

Tisbury Finance and Advisory Committee
6:30PM, Wednesday, January 22, 2025
By Zoom Cloud Conference

1

Present: Chair – Nancy Gilfoy, Louise Clough, Russ Hartenstine,
Ruth Konigsberg*, Alex Meleney, Elaine Miller*, Louis Pashman*,
Rachel Orr, Allan Rogers,

Others: Bernadette Cormie, Ben Robinson, Recorder – Marni Lipke,
Oak Bluffs Finance Committee including Bob Malecki,
Aquinnah FinCom – Allen Rugg,
CHA/OPM – Mike Owen,

Town: TSB Chair John Cahill, MVC Representative – Bernadette Cormie,

Schools: Central Office: Supt. Richard Smith,
Business Manager Mark Friedman,
MVRHS: Prin. Sara Dingley, Finance Director – Suzanne Cioffi,
Facilities Director – Jason O'Donnell, Pathways & Special Projects
Coordinator Sam Hart,
Tisbury School: Prin. John Custer, Asst. Prin. Melissa Ogden,
Facilities Director Mike Taus,
TSC – Chair Amy Houghton, Mike Watts,
MVRHS SBC – Supt. Richard Smith, Prin. Sara Dingley,
Rebekah ElDeiry, Mark Friedman, Skipper Manter,
Jason O'Donnell, Sally Rizzo, Allen Rugg, Mike Watts,

Press: Louisa Hufstader – Vineyard Gazette,

* TFC members late arrivals or early departures.

Call Meeting to Order

- The Tisbury Finance and Advisory Committee (FinCom) was called to order at 6:37PM.

(Recorder's note: Discussions are summarized and grouped for clarity and brevity.)

Review of Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) Budget –
Sara Dingley, Principal (See documents on file.)

- A recently updated Budget Certified B, retained the unchanged voted Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) amount but more accurately showed FY25 residential placement costs as budgeted (rather than as actually spent)—changing the overall comparison from 6.82% to 9.36%. FY25 Residential actual costs were higher than budgeted, and were paid for with Circuit Breaker funds (see below: p.2-4 Shared Services). There would be 2 known additional Placements for FY26.

Tisbury Finance & Advisory Committee
January 22, 2025

2

- After persistent advocacy by Martha's Vineyard Public Schools (MVPS) Business Administrator Mark Friedman and MVRHS Principal Sara Dingley the MVRHS received a \$437,549 Rural Aid grant (see 1/8/25 Minutes p.2), which would be spent in FY25 on one-time-only capital costs that would otherwise be in the FY26 budget. If all the proposed FY25 Rural Aid regional expenditures were approved (bus purchasing and 2 Special Education (SpEd) vans) the FY26 budget percentage increase would decrease to about 6.11%. An amended budget (possibly including a health insurance rate adjustment) would likely be re-certified in February—March at the latest.
- Throughout all school discussions it was emphasized that negotiations with the 5 unions (Teachers, Education Support Professions (ESPs—teacher assistants), Administrative Support Professionals (ASPs), Custodial, and Food Workers) were a major driver of the budget increases. While the estimated amount was consistent across all the MVPS (the unions were regional to all MVPS), the holding pool location(s) drafted into each budget varied from school to school, sometimes distorting lines. In accordance with ongoing Executive Session negotiations nothing further could be discussed.
- Consequently it was impractical for this budget to comply with the commitment to keep school spending increases at or under 2.5%.
- If the contract exceeded the estimated amount, the MVRHS had reserves in Excess and Deficiency (E & D—similar to a Town's Free Cash) as well as other lines, that hopefully would prevent having to return to the Towns.
- (The Tisbury Negotiations Subcommittee representatives were Lolly Hand and Michael Watts).
- For the last 15 years the MVRHS Committee chose to assess the Towns with the State statutory formula—which generally favored Tisbury, and which should further reduce Tisbury's percent increase.
- Rachel Orr reported an error in the Tisbury Cherry Sheet calculations that could alter the assessment.
- MVRHS and Tisbury School Committee representative discussed an initiative to regionalize for as much economies of scale cost saving as possible.

Review of Superintendent's Shared Services Budget –

Richie Smith, Superintendent, Martha's Vineyard Public Schools,
Mark Friedman, School Business Administrator **(MVPS)**

(See documents on file.)

