

Town of Bedford, MA
Finance Committee Appointing Authority
July 13, 2023
Select Board Meeting Room – Bedford Town Hall

PRESENT: Chair Mark Siegenthaler, Ben Thomas, Bopha Malone

ALSO PRESENT: Approximately 40 residents

Chair Mark Siegenthaler called the meeting to order at 7:00pm. The members reviewed the FCAA's June 20, 2023, Meeting Minutes. Mr. Thomas moved to approve the minutes with a slight amendment. It was seconded by Ms. Malone. **The motion passed 3-0-0.**

Mr. Siegenthaler proceeded with the Finance Committee Interviews and welcomed Mr. Stephen Steele and Ms. Erica Liu.

The Chair asked Mr. Steele about his feelings and concerns about the relationships between the Finance Committee and town departments. Mr. Steele feels that there are some ineffective communications and divisiveness. He doesn't feel that communicating over email is effective, and he didn't agree with this year's budget increase being above twice the FinComm budget guidelines.

Ms. Malone asked Mr. Steele what his most productive interactions with staff have been, what has been the most challenging, and how has he attempted to resolve conflicts when they've arisen, and Mr. Steele doesn't believe that there have been problems. He spoke about MUNIS, and he will connect with the Chair if problems arise to get his thoughts.

In response to Mr. Thomas's question about some of the areas that Mr. Steele feels are his contributions and accomplishments on the Finance Committee, Mr. Steele said that he listens to both sides. He's been on the committee for 13 years, and he brings experience to the committee in a time where there are some inexperienced members where he can teach them how municipal finance works and help with understanding the State budgeting process.

Ms. Malone asked if the FinComm 3.5% budget guideline provides for an equitable budget in a period of high inflation, and if the percentage is equally fair for both town employees and taxpayers, and Mr. Steele shared that he wasn't in agreement with the 3.5%, but it was resolved.

Mr. Thomas asked about the need for change for FinComm, and Mr. Steele's suggestions were to start the budget earlier, get all members up to speed, and understand the model. He also shared that everyone on FinComm should be able to answer questions asked at Town Meeting, but he doesn't think that they are able to.

Mr. Siegenthaler shared with Mr. Steele some examples of his concerns on the approach that he's taken that were not constructive to other committee members and town staff. Mr. Steele didn't agree.

When asked about his support for the 3% surcharge for Community Preservation Act (CPA) programs, and how he'd envision it being spent, Mr. Steele feels that we have significant unspent CPA funds, and we need to bring the CPA tax surcharge down to what is required to meet the debt obligations.

Next, the FCAA interviewed Ms. Liu. Each FCAA member asked the same questions in the same order. Ms. Liu shared that she has no problem working with the Finance Director as he was able to learn quickly. The turnover in staff in the department is a concern for her.

In terms of accomplishments, Ms. Liu talked about her abilities to serve, learn, and watch out for taxpayers' money.

As for the 3.5% budget guideline set by FinComm, that was the guideline set by the committee. She believed that it's important to consider the economic situation of the Town and taxpayers.

Mr. Siegenthaler shared concerns about her approach to Fin Comm work and town staff. She shared her thoughts about the importance of working collaboratively, having enough time for the budget process, and trying to understand the facts. She appreciated Mr. Siegenthaler for sharing his concerns.

Regarding CPA, she couldn't give a position because she didn't want to discuss without specifics.

In speaking about how she can help FinComm, she would be a good resource in helping to bring new members up to speed, she has experience in working with different people, she represents a diverse group of people in Town, and she is not a part of any political agenda or affiliation.

Because the interview ended at 7:50pm, members agreed to meet on July 25, 2023, at 7:00pm to deliberate because another meeting that Mr. Thomas and Ms. Malone were a part of in the same room was starting at 8:00pm.

Mr. Thomas moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Malone seconded. **The motion passed 3-0-0** and the meeting was adjourned at 7:53pm.

Submitted By: Bopha Malone