself and Peter Asthon, Town Moderator.

Next Meeting July 26<sup>th</sup>.

Meeting adjourned at 9:29pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jason Cole  
Finance Committee