- Shared Services covered students with severe challenges primarily pre-kindergarten (pre-K) through 8th grade (MVRHS had its own programming), that could not be met within the local standard school and Special Education (SpEd) system. It regionalized costs by gathering students with the most intensive needs into Islandwide classes with 7-8 challenged students (matched

Tisbury Finance & Advisory Committee
January 22, 2025

3

in Project Headway with 7-8 student peers). This assured equity and access to required services and addressed student needs in their homes while avoiding individual schools having to hire full staff to address the extreme needs of a few students. Avoiding Residential Placement which required students to board away from home and invoked high cost (\$250-400,000 each) was another causes for creating the Shared Services programs. Public Schools were responsible for challenged students from 2 years 9 months to 22 years. Severely challenged students were pulled from general education classes to attend the appropriate program housed in all the MVPS elementary schools:

- Project Headway for children from 2.9 to 5 yrs. old, (classrooms in MVRHS, Tisbury, Oak Bluffs (OB), Edgartown, and West Tisbury (WT) schools, and Grace School;
- Bridge for autistic students – classrooms in Edgartown and WT Schools and next year another classroom in the Tisbury School;
- Compass – intensive needs K-8 – classrooms in the OB School.
- Superintendent’s Shared Services (or Central) Office staff included administrative staff “walkabouts” (Superintendent, Student Support Director, Business Administrator, etc.) who served the entire MVPS, as well as the direct instructional Shared Services staff who served challenged students.
- The total \$10,621,495 budget increased \$1,289,461 or 13.82% over FY25, which was reflected in all local schools budgets. The increase was shown in 3 groups (some proposed changes had already been reduced or eliminated):
 - contractual – level serviced but reflecting negotiations, and benefits/health insurance projections (\$734,842);
 - direct staffing and shared programs increases (3 ESPs, Speech/Language teacher from 0.6 to 1.0 Full Time Equivalent (FTE); and supplies (\$284,093);
 - administrative growth –
 - After filling in with part-time, a 1.0 FTE Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum/Instruction was needed—\$70,000 increase to \$170,000.
 - The Office covered Human Resources (safety, benefits review, new hires, confidentiality, etc.) for the MVPS \$76,000,000 enterprise, requiring a contracted services increase of \$20,000 to \$30,000 total;
 - And a \$17,728 grade raise would increase payroll capacity.
 - Previously eliminated reserves for: vendors, professional development (PD), stipends etc. were restored at one half for a \$15,000 increase.
 - \$50,000 increase in Behavioral Health was for direct clinical services for students—and anticipating reduced competitive grant availability.
 - \$41,388 increase was for a Social Worker serving upwards of 60 students previously grant-funded and now moving from 0.6 to 1.0 FTE.
 - MVPS music programs (band, jazz band, chorus, etc.) needed a \$56,409 in salary, benefits, supplies, etc.

Tisbury Finance & Advisory Committee
January 22, 2025

4

- The MVRHS was allocated 20% and the remainder of the costs were parsed out by enrollment. Tisbury's allocation increased 30% due to the big jump in Tisbury School enrollment. (The Central Office was not an independent entity so staff were essentially MVRHS employees.)
- Circuit Breaker reimbursement was triggered when an individual student's cost exceeded \$49,000/yr. There was a question on State Circuit Breaker reimbursement calculations based on individual student applications vs. the amalgamated Shared Services costs (see below: Actions).
- Circuit Breaker was paid directly to regional districts (MVRHSD & Up Island Regional School District (UIRSD)) but was returned to Town General Funds for the Town districts.
- The FinCom expressed concern that the finance department of a \$76,000,000 enterprise had only 2 people.
- The All Island School Committee (AISC) understood the community opinion to spend on direct student services rather than administration, resulting in an extremely lean Central Office. (The FinCom noted that Tisbury Town Hall was in a similar situation with lean departments, no succession planning, etc.) However, everyone recognized that services and support staff were a real need for the \$76,000,000 MVPS and were concerned about the Central Office structure and foundation. Supt. Richie Smith thanked the FinCom for their understanding and pointed out that money was not the Office's only resource, emphasizing staff skills, teamwork, communications, strategic planning and collaboration. Consequently the FinCom could be confident that in making these asks, the Central Office and AISC deemed them necessary.

