

Tisbury Finance and Advisory Committee
6:30PM, Wednesday, July 9, 2025
Tisbury Senior Center

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Present: Chair – Nancy Gilfoy, Louise Clough, Russ Hartenstine, Rachel Orr, Louis Pashman, Allan Rogers,
Others: Recorder Marni Lipke,
Town: Town Administrator – Joe LaCivita, Planning Bd. – Ben Robinson, Finance Director – Jonathan Snyder,
* TFC members late arrivals, early departures or absences.

Call Meeting to Order

- The Tisbury Finance and Advisory Committee (FinCom or TFC) was called to order at 6:40PM. Chair Nancy Gilfoy thanked everyone for attending during the busy summer time.

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

Introductions (See Minutes: 6/1/22 p.1-2, & 5/17/23 p.1, & 6/24/24 p.1.)

FinCom members introduced themselves, including how long each had served.

- Town Finance Director Jonathan Snyder grew up in Connecticut, and lived in Philadelphia and Boston before moving to the Island. He had been Finance Director for 9 ½ years but would retire in January 2026—staying on the Island, sailing and volunteering for non-profits.
- When Town Administrator Joe LaCivita told his school teacher he was interested in “law and accounting” she responded he was not serious enough for those careers. (His father taught him not to take himself seriously and to laugh at small and serious things.) Taking her advice he went into landscaping design/architecture until he injured his back and subsequently held a long series of financial, government and public/private partnership jobs including:
 - non-profit finance departments and then comptroller,
 - Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD),
 - Governance for Small Cities,
 - Empire State Development,
 - Director of Planning and Economic Development and then General Manager of Watervliet, NY where he was born and raised.
- As a regular summer visitor he was familiar with the Island fabric and challenges. What excited him when the job was advertised was the Tisbury Master Plan. He and his family were happy about the move. He hoped to finish his career here.
- He knew change was difficult and the first leader was always bloodied. He felt that it was not how one does business but how to get out of one's own way.

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- The FinCom expressed serious reservations pointing out other Island towns that left behind their year-round populations. For example the Edgartown waterfront was now heavily tourist/big money oriented, so that commercial fishermen could barely get a berth in the harbor. When one is bent on evolving forward, it's important to understand the cost of who gets left behind and the pushback from people trying to maintain their living.
- Mr. LaCivita emphasized that any developer had a responsibility to put money into infrastructure and he expected to enforce heavy parameters. The Island needed to be firm about checking developers. His wife was a history enthusiast and they themselves were familiar with the issues, being unable to afford an Island home for retirement.

Discussion with Joe LaCivita, Town Administrator

Budget Process

The new Town Administrator bylaw (see Minutes: 10/30/24 p.1-2, & 2/19/25 p.1-4) put Mr. LaCivita at the helm of Budget process, although the FinCom presented the Budget at Annual Town Meeting (ATM).

- Mr. LaCivita had consulted with Mr. Snyder on a 10 year look back and Proposition 2 ½. Staffing was very low, so he was looking to build his “bench” and promote succession planning.
- As the person who oversaw day-to-day Town functions, he expected to be better informed on Department operations than could be surmised from an annual FinCom interview. Consequently he would work with Department Heads, and come to the FinCom with or without the Departments. He expected Departments to let him know about upcoming issues, work and actions and also expected to act as a manager/father figure—“no, you can’t do that now”. He gave 2 examples from his Watervliet tenure:
 - instituting paving plan collaboration between highway, water and sewer departments; and
 - reducing Police overtime by questioning each request with the Police Chief.
- The FinCom was excited about his plans to coordinate Departments, since they had often struggled with unilateral budgeting and planning.
- What struck him as overwhelming was the lack of bond flexibility left by the \$80,000,000 school project without State aid (see below: Capital Planning) as well as the Tisbury property configuration.
- Discussion then turned to the results of protracted lack of Town leadership.
- The Tisbury Select Board (TSB) was hampered by deficient information needed for their meetings. Mr. LaCivita intended to revise agendas, actively manage meetings and furnish background information well ahead of time.

