

**Town of Oak Bluffs Finance and Advisory Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, January 12, 2023, 5:00pm  
OB Town Hall Meeting Room/Zoom Conference**

**Present:** Chair – Sherry Countryman, Richard Weiss, Maura McGroarty, Reuben Fitzgerald, Bill Vrooman, Sean DeBettencourt, Dion Alley, Mike Taus\*, Mimi Davisson (zoom)

**Others:** Deborah Potter, Carrie Blair, Martina Thornton, Don Leopold, Christine Todd, Sarah Kuh, Doug Ruskin, Beth Folcarelli, Leslie Clapp, David Vigneault, Jim Klingensmith, Cindy Trish, Billie Jean Sullivan, Sue Diverio, Peter Graczykowski

**Recorder:** Juliet Mulinare

\*Committee members that either arrived late or departed early.

**5:00 pm** Ms. Countryman called the Oak Bluffs Finance and Advisory Committee meeting to order.

**Announcements**

Ms. Countryman reported that Falmouth voted to support the Embarkation Fee Memo that she and Ms. Gilfoy put together, as well as an increase of the fee to \$1.50. Ms. Countryman will follow up with Senator Cyr's office.

Ms. Countryman announced that she will be running for re-election this spring, as did Mr. Weiss; Mr. Vrooman will not seek re-election.

**Approval of Minutes**

The Committee reviewed the draft minutes from the December 29, 2022 meeting.

*Mr. Vrooman moved to approve the 12/29/22 minutes, seconded by Mr. Fitzgerald. No further discussion, roll call vote:*

*Vrooman – Aye, Alley – Aye, Countryman – Aye, Weiss – Aye, DeBettencourt – Aye, Fitzgerald – Aye, McGroarty – Aye, Davisson – Abstain (Taus not present at time of vote).*

*Motion carries (7-0-1).*

The Committee reviewed the draft minutes from the January 5, 2023 meeting.

*Mr. Vrooman moved to approve the 1/5/23 minutes, seconded by Mr. Fitzgerald. No further discussion, roll call vote:*

*Vrooman – Aye, Alley – Abstain, Countryman – Aye, Weiss – Aye, DeBettencourt – Aye, Fitzgerald – Aye, McGroarty – Aye, Davisson – Aye (Taus not present at time of vote).*

*Motion carries (7-0-1).*

**Financial Policy Amendment Review**

The Committee reviewed a request change to the Town's existing Financial Policy that would prevent the allocation of Short Term Rental (STR) tax to local receipts as dedicated revenue. Ms. Potter stated that it would be fiscally irresponsible to allocate the revenue from the STR tax towards anything without five years of data to consider. The Committee discussed what process would need to happen in order to allocate the STR revenue to a certain area.

*Mr. Vrooman moved to table the discussion on the amendment to the financial policy until a member of the Selectboard is present to explain why they have requested the change.*

Ms. Potter stated that the change sets the tone for the next 3-5 years. Ms. Countryman stated that the Affordable Housing Committee had requested that a percentage of the STR tax be allocated to them and asked whether approving this change to the policy would prevent that from happening. Ms. Potter responded that it would, for the time being.

*Mr. Weiss seconds Mr. Vrooman's motion to postpone discussion. Further discussion:*

The Committee questioned why the change needed to be made now. Ms. Potter responded that she is trying to move forward with getting policies updated, which is usually a long process.

*Roll call vote to postpone the financial policy amendment:*

*Vrooman – Aye, Alley – Aye, Countryman – Aye, Weiss – Aye, Fitzgerald – Aye, DeBettencourt – Aye, McGroarty – Aye, Davisson – Aye. (Taus not present at time of vote.)*

Motion passes unanimously (8-0-0).

### **COLA Review/Discussion**

The Committee discussed the Personnel Board's recommended COLA of 3.1%. Ms. Potter stated that other towns are putting in for higher COLAs (Edgartown is at 5%, Tisbury is at 6%). She continued that while other towns are using articles to appropriate the COLA funds, Oak Bluffs has embedded it in the budget so it is easier to absorb. Ms. Potter stated that, for OB, it is approximately \$75k for every 1% increase. The formula the Personnel Board used to derive the COLA is a 5-year average of New England CPIs. Ms. Potter clarified that the FinCom only comments on the aggregate COLA as it pertains to the budget, they do not make a recommendation on the percentage. She continued that the reason for the FinCom to take action now is to allow the Selectboard to review and make changes as needed. Ms. Davisson stated that OB's COLA is too low compared to the other towns and she would support a higher percentage increase so OB salaries stay competitive on the island.

*Mr. Weiss moved to postpone the COLA discussion and revisit at a later date. Mr. DeBettencourt seconded the motion, no further discussion, roll call vote:*

*Vrooman – Aye, Alley – Aye, Countryman – Aye, Weiss – Aye, Fitzgerald – Aye, DeBettencourt – Aye, McGroarty – Aye, Davisson – Aye. (Taus not present at time of vote.)*

Motion passes unanimously (8-0-0).

### **Review/Discussion Police Budget**

The Committee reviewed the budget request presented by Chief Searle at the 1/5/23 meeting. The Committee expressed concerns with adding another full-time position to the budget when the Department has had problem's filling the existing officer positions.