Review of Tisbury School Budget – John Custer, Principal,
Amy Houghton Chair, Tisbury School Committee (TSC)

(See documents on file.)

- The 17.06% increase to the FY26 Budget could be broken into 3 main drivers:
 - 6.26% was the Superintendent Shared Services Office increase (see above).
 - 8.83% was negotiations projections for salaries/benefits (see above p.2). A new Specials/Support teacher was requested for the additional enrollment and challenged student population along with a mandated SpEd ESP (currently paid with School Choice funds).
 - A \$165,000 Preventive Maintenance increase would insure the School was a good steward of their new building—which came off warranty in 2025-26. The amount was set after Facilities Manager Mike Taus's extensive consultation with the professional team—Tappé Architects, Construction Manager W.T. Rich, Owners Project Manager (OPM) CHA. Major future expenditures, such as a new roof should be part of Tisbury Capital Planning Advisory Committee (CPAC) inventory (see below: Actions) and were likely to be warrant articles.

**Tisbury Finance & Advisory Committee
January 22, 2025**

5

- The FinCom noted that while union negotiations were Islandwide and negotiations as a whole were most efficient, Towns varied greatly in their financial resources.
- School budget residuals ended with each fiscal year and could not roll over.
- There was no School Choice offset to this budget (see Minutes: 1/9/24 p.3, & 3/28/24 p.1 #I A). However, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) increased FY24 Chapter 70 funds dedicated to high-needs students over \$600,000, and a similar increase was expected for this year, which would pay for half the budget raise. (Current Ch. 70 reimbursement was \$1,677,249 Ch. 70). Everyone was urged to tour the new school facility.

Review of Martha's Vineyard Regional High (MVRHS) School Building Project (SBC) – Richie Smith, Superintendent, Sam Hart, Special Projects

(See documents on file, & below: Actions, & 7/24/24 Minutes p.1-2.)

* During this discussion Ruth Konigsberg, Elaine Miller and Louis Pashman left the meeting.

- The FinCom met with School Building Committee (SBC) representatives in 2024, but having gone through the Tisbury School project, they understood the importance of continuing communications throughout the lengthy Project—this was not a “one-walk-dog”. Supt. Smith understood that addressing FinComs’ and community concerns was paramount and promised repeated meetings with representatives. He introduced many of the 25 SBC members, including the Tisbury representatives: Rebekah ElDeiry, Tracey Stead, Michael Watts, and Sally Rizzo – Chair of Presentation & Outreach Subcommittee.
- The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) was a State agency charged with supporting school capital projects with expertise and funding from State sales tax revenues. The support, however, had a prescriptive process and statutory regulations. In Martha's Vineyard it required the support of all 6 Towns, for example in the crafting of a building project allocation formula (see 5/11/22 Minutes p.4), and support for the Feasibility Study phase. There were 7 modules to the process.
- The MVRHS submitted 9 annual applications called Statements of Interest (SOIs) before finally being invited into the process in 2022-23. The MVRHS SOI detailed facility needs to meet current instructional space, American Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility, hazardous material removal, security, etc. Built in 1959, at 65 years old the building did not meet modern educational code such as minimum square footage per student.
- In module 2 the Feasibility Study was started (existing conditions, visioning sessions by staff, students and public, MSBA requirements, options, etc.). The

Tisbury Finance & Advisory Committee
January 22, 2025

6

SBC was formed and the architect/designer and OPM interviewed and hired. The Preliminary Design Plan (PDP) was developed, approved by the SBC and submitted to the MSBA. The SBC had not eliminated any option and was still considering:

- straight renovation/code upgrade (estimate \$197-223,000,000) had to address all issues in the SOI and might fail some MSBA requirements and therefore could receive limited and unknown MSBA funding;
- addition/renovation (estimate \$307-357,000,000) increased square footage to the MSBA required minimum of 211,000 sq. ft. (now at ~166,000 sq. ft.) – 30% MSBA estimated reimbursement for Island cost of \$215-250,000,000; and
- new build (estimate \$308-359,000,000) 30% MSBA estimated reimbursement for Island cost of \$216-251,000,000.

