

**Tisbury Finance and Advisory Committee**  
**6:30PM, Wednesday, January 29, 2025**  
**By Zoom Cloud Conference**

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**Present:** Chair – Nancy Gilfoy, Louise Clough, Russ Hartenstine,  
Ruth Konigsberg, Alex Meleney, Louis Pashman, Rachel Orr,  
Allan Rogers,  
**Others:** Justin Lucas, Tony Peak, Ben Robinson, Recorder – Marni Lipke,  
**Town:** TSB Chair John Cahill, Finance Director Jonathan Snyder,  
Building – Greg Monka, Fire/Ambulance/EM – Patrick Rolston,  
\* TFC members late arrivals or early departures.

**Call Meeting to Order**

- The Tisbury Finance and Advisory Committee (FinCom or TFC) was called to order at 6:32PM.

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

**Review of Building Department Budget and Warrant Article**

**Greg Monka – Director**

(See documents on file.)

- After shifting the short-term rental position into a warrant article the Building Dept. Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Budget was up 5%. Increases included:
  - salaries and professional services;
  - training in new building code updates and the attending
  - travel and mileage expenses while the off-Island vehicle was being replaced.
- The local inspector's salary was raised to \$106,000 plus benefits in the hope of attracting a good candidate. The position was being advertised regularly.
  - Since the last local inspector left, the Department had been struggling to keep a good workflow but missing statutory deadlines for inspections, plan reviews, permitting, etc.
  - Building Director Greg Monka considered that each town had the workload for a full time second position (or local inspector) and so it could not be a shared job. There was a national shortage of building inspectors.
  - Former Town Administrator Jay Grande hired Tom Perry who worked in the Department 12-19 hrs/wk—he was not paid from the Building Dept. budget.
- The Building Director was also the Town zoning enforcement officer but as a small, specific job this was not likely to be separated out.
  - The building code was standard for the entire Island. Building staff were very busy which made Islandwide meetings difficult, but conversations showed they were all facing the same problems.
- The Department budget was fairly stable, however Mr. Monka hoped to revise the inspection and permitting fee schedule to more closely cover costs. Current revenues were not available.

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- A warrant article for a short-term rental administrator was with Human Resources Director Pam Bennett and would be submitted to the Town Clerk tomorrow. The position would cover registration, inspections, and fee collection and the person would have to be willing to work towards local inspector certification in order to eventually also cover field work.
- The new Tisbury Bylaw restrictions on number of rentable days per year (see 11/13/24 Minutes p.1-3) would be difficult to monitor/enforce and would likely affect revenues. However, Tisbury and Oak Bluffs were collaborating on a consultant study to mine unregistered short-term rentals that should increase revenues by roughly 40%. Mr. Monka was also considering a more aggressive fee schedule, for example some communities charged a \$500 registration fee.
- All inspections were Building Dept. purview—annually for non-resident owners (~ 70%) and every few years for owner-occupied rentals.
- Mr. Monka and the FinCom exchanged thanks.

**Review of Fire, Ambulance, and Emergency Management Department Budget and Warrant Articles – Patrick Ralston, Fire Chief**

(See documents on file & below: Actions.)

- The FinCom congratulated Fire Chief Patrick Ralston on his January 2, 2025 appointment.
- **Fire Department Budget** showed a 21.8% increase, and had risen from \$379,000 to \$855,000 (225%) in 5 yrs.
- FY26 salaries were up over 40% mostly in shift coverage, and drafted in November, did not reflect Chief Ralston's or the Deputy Chief's salaries.
- There were standard Cost Of Living Adjustment (COLA), step/grade raises.
- The Administrative Assistant worked as needed for all Departments in the building.
- After substantial pay increases last year, Tisbury was able to hire 2 summer 2024 lifeguards, assigned to Tashmoo—Owen Park beach was considered covered by Harbormaster staff.
- Shifts were increased to 7 nights and weekends. As directed by Finance Accounting that if paid it must be minimum wage, Duty Chief's (or Shift Leader's) night shifts were raised from \$150 to \$200. Day shift was raised from \$25 to \$30/hr. in a gradual increase to match other towns some of which paid \$45-50/hr. to encourage volunteers, who might be avoiding shifts because of lost income. Volunteers had not gotten a significant increase (aside from step and COLA) in 15 yrs.
- The Chief or Deputy Chief would respond during these shifts if:
  - there was another alarm, or
  - it was more than an alarm—a car accident, fire, medical assist, etc.