\*Mr. Taus joins the meeting.

The Committee discussed the issues the town is having in attracting and retaining employees due to the lack, and high cost, of housing on island. The Committee decided to review all budget requests before making any recommendations.

## **Oak Bluffs Association Budget Review**

Ms. Billie Jean Sullivan was present to discuss the budget request from the Oak Bluffs Association (OBA). Ms. Sullivan stated that the OBA is requesting an increase from \$20,000 to \$27,500, which will allow them to give their five (seasonal) staff members an hourly raise from \$15 to \$18, as well as \$2,500 to cover payroll processing expenses. Ms. Sullivan said the staff has not gotten a raise in four years; they speak with thousands of visitors at the kiosk downtown and provide them with very useful information. The Committee discussed whether the services provided by the OBA should be funded by the tax payers or whether they should fall to the businesses. Ms. Sullivan stated that the OBA puts on five events every year that bring people into town who spend money.

The Committee also discussed the \$2,500 needed for payroll administration and whether that could be administered through the town to save on costs. Mr. Alley stated that the OBA recently lowered some of its rates for businesses; he would be more inclined to support this request if those rates were instead being raised. The Committee discussed the town's tourism based economy and to what extent the services provided by the OBA benefit the town and add to the tax base.

## **County Budget Review**

Don Leopold, County Commissioner, provided the Committee with an overview of the County's services. He stated that the County serves island residents (ie beach management and appointments to County boards), the towns (as fiscal administrative agent for regional services) and the island as a whole (grant funds). He said that funding from the towns goes directly to the programs offered, it does not go to the County.

The Committee's primary concern with the County was the duplication of administrative functions. Mr. Taus said that for years he has been asking the County to provide a simple chart outlining the services they provide and who administers them as it is very confusing. Mr. Weiss echoed the concern about redundant services and asked if the County had ever hired an outside auditor to evaluate this. Ms. Countryman followed up that the concern is about redundant administrative services and expressed her frustration that she had reached out to the County back in October and was blown off, which was very frustrating. Mr. Leopold offered to sit down with the Committee and talk through their concerns; Ms. Countryman responded that she was hoping to do that back in October so that the budget process would be more efficient.

The Committee then heard from the various County programs on their budget requests:

- **HARBOR HOMES:** Sue Diverio, Executive Director  
Ms. Diverio provided the Committee with an overview of the Harbor Homes program which provides shelter services for the homeless and victims of domestic violence. The Committee questioned why there was an additional 5% administrative fee on top of the caseworker's salary. Ms. Diverio explained that the 5% administrative fee was in place before she arrived and that it is determined by her board. The Committee expressed their concern with the lack of budget information provided to them.
- **PUBLIC BENEFITS ACCESS:** Sarah Kuh, Director  
Ms. Kuh provided the Committee with an overview of the Public Benefits Access program, which administers assistance programs like SNAP and WIC for island residents. She explained that while the Councils on Aging provide this service to residents over the age of 60, they do not serve the under 60 population, which is the gap this program is intended to fill. In FY24, the program is reducing a 40 hr/week employee to 30 hours so there is a slight reduction from FY23 in the overall budget request.

- **HEALTH CARE ACCESS:** Sarah Kuh, Director  
 Ms. Kuh also serves as the Director for the Health Care Access program and explained that this is a program designed to help islanders apply for and maintain their health insurance. The requested budget for FY24 is a 4.81% over FY23. The Committee discussed the fact that funding for HCA is imbedded in the town's budget instead of being a separate warrant article.
  
- **MV CENTER FOR LIVING:** Leslie Clapp, Executive Director  
 Ms. Clapp explained that this program is operational again after a Covid-related hiatus. There is a significant increase in their budget request this year due to the addition of a 20 hr/week position to accommodate more clients and to account for increased costs. The Committee asked whether the clients pay anything for services provided; Ms. Clapp responded that some clients receive public support and some are private pay. The Committee discussed that this budget is also embedded in the town's budget and is not a separate warrant article. Ms. Countryman noted the significant increase and stated that grant funding should be sought. Ms. Clapp said that the Center for Living has been designated as a dementia-friendly community which will open the door for more grant funding; she also said she intends to increase the non-profits fundraising efforts to try and offset the budget increases.
  
- **MV COMMUNITY SERVICES:** Beth Folcarelli, CEO MVCS  
 Under the umbrella of MVCS are three programs, CORE (Counseling, Outreach and Referrals for Elders), Healthy Aging MV and the Substance Use Disorder Coalition (SUD).
  - **CORE**  
 Ms. Folcarelli provided the Committee with an overview of the program which provides outreach to homebound elders and includes a variety of services such as transport, food and mental health services. Ms. Folcarelli said the program is level funding for FY24; they are giving modest pay increases to the staff but have shaved expenses to accommodate them. She continued that the 12% administrative fee is typical for the field and is based on the actual amount needed, as demonstrated in their annual reports. The Committee asked whether administrative services could be combined with other programs. Ms. Folcarelli responded that the programs under MVCS are completely different organizations. Ms. Folcarelli said the CORE operation is licensed under a number of different State and public health entities and as a non-profit they conduct annual reporting.
  
