

**All Island Finance Committee
Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS)
Oak Bluffs, MA
September 4, 2019**

In Attendance

Tisbury Finance Committee

Mary Ellen Larsen
Seth Gambino
Nancy Gilfoy
Laura Rose

West Tisbury Finance Committee

Greg Orcutt
Doug Ruskin
Jane Dreeben
Clark Rattet

**Oak Bluffs Finance Committee
Committee**

Bill Vrooman
Sherry Countryman
Robert Gaffey
Maura McGroarty
Walter Vail
Greg Thornton

Chilmark Finance

Vicki Divoll
Susan Murphy

Edgartown Finance Committee

Les Baynes
James Carter
Jane Chittick

Aquinnah

Mark Foster

Towns

James Hagerty, Edgartown Town Administrator;
Gregory Coogan, OB Selectman;
Brian Packish, OB Selectman
Jon Snyder, Tisbury Finance Director

Schools

Supt. Matt D'Andrea,
Asst. Supt. Richie Smith
MVYPS Finance: Amy Tierney
MVRHS Finance: Mark Friedman
MVRHS & OB School Committee: Kris O'Brien

Residents

Peter Palches, Oak Bluffs
Ewell Hopkins, OB Planning Board
Juliette Molinare, Edgartown
Mary Jo Goodrich, Tisbury

- The meeting was called to order at 6:02 pm.
- **Roll Call – see above**
- **Approval of Minutes (8/28/19)**
 - LAURA ROSE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM AUGUST 28, 2019 AS CORRECTED, SECONDED BY DOUG RUSKIN. (NO VOTE TAKEN.)
- Mary Ellen Larsen, Tisbury FinCom, read aloud a letter from Tisbury FinCom member Lolly Hand (attached.)
- Martha's Vineyard Public Schools (MVPS) Superintendent Matt D'Andrea reported that bond counsel has advised that, for the feasibility study article to be passed, it must be voted anew by all six towns. This need not be done before December, and it need not be done before the MSBA makes its decision in December.
- Matt D'Andrea also noted that the MV public schools are a member of an organization of schools and districts, the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS,) which can offer us a consultant/facilitator to help the six towns work out their differences. This service has worked with over two dozen districts. The cost is estimated between \$15,000 – 25,000. The school does not have those funds readily available, but they might be able to adjust some budgets to cover it.
- Finally, Matt D'Andrea noted that the regional agreement is about much more than the funding formula. It also describes the governance of the school, including how the school committee is appointed. We might want to look at that part of the agreement again.
- Brian Packish, OB Selectman, said that there is much misinformation and undue alarm about this issue. There is no \$40 million, as the MSBA has not made any grant and we don't know whether they will this year. Vicki Divoll, Chilmark FinCom, agreed.
- Bill Vrooman, OB FinCom chair, reported that last night, the OB FinCom voted not to recommend re-voting the feasibility study because they have seen nothing that would change their recommendation. The AIFC asked the OB FinCom to present a plan they would be willing to go forward with, so they decided to present the formula based on equalized valuation (EQV), because they feel that it is the best solution for the school.
- Maura McGroarty, OB FinCom, noted that the high school is a community resource. She would be willing to differentiate between education costs and facility costs, perhaps using a different formula for each.
- Les Baynes, Edgartown FinCom, asked whether Oak Bluffs is going to vote to approve the feasibility study.
- Bill Vrooman replied, "No."
- At this, all the Edgartown participants departed the meeting at 6:30pm.
- Sherry Countryman, OB FinCom, noted that the larger towns the smaller

towns, because none of the towns could afford to build their own high school.