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- The Chief and Deputy Chief worked 40 hr. weeks in four 10-hr. days, with some overlap (modeled on Oak Bluffs which had a chief, deputy chief and an inspector). It was important they be fit day work and not tired from long night shifts. They were often at meetings, in which case the other covered a call.
- FinCom asked about anomalies in actual vs. budgeted spending:
  - possible over-budgeted Lifeguard Supplies; and
  - Data Processing, which paid annual invoices early in the fiscal year.

At this time and later in the meeting there was substantial conversation on larger issues.

- In former Chief John Schilling's time the Department answered ~ 360 alarms per year, currently there were ~ 600 of which 400 were false alarms from cooking or oversensitive smoke detectors hard-wired to the Com Center as required by insurance companies. There was a discussion on punitive fees for repeat false alarms especially when dealing with alarm monitoring companies—however, this would involve substantial restrictions and paperwork.
  - The mandate was for a response within 8 minutes.
- Inspection revenue was about \$30,000/yr.—State law limited fees to \$50, but this could be superseded by a local bylaw. One time permitting included: dumpsters, fuel oil burners, propane, solar panels, energy storage, sale or transfer permits (house smoke detectors), etc.
- Tisbury had the lowest paid volunteers on the Island. It was increasingly difficult to get volunteers and most of the current volunteers were in their 50s. They signed up to help their town in emergencies, not to respond to false alarms from wealth-based development. Volunteers were now required to have at least 100 hrs. of training. A shift or call required volunteers to gas up vehicles and leave work, and the on-call duty officer had to remain on-Island, sober, unencumbered and accessible.
- The FinCom and the Chief considered the enormous expense of a slow and possibly inevitable move to a full time professional department, which lead to comments on the need to regionalize. For example Chief Schilling initially proposed a Deputy Chief as succession planning (see 3/6/19 Minutes p.2)
- FinCom members sharply questioned the FY26 steep rise in pay and shift coverage and asked how many staff were needed for 24/7 coverage.
  - There was a general consensus that the Chief/Deputy Chief schedule could be reworked to better avoid the \$72,000 for night and \$37,400 weekend duty officer expense. (The Oak Bluffs schedule was based on a Chief who lived off-Island and went home on weekends.)

The **Ambulance/Emergency Medical Service (EMS)** Budget included steps and COLAs.

- The Fire Chief oversaw the EMS as part of their job description but was paid entirely from the Fire Dept. Budget (see 3/6/24 Minutes p.3).

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- Paramedic Jason Davey was promoted to Paramedic Supervisor to run day-to-day operations, leaving the Department 2 paramedics short—full staffing was 5 to 6. The Town now compensated the Supervisor if they were went out on call.
- As predicted, Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) night shift pay was raised from \$200 to \$250 to match other Island towns and prevent attrition.
- The 2 ambulances were on a 10 year rotation as mandated by National Fire and Protection Agency KKK-A-1822 standards. The next ambulance was 5 years away and had to be ordered about 18 months in advance.

**Emergency Management (EM) budget** covered stipends for a Director and Deputy plus Tisbury's \$5,000 share of an Islandwide position.

- The Personnel Board was discussing whether the EM Director should be part of the Assistant Fire Chief's job description. Chief Ralston was commended as an excellent EM Director who worked well with his Police Dept. counterpart.
- Some FinCom members were uncomfortable with adding 10 hrs/month to someone working a stressful 40 hr. week job. Others considered it appropriately assigned since most EM directors were public safety/first responder officials, either police or fire. As an island Martha's Vineyard required extra work and planning. The Island EM personnel met regularly and worked as a team. Geo-global climate change was a significant threat.
- Russ Hartenstine was the former West Tisbury EM Director as a third party independent volunteer, and argued this could/should be a full time job which included population education, outreach, and grant writing as well as or rather than incident command.

**Warrant articles:**

- Ambulance requested \$20,940 for a Lucas cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) device to replace the current one which was 3 years out of date.
- Fire requested \$25,000 to repair the Tashmoo rescue boat which has been out of commission for a year. The Harbormaster boat was mostly in the Harbor and to far away from Tashmoo for rescue operations.
- A replacement would cost \$60-70,000.
- The boat was used by the Harbormaster, Police and Fire staff (see Minutes: 12/21/22 p.4 & 2/1/23 p.1?) but funded under the Fire Dept.
- The FinCom recommended the article draw from Free Cash so that repairs could be implemented in time for the 2025 summer season.

**Town Finance Overview – Jonathan Snyder, Finance Director**

- Finance Director Jon Snyder reported the Department continued to be short staffed particularly in Accounting. Libby Cleary was appointed Interim Town Accountant and hopefully would become Town Accountant next fiscal year.

