

Town of Appomattox

Office of the Town Manager

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of Town Council

FROM: Michael Campbell, Town Manager

DATE: 6/3/2025

SUBJECT: Considerations Regarding the Finance Committee

This memo is offered in the spirit of collaboration and to support Council in evaluating the current structure and function of the Town's Finance Committee. My intention is not to discourage Council's interest in sound fiscal oversight, but to raise a few concerns from the administrative side and to ensure the Town continues to operate efficiently and within the best practices of good governance.

As Town Manager, I am charged with managing day-to-day operations and ensuring the effective delivery of services to our community. In that role, I feel obligated to share that the current structure of the Finance Committee, while well-intentioned, introduces some challenges that I believe warrant thoughtful discussion.

The Town Code (§ 5-6) notes that the Finance Committee shall recommend ordinances related to taxes and assessments, and the Standing Committee Rules and Procedural Guidelines expand the Committee's scope to include areas such as personnel policy, budget amendments, utility rate adjustments, and economic development incentives. Many of these subjects also fall within the professional responsibilities of staff—particularly myself as Town Manager, the Treasurer, the Deputy Treasurer, and the Deputy Clerk.

In practice, preparing for committee meetings requires additional staff time to duplicate briefings, compile materials, and ensure full FOIA compliance. Often, these same materials must be presented again to the full Council, creating redundancy. In a small-town setting where our staff is already lean, this can stretch resources without always producing additional value.

Furthermore, I do believe there is some potential overlap with operational matters that may unintentionally infringe upon areas best handled by administrative staff. Topics such as employee compensation, contract execution, and internal budgeting procedures are traditionally and legally managed by the administrative team.

That said, I fully recognize and appreciate Council's commitment to responsible stewardship of public funds. If Council finds that the Finance Committee is a helpful tool in that effort, it may be worth considering a more focused scope or a shift toward periodic work sessions that include the full Council.

Additionally, I believe it is important to acknowledge the level of commitment expected from Council members who serve on standing committees. Under the current guidelines, committee members are not only asked to attend separate meetings outside of regular Council sessions but also to prepare in advance by reviewing detailed financial and policy materials. Members are also responsible for presenting findings and recommendations to

the full Council. This is meaningful work, and when carried out consistently and thoughtfully, it can add value. However, it also requires active engagement, clear coordination, and time commitments that must be weighed alongside other duties.

Under the current Standing Committee Rules and Procedural Guidelines, the Finance & Planning Committee is composed of three voting members from Town Council, appointed by the Mayor. In addition, the Mayor serves as a non-voting member of the committee. A chairperson is also appointed by the Mayor from among the three voting members and serves a one-year term aligned with the Town's fiscal calendar. Committee membership and chairperson roles may be rotated at the Mayor's discretion. This structure means that up to four elected officials are expected to attend and participate in each Finance Committee meeting, with the chairperson also tasked with presenting the committee's recommendations to the full Council.

To support your deliberation, I respectfully pose the following questions for reflection:

1. What specific outcomes or efficiencies do we hope the Finance Committee will achieve?
2. Could those outcomes be met just as effectively in full Council work sessions, where all members receive the same information simultaneously?
3. Is the current use of staff time proportionate to the value the Committee is producing?
4. Would an alternative structure (such as ad hoc financial review teams or quarterly financial briefings) meet Council's needs with greater flexibility?

If Council determines that the Committee should continue, I would simply recommend that we define its scope clearly, limit its meeting frequency, and ensure full Council transparency in all related matters.

Ultimately, I defer to Council's judgment on how best to proceed. I hope this memo serves as a constructive starting point for that discussion. Please know that I and the rest of the staff remain committed to supporting Council in whatever structure you choose.

Respectfully,
Michael Campbell
Town Manager
Town of Appomattox