

**Finance Committee
Town of Buckland
Minutes of Meeting
January 10, 2022**

This meeting was conducted remotely in accordance with the provisions of the Governor's March 12, 2020, Executive Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law.

Present:

Finance Committee: Larry Langford, Bruce Lessels, Dena Willmore via Zoom
Paula Consolo via phone

Town of Buckland: Heather Butler, Town Administrator, via Zoom

Franklin Tech Regional School District: Russ Kaubris and Rick Martin via Zoom

General Public: none

The meeting was called to order by Chair Langford at 4:02 P.M.

The first order of business was the review and acceptance of the minutes of November 8, 2021. Ms. Consolo moved and Ms. Willmore seconded that the minutes be accepted as written. Vote: A roll call was taken and the vote was unanimous.

The second order of business was a discussion with Franklin Tech regarding their FY23 budget and its impact on Buckland. Mr. Martin prefaced his remarks by saying that the Finance Committee of Franklin Tech had not voted on a budget yet – their meeting is in several weeks – but he was prepared to give us a guestimate of where Buckland’s assessment will be. He then quickly went through an abridged PowerPoint presentation on various sources and uses of grants, reviewed new programs that are intended to keep students within the district (such as veterinary and nursing programs), and then moved to the impact of the number of students from Buckland attending FTRSD. Our assessment for FY 2023 is based on the number of students attending in FY22 – and that is 18 for Buckland, up from 8 in the prior fiscal year. Mr. Martin is estimating that the overall increase in assessments will be about 3% - but this is dependent on the amount of aid from the State and that will not be known until the end of January. However, assuming the 3% number is close to the final number, combined with the significant increase in number of students, Buckland’s assessment will increase to \$250,000 to \$300,000 (from \$111,000 this year). Looking forward to FY24, it appears that we will not see another big jump in the number of students attending. Mr. Kaubris and Mr. Martin left the meeting at 4:24.

The discussion then moved to the Shelburne Falls Wastewater Treatment Facility, a brief review of the role of Fiscal Agent that Buckland plays and the current staffing issues. Ms. Butler discussed the proposed Memorandum of Agreement between SFWTF and Charlemont on the sharing of one professional and the recent hesitation on the part of Charlemont over their share of costs. The SFWTF has hired an additional person and does have sufficient funds to cover those costs in case the MOA does not come to pass.

The discussion then moved to staffing issues in town hall and the highway department: the Town is currently looking to hire a new Tax Collector/Treasurer, and a part time assistant to the Assessor allowing Ms. Guyette to transition to a more significant role supporting the Town Administrator. The Highway Department is now looking for a Foreman and a laborer, and the Police Department is looking for a full-time officer. Clearly a stressful period for the Town Administrator.

Moving back to the budget the focus shifted to revenues with Ms. Willmore questioning why the local receipts estimate continues to be so significantly below what turns out to be the actual number. After some discussion about developing a methodology of how these estimates are developed, along with a recognition that low-balling local receipts as one way to capture future free cash, Ms. Willmore stated “it is not all about free cash” – but also about best practices and transparency.

Discussion then moved to the Expense side of the budget with some time spent on the capital needs of the town, particularly vehicles. Mr. Langford stressed that, given the small staff in the Highway Department, we cannot afford to have staff sidelined because vehicles are under repair. A brief discussion about how to fund highway vehicles was had, including the use of Chapter 90 funds and borrowing along with use of stabilization funds.

Because there were so many department budgets that had not been provided, or were incomplete, no detailed line-item budget discussions took place. The committee decided to next meet in person to go over the budget on a line-by-line basis. That meeting will take place on January 24 at 4pm at a place to be determined.

There were no public comments. With no further business, the Chair entertained a motion to adjourn. Ms. Willmore so moved, Mr. Lessels seconded. A roll call was taken and the vote was unanimous. The meeting adjourned at 5:38 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Dena Willmore