

## **RTM Finance Committee Meeting**

Tuesday, April 7, 2020

( By Zoom )

**Purpose:** Upon the request of the Town Attorney's office, and upon the approval of the Board of Finance at its March 4, 2020 meeting, to recommend approval to the full RTM a special appropriation in the amount of \$170,000.00 to the Contract Services Account 10101170-532000 for unanticipated matters and ongoing affordable housing matters.

**RTM Finance Committee Members Present:** Jeff Wieser (Chair); Cathy Talmadge; Seth Braunstein; Jessica Bram; Rick Jaffe; Christine Meiers Schatz; Stephen Shackelford.

**Other RTM Members Present:** Kristin Schneeman.

**Others Present:** Ira Bloom, Town Attorney; Gary Conrad, Finance Director; Patty Strauss, Town Clerk.

Patty Strauss introduced the Zoom meeting, provided instructions to the assembled committee members and turned the administration over to the Chair.

Town Attorney, Ira Bloom, then presented the request which he indicated had arisen out of extraordinary caseload that his firm, Berchem, Moses had been required to handle on behalf of the Town this year. For historical reference, Atty. Bloom indicated that he has served in this role for 23 years. during that time, the Contract Services Account had been budgeted very near to \$510,000 each year. He has made a request for an increase in this amount only about 6 times, and never to as great an extent as this. He also mentioned that in many of those 23 years, he has been able to return to the Town some unexpended funds due to relative inactivity.

(A subsequent memo sent by Mr. Bloom indicated that over the past ten years to 6/2019 the Contract Services line item had turned back to the Town over \$435,000.)

Through the first 8 months of this year, \$413,000 has been expended and \$213,000 of this has been on only five actions in which the Town is currently engaged. These involve developments on Hiawatha Lane, Cross & Lincoln Streets, and Wilton Road.

Mr. Bloom had a meeting in January with Town officials including Mr. Conrad and they determined that \$170,000 would be an appropriate ask to get them through to June, 2020. That number remains firm even after several new activities revolving around the requirements of COVID-19 and the numerous requests for clarification of Governor's executive orders, etc.

Ms. Meiers Schatz asked a number of questions regarding a request to review the relevant bills and provide due diligence on them. There was a debate on the appropriateness and ability of sending electronic copies of the files. Mr. Bloom suggested that when there is access to the files in Town Hall, the RTM would be welcome to review them, but to send them electronically was an administrative burden that exceeded his firm's and the Town's Finance Department's capabilities in this confused period of limited staffing.

It was suggested that we might get a breakdown of the different actions on which legal fees are being expended, and Mr. Bloom indicated again that in the fullness of time that could be arranged.

It was suggested that we hold off approving the additional funding until members could review the bills, but we learned that the Town cannot authorize new legal work unless there is budget allocated for the work, or unless the work represents emergency requirements.

Mr. Bloom agreed to try to find additional information for the full RTM meeting.

On a motion by Rick Jaffe, seconded by Seth Braunstein, the committee voted to recommend to the full RTM the approval of this item by a vote of 6 – 0 with Ms. Meiers Schatz abstaining

Jeff Wieser  
Chair and Reporter