- Module 3 had a May 2025 deadline for the Preferred Schematic Report (PSR) on the options with some cost analysis. Before the May submission the SBC would declare a preferred option—which would not necessarily be what the MSBA accepted.

- Module 4 the more detailed Schematic Design Report on the MSBA preferred option was due in Fall 2025.

- In 2026 the Towns would be asked to approve the Project at Town Meetings and the ballot. If the vote failed the Project would be dead. The Design Development Report had to be submitted to the MSBA, solid MSBA reimbursement numbers were set and the MVRHSD contracted with the builders. Once the Project cost was set the Towns would know the cost to their Town for the life of the bond.

- There were 2 options for construction contracts: Massachusetts General Law (MGL), Section 149 low bidder and 149 A construction manager at risk.

- Modules 6 & 7 in 2027 would complete the design and begin construction, to be completed (with paperwork handover) in Module 7/8 in 2030-31.

- The FinCom asked about cost overruns after Project amounts were voted. OPM CHA representative Michael Owen stated estimates included the inflation projection, per/sq. ft. costs and the Island factor, but could not give a definitive answer on overruns, although he suggested this was a possible reason to hire a construction manager at risk to lock in the price. Recently the MSBA increased its reimbursement to the Randolph school district, however this was a first time and the district was severely economically depressed.

- Tisbury would pay 22.9% of Project cost, ~\$50,000,000. As a legal entity the MVRHS (currently debt-free) would borrow the funds. Debt and interest would be passed to the Towns according to the agreed formula as part of the MVRHS assessment. Overrides and debt exclusion would be the purview of each town.

- The MVRHSD, SBC and OPM would apply to the MSBA for all eligible costs, however some costs were ineligible, e.g. construction of a track.

**Tisbury Finance & Advisory Committee
January 22, 2025**

7

- The FinCom emphasized community use of the High School, particularly the Performing Arts Center (PAC) and gym, giving extensive feedback on PAC public accessibility, parking and separation from the main facility.
- The SBC had similar concerns but pointed out other issues under consideration such as athletic field locations and the disruption of using modulars which could cost millions that would not go into the new facility itself.
- The SBC would continue to solicit public input but it was hard to get the public to attend visioning sessions. Information was now available on the Project website linked to <http://www.mvrhs.org>. FinCom members reported the sessions were poorly publicized.
- It was important for voters to understand they were deciding on whole Island educational needs for the next 50 years, and to see the process and growth of the Project. The SBC was eager for community input and promised regular FinCom updates.

Vote on County and Regional Programs – Tabled
(See documents on file & 1/15/25 Minutes)

Committee Reports – Tabled

Future Meetings (See below: Meetings/Events, & Actions.)

- FinCom found the January 15th in-person meeting with the County very helpful. Members were split, some preferring in-person meetings, others liking the convenience and effectiveness of Zoom.
- An in-person joint Tisbury Select Board (TSB) meeting was requested to discuss to Town Administrator Bylaw, tentatively set for February 19th.
- January 29th – Fire, Ambulance, Emergency Management and Building and possibly Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC). The FinCom would also vote on the County and regional services budgets.
- The Tisbury School and Central Office budgets were set but the MVRHS was still in flux. There was a discussion on separate or whole education perspective.
- The FinCom again and more strongly requested FY26 Town financial status overview in order to vote large spending items such as schools (see below: Actions).
- Department over-budgeting (along with under-estimating local receipts) was responsible for excessive Free Cash—last year ~\$7,000,000 (or ~20% of the operating budget) with \$3,000,000 still remaining.

Items Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair – None

continued >

**Tisbury Finance & Advisory Committee
January 22, 2025**

8

Adjournment

• ALEX MELENEY MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 9:36PM; RUSS HARTENSTINE & RACHEL ORR SECONDED; MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY: 6 AYES, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSTENTIONS: LOUISE CLOUGH—AYE, RUSS HARTENSTINE—AYE, ALEX MELENEY—AYE, RACHEL ORR—AYE, ALLAN ROGERS—AYE, NANCY GILFOY—AYE.