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- Consultants continued to help with the December tax bill process.
- January was spent sending out the W-2, 1099 and 1095 forms so staff had not been able to devote time to Town financial status and budget drafts.
- Most departments had entered their budgets directly into the Munis software, but a few small departments (Town Moderator, Veteran Affairs, Historical Commission, etc.) with little or no staff continued to be a challenge.
- The Tisbury Select Board (TSB) would review the budgets under their purview and joint FinCom/TSB meetings were planned (see below: p.7).
- The FinCom understood the predicament but was reluctant to vote budgets or articles with no idea of the levy limit or free cash (see 1/22/25 Minutes p.7).
- Mr. Snyder commended Rachel Orr for catching an error in the State cherry sheet calculation placing Tisbury's per capita income at 3 times its actual.

**Discussion and Vote on County and Regional Programs**

(See 1/15/25 Minutes)

- These were small and regional asks that subsidized Tisbury residents.
- Current Federal unpredictability and the attempt to freeze all grants might force many of these programs to return to the Towns.
- *ALEX MELENEY MOVED TO RECOMMEND APPROVAL OF THE 2025 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING WARRANT ARTICLES ON **DUKES COUNTY AND REGIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE NON-PROFITS** AS PRESENTED:*

- **DUKES COUNTY HEALTH CARE ACCESS (DCHCA) PROGRAM AT \$107,794,**
- **PUBLIC BENEFITS ACCESS PROGRAM AT \$10,895,**
- **MARTHA'S VINEYARD CENTER FOR LIVING BUILDING BOND AT \$30,914,**
- **DUKES COUNTY REVENUE REPLACEMENT OR SUPPLEMENTAL INCOME AT \$16,199,**
- **HARBOR HOMES MARTHA'S VINEYARD (HHMV) HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AT \$13,674,**
- **MARTHA'S VINEYARD CENTER FOR LIVING (CFL) AT \$121,823,**
- **COUNSELING, OUTREACH AND REFERRAL FOR ELDERS (CORE) 55 YEARS OR OLDER AT \$18,465,**
- **HEALTHY AGING MARTHA'S VINEYARD (HAMV) AT \$23,805;**

RUSS HARTENSTINE AND ALLAN ROGERS SECONDED: MOTION PASSED **UNANIMOUSLY: 8 AYES, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSTENTIONS:** RUSS HARTENSTINE—AYE, ALLAN ROGERS—AYE, ALEX MELENEY—AYE, RUTH KONIGSBERG—AYE, LOUIS PASHMAN—AYE, RACHEL ORR—AYE, LOUISE CLOUGH—AYE, NANCY GILFOY—AYE.

**Discussion of School Cost Comparisons**

(See documents on file & 1/22/25 Minutes.)

The FinCom discussed Rachel Orr's extensive data.

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- Martha's Vineyard schools were well resourced with small class sizes but at 6 to 1 Tisbury had the smallest student/teacher ratio.
- There was a decided loss of students during the lead-crisis school split and the construction disruption. Although most who chose other schools remained in those schools, Tisbury enrollment showed substantial new growth in 2025.
- A stable staff was needed despite annual population bubbles or spikes.
- The All Island School Committee (AISC) had formed a Subcommittee to discuss regionalization, common purchasing and contracting for economies of scale, etc. An Islandwide region could shift staff to cover population bubbles, maternity leaves, etc. The Shared Services, Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS), and music bands/choruses were good examples of savings.
- The move was also triggered by equity issues such as students entering the MVRHS on different levels, e.g. some had studied algebra, others had not.
- Most Massachusetts districts stayed within the State Chapter 70 minimum spending limits, however Island public elementary/middle schools (data did not include the Charter School) spent over 200% above the minimum.

**Committee Reports**

- Capital Planning Advisory Committee (CPAC) talked about overall spending. The Town was way above its own capital and debt service guidelines. Next Monday the Committee would review the 2025 warrant articles.
- The Climate Committee liked the new Cape Light representative who explained the changes to the Green Communities grants (regular \$200,000 per year); and they highly commended Cape Light work for the Town.
- A new program called Climate Leadership had grants up to \$1,000,000 able to fund solar panels, battery storage etc. Community prerequisites were:
  - having a climate committee
  - being a Green Community,
  - ATM commitment to de-carbonize—Tisbury needed stronger language,
  - municipal planning, e.g. insuring roof replacements were solar ready,
  - town vehicle replacements with electric or hybrid vehicles.
- Water Resources expected to present a finalized Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan (CWMP) to the TSB next month followed by a public presentation and meeting.

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

February 5<sup>th</sup> would cover Harbor, Shellfish who requested a new position, Dept. of Public Works (DPW) hopefully including Facility Manager Erik Blake, Wastewater which submitted a \$700,000 Town ask, and the Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC)—Tisbury's share was up 25%.