  - **HEALTHY AGING MV:** Cindy Trish, Executive Director  
 Ms. Trish stated that Healthy Aging MV provides different services than the programs already discussed. The rate of seniors on the island is increasing at a rapid rate and the culture is moving towards aging-in-place. Ms. Trish said HAMV is a "planning, advocacy and community building agency that brings numerous organizations together to identify needs and sort out logistics of providing for those needs. She works with the VTA, SSA, COAs and more to accomplish this. The budget request for FY24 is slightly higher than FY23 due to the fact that previously the MVC contributed \$10k to the HAMV budget, but they are not doing that this year, so Ms. Trish is asking the towns to make up the difference. The Committee discussed the 12% administration fee to use MVCS as the fiscal agent when the County would provide that service at no additional cost. Ms. Trish explained that the total budget of \$375k covers all four pilot programs that she oversees and she is actively pursuing grant opportunities whenever possible. The Committee expressed concerns with grant-funded programs, specifically what happens when a grant is no longer available and the obligation to continue funding the program then falls to the towns.

- **SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER COALITION**

Ms. Folcarelli stated that the SUD Coalition is requesting funding for a coordinator position. This is a position that has not been filled in two years; it started out as a part-time position but there was no interest so they decided to make it a full-time position in the hopes that it would attract more applicants. The SUD Coalition is comprised of the MV Hospital, MVCS, Police Departments and others and their purpose is to address gaps in prevention and treatment for substance abuse.

The Committee then discussed the County's request for \$200k (total) in funding for improvements to be made to the Health Care Access building. Improvements include updating the HVAC and lighting, as well as improving the interior layout to provide areas with more privacy. The Committee was concerned with putting money towards a County building when there are many town buildings that need a lot of work. Mr. Weiss asked if the County could get a loan for the work. Ms. Thornton responded that the County has no revenue source to back up a loan, and no mechanism to raise taxes. Ms. Potter asked whether the ARPA funds could be used. Ms. Thornton stated that a portion of the ARPA funds have been allocated to the Airport's Wastewater System Upgrade and the rest will be used to upgrade private septic systems. Mr. DeBettencourt asked how the \$200k budget was figured. Ms. Thornton responded that she solicited quotes for the various aspects of the scope of work.

The Committee discussed the County's request for \$42k for Revenue Replacement. Ms. Thornton explained that the discrepancy between revenue and expenses must be balanced on an annual basis. Sometimes this means the towns get money back from the County and sometimes additional money is owed.

### **Dukes County Regional Housing Authority Budget Review**

Mr. David Vigneault was present to discuss the FY24 budget request from DCRHA. He gave a history of the program, which was started in 1986, and provided a summary of how staff salaries are determined and adjusted. He said the DCRHA oversees 100 housing units on 16 properties in five island towns. The FY24 budget request is an increase from \$86k to \$92k, and reflects salary increases for staff. The Committee discussed the percentage increase as it relates to the town COLA.

### **Sheriff's Dept. Budget Review**

Mr. Peter Graczykowski was present to discuss the FY24 budget requests from the Sheriff's Department. The Department's biggest request is for the island-wide communication system. Although they have expanded coverage for the system, the FY24 request is actually a \$36k overall (~\$3,000 for OB) decrease from FY23. Other funding requests are for generator and microwave network maintenance contracts. The Committee discussed the formula used to determine each town's share of the Sheriff Department's budget, which is based on a 50/50 formula: 50% based on population and 50% based on town of origin for emergency calls placed. Ms. McGroarty noted that approximately 10% of the calls that originate from Oak Bluffs come from non-profit entities that serve the whole island but are located in Oak Bluffs. She requested the opportunity to speak further about this with the Sheriff's Department.

### **Committee Updates**

None.

### **Town Administrator/Accountant Comments**

None.

### **Member Comments**

None.

### **Public Comments**

None.

### **Adjournment**

*At 8:50pm a motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Taus and seconded by Mr. Fitzgerald. No further discussion, roll call vote:*

*Weiss – Aye, McGroarty – Aye, Fitzgerald – Aye, Vrooman – Aye, DeBettencourt – Aye, Alley – Aye, Taus – Aye, Davisson – Aye, Countryman – Aye.*

*Motion passed unanimously (8-0-0).*

### **Meeting Documents on File**

1. FY24 OBA – Budget Request
2. FY24 DC County Harbor Homes Budget Request 11-16-2022
3. FY24 DC Public Benefits Access Budget Request 12-16-2022
4. FY24 DC Health Care Access Budget Request 12-16-2022
5. FY24 DC Center for Living Budget Request 12-16-2022
6. FY24 DC MV Community Services Budget Request 11-16-2022 (CORE & SUDC)
7. FY24 DC Healthy Aging MV Budget Request 11-16-2022
8. FY24 DCRHA Administrative Staff Budget 50-50 FINAL
9. FY24 Sheriff Budget Narrative – 2022-12-09

*Respectfully Submitted*

*Juliet Mulinare, Recorder*

Minutes Approved: 1/26/23