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- Departments were used to working independently, e.g. the Department of Public Works (DPW) self-generated philosophical shift from budgeting items to warrant article funding (see 2/5/25 Minutes p.2-3). It was also evident in departments' failure to furnish long-term capital planning information.
- Mr. LaCivita had discussed lawsuit history with the Police Chief, Lieutenant, and insurance companies, informing them that summons would now be looked at aggressively and insurance could not simply pay to move on.

Capital Planning

The Capital Planning Committee still seemed bogged down in understanding its mission and Mr. LaCivita preferred to have Department Heads come directly to him, avoiding redundancy and miscommunication. Capital planning could then be done in partnership with the FinCom or FinCom representative(s). He had begun to talk to State and Federal representatives and senators, stressing how the Town was crippled by the 30 year Tisbury School debt.

Agreement with American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Union

Negotiations were very close to an agreement on time, current policy, and salary structure—Tisbury recently had a compensation/classification study. The settlement was likely to be fairly substantial, covered this year by the number of vacant positions, but making the second year difficult.

- The FinCom deplored Towns' practice of hiring workers away for additional pay. They advocated regionalization especially in public safety areas; e.g. costs sky-rocketed as traditionally volunteer fire departments lost volunteers.

Special Town Meeting (STM)

A late September STM was planned, hopefully with only 3-5 articles.

- The driving reason was an additional \$50-80,000 needed above the Fire Stabilization balance for a new fire truck contract (one engine was beyond its useable lifespan). Mr. LaCivita hoped to lock in the price by agreement now at ~ \$1,083,000 to avoid a further 3-4 months of inflation.
- Harbor was working on a cost estimate and levy capability to raise and dispose of *The Seeker* which sank in Tashmoo.

Visioning Session with Select Board (See above p.2)

Some former TSBs had goals but initiative had dissipated. The current TSB had no long-range objectives or philosophy so Mr. LaCivita suggested a joint TSB/FinCom visioning session. The next step in the Master Plan process was a 'strategic plan' covering finances and timing.

Update on Information Technology (IT) Improvements

(See 5/14/25 Notes p.1-2, & 6/4/25 Minutes p.1-2.)

- \$85,000 of the \$100,000 Reserve Fund IT transfer was being spent on:

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- Network Attached Storage (NAS) to daisy-chain link all Town Hall locations (Town Hall, Annex, Water Dept. DPW/Town Admin. office, Police, etc.);
- 10 Central Processing Unit (CPU) desktops so staff could bring work with them from location to location; and
- Town website upgrading.
- Upcoming changes to increase security and staff efficiency would include:
 - updating cyber policies,
 - replacement of aging servers,
 - iCloud storage for easy access,
 - Trumpia application to blast emergency information to residents,
 - Opengov. trainings and modules for such things as online dog licenses,
 - modules for Town budgeting and capital planning,
 - Town vehicle modules, e.g. allows Animal Control Officer (ACO) to connect to the office while out on a call.

Questions (See below: Actions.)

- In terms of the fee inventory (see 6/4/25 Minutes p.5 & 7—documents on file), Mr. LaCivita asked every Department when they last reviewed their fee structure. The Police would bite the bullet and order new books. He was looking at Wastewater fees (see 2/5/25 Minutes p.3-4).
- Commercial water rates and false fire alarm fees should also be examined (see 1/29/25 Minutes p.3).
- Rachel Orr reported Governor Healey's Mass Ready (or Environmental Bond) Bill earmarked for climate change resiliency:
 - a possible partial funding source for Beach Rd. seawall restoration; and
 - the Embarkation fee legislation could be attached.
- The Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC) Municipal Vulnerability would coordinate local issues and Mass Ready spending (see below: Actions).

Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) Building Project Update

(See documents on file, & 5/14/25 Notes p.2, & 6/4/25 Minutes p.2.)

- Tisbury representative to the Building Committee Nancy Gilfoy reviewed her role and last month's vote to submit the renovation/addition option to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). The Committee also voted Construction Manager at Risk (CMR) procurement (not low bidder) which increased MSBA reimbursement rates.
- The project was based on the Education Plan and School needs so she considered her role was to inform people of Tisbury's struggle with the \$80,000,000 School debt, the Town's 14% debt burden and the disparate impact of the Project assessment formula (Edgartown 30¢ per \$1,000 real estate value, Oak Bluffs 60¢ per \$1,000, Tisbury 80¢ per \$1,000...).