February 12<sup>th</sup> would cover the Police and Finance Departments.

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February 19<sup>th</sup> would be a joint in-person meeting on TSB articles and budgets, as well as the Town Administrator bylaw.

February 26<sup>th</sup> was school vacation week. Anyone unable to attend a meeting please inform the chair.

March 5<sup>th</sup> would be another joint meeting with the TSB to review the warrant. It would be new Town Administrator Joe LaCivita's first FinCom meeting.

**Items Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair** – None

**Adjournment**

Chair Nancy Gilfoy thanked everyone for their time and attention.

• *RACHEL ORR MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 9:12PM; ALEX MELENEY SECONDED; MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY: 7 AYES, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSTENTIONS: RUSS HARTENSTINE—AYE, ALEX MELENEY—AYE, RUTH KONIGSBERG—AYE, LOUIS PASHMAN—AYE, RACHEL ORR—AYE, LOUISE CLOUGH—AYE, NANCY GILFOY—AYE.*

**Appendix A: Meetings/Events**

- **TFC – 6:30PM, Wednesdays, February 5, 12, 2025 – TBD**
- 2025 ATM Warrant Articles deadline– February 11, 2025
- **TFC/TSB – 6:30PM, Wednesdays, February 19, 2025 – In-person TBD**
- **TFC – TBD 6:30PM, Wednesday, February 26, 2025 – Zoom**
- **TFC/TSB – 6:30PM, Wednesday, March 5, 2025 – In-Person TBD**
- **TFC – TBD 6:30PM, Wednesdays, March 12, 19, 26, 2025 – TBD**
- STM/ATM – 7:00PM, Tuesday, April 29, 2025 Tis. Sch. Gym

**Appendix B: Actions**

Greg M. – request the local inspector ad be placed with Mass. Municipal Assoc.

Patrick R./Jon S. – add “Free Cash” source language to boat repair article.

Patrick R./FinCom – propose local bylaw to raise Fire inspection fees;  
& punitive fines for repeat false alarms?

Nancy – double check Dukes County supplemental income number.

Nancy – resend articles to Alex.

Nancy – put MVC first on 2/5 agenda re: Rachel Orr recusion

All – contact Nancy re: attendance at 2/26 school vacation week meeting.

All – Please remember not to hit “Reply All”

Future Agendas –

- Minutes: 1/8/24 as amended, 1/15/25, 1/22/25 as amended, 1/29/25

- Revisits

° Conservation Dept. & Conservation Agent Article

° Building Dept. Short-Term Rental Agent Article

**continued >**

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**Appendix B: Actions (cont.)**

Future Agendas (cont.) –

- Discussed but not voted:
  - ° Tisbury School, MVRHS Budgets
  - ° Fire, Ambulance, EM Budgets
  - ° Ambulance & Lucas CPR Article
  - ° Fire Rescue Boat Article

Budget Season Notes

- Request data on how much each Department turned back in FY24.
- Request projects for grant funding.
- Request capital projects.
- Attach budget/narrative modules to agendas.
- Request/demand foundational information, levy, free cash estimates, etc.
- include fee revenues (offsetting expenses) in budget interviews;
- ask departments to project 5 years of needs i.e. like a capital plan but on other factors—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**

- Gilfoy cover email & Agenda (2 p.) 1/29/25
- Gilfoy email re: Recording 1/30/25
- Gilfoy email re: MMA update on federal spending freeze, free immigration webinar 1/29/25
- Gilfoy email re: MMA Latest update on federal spending freeze (2 p.) 1/29/25
- FY 2026 Budget Plan Town of Tisbury Department 241 Building (9 p.) 1/8/25
- FY 2026 Budget Plan Town of Tisbury Department 241 Building (4 p.) 1/8/25
- FY 2026 Budget Plan Town of Tisbury Department 240 Other Inspectors (2 p.) 1/8/25
- FY 2026 Budget Plan Town of Tisbury Department 220 Fire (8 p.) 1/8/25
- FY 2026 Budget Plan Town of Tisbury Department 231 Ambulance (7 p.) 1/8/25
- FY 2026 Budget Plan Town of Tisbury Department 291 Emergency Management (5 p.) 12/31/24
- Article Submission Form – ATM – Capital Appropriations and Other New Equipment (2 p.) 12/11/24
- Orr email re: school numbers (4 p.) 1/24/25
- Gilfoy/Friedman emails re; MVRHS Statutory assessments (3 p.) 1/25/25

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Nancy Gilfoy – Chair

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Date

Minutes approved as amended 2/20/25