- Vicki Divoll asked what, specifically, is unfair about a per-student formula? You take the cost to own and operate the high school, divide by the number of students, and everyone pays the same amount to educate a student. No other formula has a rational explanation for their approach. Using the EQV approach, Chilmark would pay four times more than OB to educate a student. She asked, “What is fair about that?”
- MVPS Assistant Superintendent Richie Smith, said that we need to listen to understand each other if we are to come to any agreement. The key issue is the sustainability of the schools and the quality of the education. We won’t get anywhere if we only talk about “what my town wants.” The budget of the high school squeezes out local schools, and that can’t continue. It’s already affecting some island schools, with increasing disparities between them. That can’t continue.
- Susan Murphy, Chilmark FinCom, asked why not tease out capital expenses and allocate them differently?
- Mark Foster, Aquinnah FinCom, said that Aquinnah taxpayers pay for the education of tribal children with no contribution from the tribe. The town makes no distinction between children, and he has never heard from non-resident property owners calling for that to change. His FinCom wonders whether there is any possibility of seeking private donations to fund the high school.
- Doug Ruskin, West Tisbury FinCom, replied that private funding is not appropriate for a high school, and that, with the EQV formula, you are getting a good portion of the funding from non-residents, the people with high-value homes.
- Vicki Divoll asked, “How does having a high-value home equate to having a lot of money to spend?”
- Doug Ruskin said that, true, there are some land-rich, cash-poor owners. Only Tisbury has a split tax rate [meaning the residential exemption,] though other towns may go that route.
- Laura Rose said it was fair to pay per student for education expenses, but the capital expenses should be divided equally between towns.
- Matt D’Andrea said that, back in the 90s, a fourth grade student sued the state because of education disparities, and that was the origin of state aid like Chapter 70 funding. Under Chapter 70, funds are redistributed based on ability to pay, which is based in part on equalized valuation. That means that some towns, like Fall River, receive substantial funds, while others, like the six island towns, pay into the system.
- Vicki Divoll noted that 70% of Chilmark homes are owned by non-residents. Chilmark’s tax rate is low, and its property values are high, and their tax bills are similar to other MV towns.
- Mary Ellen Larsen asked whether the high school charges for the use of the Performing Arts Center (PAC) and other facilities. Mark Friedman,

MVRHS Finance Director, replied that, yes, and, in the case of the PAC, that money – perhaps \$25-30k a year – goes into a revolving fund to maintain the PAC.

- Brian Packish said that OB's proposed EQV formula is a starting point – that's where they started a couple of months ago, and that it is natural not to negotiate against yourself. He said that everyone wants the best for our students, and that our focus should be on how to continue this discussion.
- Matt D'Andrea suggested bringing in the MARS consultant as soon as possible. Doug Ruskin noted that he had supported the idea of a facilitator a couple of months ago. Maura asked whether we could get private funding for that, and Susan Murphy said that was not a good idea – in her experience, it tends to taint the perception of the result.
- Vicki Divoll noted that the Chilmark Board of Selectmen agreed that they would not consider any alternative formula until someone explained what is wrong with the existing formula.
- Mark Friedman noted that the existing per-student formula is volatile, with individual town assessments going up or down significantly from year to year with changes in the student population attending from each town. One of the formulas we have looked at uses three-year smoothing of student attendance. In the long run, each town pays the same as it would, but the year to year changes are damped down.
- Mary Ellen Larsen asked whether it makes any sense to discuss alternative formulas at this moment, and Doug Ruskin said that discussing formulas right now is a waste of time.
- Seth Gambino, Tisbury FinCom, asked if he could present his idea for a formula and gave a five-minute presentation (attached.) This formula takes each town's annual budget (averaged over three years) and adds them to get a total. He then takes each town's percentage of the total and uses that to allocate high school costs. This treats the cost of the high school as part of the cost of operating the island. Percentages are similar to per-student percentages, with higher percentages for Aquinnah and Chilmark, and marginally lower numbers for the other towns.
- *LAURA ROSE MOVED TO BRING IN A MEDIATOR. DOUG RUSKIN SECONDED. MOTION PASSED, MOSTLY AYES, NO NAYS, ONE ABSTENTION (VICKI DIVOLL.)* Bill Vrooman said that the AIFC needed Edgartown to come in. Vicki Divoll noted that the All Island FinCom has no power or authority.
- Matt D'Andrea noted that the consultant would work for the high school committee. The high school committee will meet on Monday evening and the consultant question will be on the agenda.
- Walter Vail, OB FinCom, asked whether we can get a detailed proposal, including timeline and cost, from the consultant. Matt D'Andrea agreed. Mark Friedman noted that this will have to be pursued following procurement laws, so we would have to get competing quotes. He knows of no other consultant with this specialization or qualification.

- The next meeting of the All Island FinCom will be scheduled when we have movement on the consultant, hopefully by early October. Vicki Divoll offered to have Chilmark host the meeting.

LAURA ROSE MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 7:31 PM, DOUG RUSKIN SECONDED; MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Documents on file:

Lolly Hand letter (2 p.)

Seth Gambino formula presentation (3 p.)

Respectfully submitted,

Jon Snyder

Finance Director, Tisbury

Mary Ellen Larsen – TFC Chair

Date

Minutes approved by the Tisbury FinCom 11/20/19.

- *Minutes approved by the OB FinCom as amended 10/3/19.*