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- The 2023 Assessment Agreement allowed a member town to ask for changes and the FinCom discussed re-opening the matter in tandem with the Project MSBA progress.
- After MSBA meets with Tappé Architects, the full Building Committee had to agree that the community could proceed with the preferred option. Tappé and the Committee would work on a schematic design and meaningful cost estimate. The MSBA would vote to agree (probably in February 2026) setting the Project for Annual Town Meeting (ATM) votes in April 2026.
- Elaine Miller was unable to attend but sent an email advocating for Tisbury to cooperate with the Building Committee so as not to lose the MSBA funding opportunity for a much needed renovation.

Committee Reports

Climate Committee had not met for a while.

Tisbury School Committee (TSC) met off-schedule in June and voted end-of-year transfers. Roof and parking lot canopy solar installation was scheduled for this summer—there had been no communications with the neighborhood.

Town Hall Task Group – (Rick Homans, Russ Hartenstine, Joe LaCivita, Lindsey Famaris, and a Planning Bd. member) The Group was very impressed with ICON Construction as not just municipal specialists but town hall oriented. They built the new Oak Bluffs Town Hall, working and listening to everyone's needs and concerns.

The Community Preservation Committee (CPC) had not informed Russ Hartenstine of their meetings or agendas.

Seasonal Communities (See below: Meetings/Events, & Minutes: 3/26/25 p.6 & 4/16/25 p.1-2, & 6/4/25 p.4-5.) Rachel Orr planned to attend the July 17th Listening Session to ask about a number of concerns. Some measures would be restricted to communities with 10% Subsidized Housing Inventory. Tisbury was 99 short of the required 236 official units (Dukes County Regional Housing Authority DCRHA, Island Housing Trust (IHT), or 40B developers). However a number of landlords with affordable units chose to remain unofficial to retain their ability to choose their tenants.

- A Board of Health (BOH) representative hoped to attend to speak to conflicts with septic regulations for tiny houses on sub-standard lots.

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

- The September STM would required some August meetings.

Items Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair – None

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Adjournment

- ALLAN ROGERS MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 8:40PM; LOUISE CLOUGH SECONDED; MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY: 6 AYES, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSTENTIONS.

Appendix A: Meetings/Events

- Seasonal Communities Listening – 11:00AM, Thursday, July 17, 2025 – Zoom https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/GZf6D8TMSQe3527Jya0MRg?x_zm_rtaid=yEFlwvqnS-WxhDzs4gCzqw.1752425078880.c19729fbabd2f4d55afb21e2ab072238&x_zm_rhtaid=477#/registration
- **TFC – TBD 6:30PM, Wednesdays, August 6, 13, 20 or 27, 2025 – TBD**
- **TFC/TSB Visioning Session – TBD**

Appendix B: Actions

Nancy – request report detailing end-of-year transfers from Jon Snyder.
Nancy – Russ will be in Alaska (Zoom attendance) Aug. 18th through September
Joe LaCivita – check commercial water rates (currently flat \$2,000/yr.).
Joe LaCivita – consider false fire alarm fee codification (now 400 of 600 calls).
TSB/Joe LaCivita – appoint rep to MVC Municipal Vulnerability—hopefully someone living at ground zero/flood zone—Gretchen Snyder?
Nancy/Joe LaCivita/Deb Potter – contact Sen. Cyr/Rep. Moakley re: attaching Embarkation bill to the MassReady bill.
Russ – Contact Heidi Diettrich and/or Paul Munafo re: CPC agenda/meeting notification
Future Agendas – Minutes: 6/4/25, 7/9/25
- Municipal Housing Trust Representatives
\$200,000 FY26 Reserve Fund spending tally – Balance: \$200,000

Appendix C: Documents on File

- Agenda 7/9/25
- Miller email re: Item for minutes tonight 7/9/25

Nancy Gilfoy – Chair

Date

Minutes approved 8/20/25