Appendix A: Meetings/Events

- **TFC – 6:30PM, Wednesdays, January 22, 29, 2025 – Zoom**
- **TFC – 6:30PM, Wednesdays, February 5, 12, 2025 – TBD**
- **TFC – 6:30PM, Wednesdays, February 19, 2025 – In-person TBD**
- **STM/ATM – 7:00PM, Tuesday, April 29, 2025 Tis. Sch. Gym**

Appendix B: Actions

Mark F./Central Of. – explore Circuit Breaker individual vs. amalgamated cost.

Mike T. – contact Alex Meleney (CPAC) re: major capital planning.

Michael O./SBC – what would happen if project cost overruns voted amount?

Nancy – contact Jon S. for financial overview, tax levy, Free Cash, local receipts.

All – please contact Nancy if you cannot attend a meeting.

All – contact Nancy with any request to review a department budget.

All – please remember not to hit “Reply All”.

Future Agendas – Minutes: 1/8/25, 1/15/25, 1/22/25

- DUKES COUNTY & REGIONAL SOCIAL SERVICES VOTE

Budget Season Notes

- Request data on how much each Department turned back in FY23.
- Request projects for grant funding.
- Request capital projects
- attach budget/narrative modules to agendas.
- request earlier foundational information, levy, free cash estimates, etc.
- include Building Dept. fee revenues (offsetting expenses) in budget interview;
- ask departments to project all needs 5 years out i.e. like capital planning but on staffing, program changes, etc.

\$200,000 FY25 Reserve Fund spending tally – Balance: \$160,000

- 12/11/24 – Accounting - \$40,000 – Ongoing Consultants

Appendix C: Documents on File

- Agenda 1/22/25
- High School FY2026 Budget, as of 12/26/2024
- Martha's Vineyard Regional High School District, FY26 Draft #5, December 18, 2024 (8 p.)

continued

Tisbury Finance & Advisory Committee
January 22, 2025

9

Appendix C: Documents on File (cont)

- Martha's Vineyard Regional High School District, FY26 Certified B Budget, with FY25 Corrections, January 21, 2025 (8 p.)
- Gilfoy/Friedman cover emails re: Enrollment Numbers 1/16/25
- FY26 Supt./Shared Services Budget – New Formula Calculations (Including Compass and Bridge Programs (2 p.)
- DESE Foundation Enrollment, MVRHS, FY20-FY25 Foundation Budgets
- Gilfoy/Friedman emails re: Assessment to Member Towns (2 p.) 1/22/25
- MVYPS FY16 680 Shared Services Budget, Budget Highlights Version #3 (1 Asst. Supt. Position) 11/21/2024
- Superintendent's Shared Services Budget, FY'26 Certified Budget Listed by School District, Version #3 A.I.S.C. November 21, 2024 (3 p.)
- Martha's Vineyard Public Schools, Superintendent's Office and Shared Service Programs, FY'26 Budget Version #3 (Certified), A.I.S.C. November 21, 2024 (6 p.)
- Tisbury School FY'26 Budget Analysis, Version #2.0, Approved, Tisbury January 14, 2025
- Tisbury School Budget for 2025/2026, Version #2.0, Approved, Tisbury January 14, 2025 (8 p.)
- Gilfoy email re: MVRHS School Building Committee Meeting Tuesday, January 21, 2025 5:30PM, MVRHS Library and Zoom (2 p.) 1/15/25
- Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, (8 p.)
- Gilfoy/Orr emails re: Estimate of High School Building Project Costs (2 p.) 1/12/25
- Gilfoy/Friedman email re: Thank you 1/23/25
- Chat: Messages addressed to "Meeting Group Chat"
- Rebekah ElDeiry (Jan 22, 2025, 8:50 PM): Please check that you are muted if your not speaking
- Finance and Advisory Committee (Jan 22, 2025, 9:02 PM): Thank you for hosting this informative meeting 😊 - OBFInCom
- Sam Hart (Jan 22, 2025, 9:18 PM) www.mvrhsbuildingproject.org
- Mike Owen / CHA (Jan 22, 2025, 9:21 PM): Thank you
- Town Clerk memo re: Draft #1 ATM articles only (5 p.) 1/16/25

Nancy Gilfoy – Chair

Date

Minutes approved as amended 2/5/25