



TOWN of
THOMPSON

BOARD OF FINANCE

Minutes: Budget Meeting
Wednesday, April 29, 2015
Thompson Library/Community Center
7:00 PM

p. 1 of 5

Chairman Ray Faucher, Jr. called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

- I. Roll call and seating of alternates
 1. Members Present: Raymond Faucher, Jr., Paul Dery, Larry Groh, Jr., Laurent Guillot, Aaron McGarry, and Susanne Witkowski.
 2. Members Absent: None.
 3. Staff Present:
Tina Fox, Recording Secretary
Orla McKiernan-Rafferty, Finance Director
 4. Also Present: Neal Breen, Kerstin Forrester, Dr. Michael Jolin, Paul Lenky, Members of the Public
- II. Correspondence
 1. Letter from Attorney St. Onge regarding the eligibility of L. Groh, Jr. to vote on the education portion of the budget.
 2. Information from K. Forrester concerning the Town Clerk and Assistant Town Clerk positions.
 3. Information from Danielle Pederson, secretary of the Superintendent.
- III. Citizen's Comments
 1. Kathleen Herbert, 122 Wilsonville Rd., stated that she is a member of the Board of Education. She asked that there be no further cuts to the budget. She asked what the reason for the date change of the meeting, stating that the National Honor Society induction was the same night. She stated that the Board of Education members had to choose to either attend this meeting or the NHS induction, which was a very difficult choice. R. Faucher, Jr. stated that the Board members chose to change the date of the meeting just after the end of the last meeting, that he may have been premature in just asking the Board of Finance members if they were available and not asking anyone else, and that he is sorry for any inconvenience it caused.
 2. Donna Lynch, 212 Chase Rd., stated that she is a member of the Board of Education. She said that at a previous meeting, it was her understanding that there was a question regarding per pupil expenditure. She stated that number was \$14,858, which is lower than the state average of \$15,729, and lower than some surrounding communities.

3. Lauren Langlois, Lowell Davis Rd., stated that she is a teacher at the middle school. She believed that the Board has done a great job thus far, but the budget needed to go out at the .99 increase that it stands out. She stated that the increase would only effect her about \$20 per month, and that the difference between \$15 and \$20 is not a huge difference. She reiterated her comments from the last meeting that less funding means less teachers and larger class sizes, which are not as effective as smaller class sizes. She believes that the class sizes effect enrollment at the school. She stated that she would not want to send her own children to a school with class sizes between 25-30 students. She added that more cuts make fewer courses available, which makes other schools seem better. She reiterated that she would like the Town to vote on the budget as is, because the parents and teachers are supportive of it.
4. Kevin Walsh, Blain Rd., asked what the number is on the minimal education requirement per student. Dr. Jolin attempted to answer Mr. Walsh. R. Faucher, Jr. stated that he believes the minimum per pupil expenditure is not something that exists anymore. K. Walsh asked what the enrollment at the school is, and Donna Lynch answered that there are 1,005 students between the three schools.
5. Sally White, East Thompson Rd., stated that she is troubled that the meeting date was changed, and that unless there was some sort of crisis, she does not believe the date should have been changed. She stated that at the last meeting, it was mentioned that a Dunkin Donuts and Dollar General would be moving into the town, and she asked if there were any projections as to the revenue that they would be bringing into the Town. P. Lenky answered that there were no projections as of yet. S. White stated that she feels badly for the parents at the meeting that seem concerned about their children's education. She stated that she doesn't see a problem with their education, and added that she has not heard as of yet any compelling reason to raise taxes or that we [the Town as a whole] cannot operate with the resources that we have. She stated that she does not have assurance that the Town's resources are being optimized, and she asked the Board to not raise taxes. In regards to hearing comments about large class sizes, she mentioned that when she went through school, there were larger class sizes and only two principals, but there were many people who ended up with accomplishments after school. She further mentioned that the possibility of contracting out the busses needs to be considered. She stated that it's time for all of the Boards and Committees in the Town to scrutinize and maximize their resources, and she entreated the Board to not raise taxes.
6. Bob Ventley stated that he is a member of the Board of Education. He believed that a zero dollar increase to the budget would be going backward because costs increase each year, such as healthcare and utilities. He mentioned that people often ask why the Board gives people raises, and the answer is to be competitive. He stated that the Board tries to be reasonable, but a zero dollar increase means that the school would be going in reverse.
7. Michael Krogul stated that he is a bus driver at the school. He discussed the privatizing of busses. He mentioned that Plainfield just privatized and have many troubles because of it. L. Guillot stated that the Board has seen three studies about privatizing the busses, and none of those studies worked in favor of privatizing. He stated that the studies showed it's not the cheapest option, and that Pomfret recently privatized and are having trouble, too.

8. Shawn Bassette, Fairway Dr., stated that his wife is a school teacher. He mentioned that last year's budget proposal failed at referendum as a tie, and then the Board decided to cut more from the budget. He stated that the Board only listened to the half of the population that voted 'no' on the first proposal. He stated that if the Board chooses to cut anything tonight, the only reason would be the chance that the budget proposal can pass on the first vote, and that the Board is looking to cut \$50,000 or more at the chance to save maybe \$5,000. He mentioned that at the state and federal level, they have regulations about having curriculum directors and other administrators, not just principals. He added that if anyone thinks that one administrator can handle the behavioral issues at the school, they should 'live a day in the administrator's shoes,' and then they would not question what the Board of Education brings the Board as a budget proposal.
9. Paul Baer, 1227 Thompson Rd., asked about the salary for the new Town Clerk being cut, but giving the new Assessor a raise. R. Faucher, Jr. stated that the Assessor's position pay has been cut, and that no raise is in place. P. Baer stated that the ambulance and fire department should be split. He stated that the ambulance service is a profit center and should be a separate service. He further mentioned that not every home was reassessed during revaluation. In regards to maintaining roads, he stated that Main Street is deplorable and that one of the biggest eyesores belongs to the Town of Thompson. He believed that there are places to cut in education. He also mentioned that he supplied the Chairman with a list of libraries in Connecticut that use volunteers, emphasizing that numerous wealthy communities utilize volunteers.
10. Sally White stated that no one has proposed a budget cut; a cut would be if the Board was to decrease the current budget. She clarified that her proposal would be to maintain the current budget.
11. In response to P. Baer's comments, R. Faucher, Jr. clarified that Mr. Sharpe acknowledged that the ambulance is able to support itself and he took back the request for more money for a new ambulance. R. Faucher, Jr. asked P. Lenky if it is possible that not all homes get assessed during revaluation. L. Groh, Jr. explained that the whole Town gets revaluated every ten years, with 50% of the homes being done one year, then the other 50% being done five years later.

IV. Budget Workshop

1. The Board discussed changing the Assessor's salary line with K. Forrester and P. Lenky. K. Forrester explained that the Board of Selectmen agreed on decreasing the pay by 10% to \$49,000 to reflect that the person in that position is new. She also stated that the Interim Assessor felt that the job could be done at 35 hours per week, rather than 40 hours per week. **There was a consensus amongst Board members to decrease the Assessor position salary to \$49,000.**
2. Orla McKiernan-Rafferty stated that she received update numbers regarding health insurance, for a total savings of \$7,000. Also, one of the school grants had not been added, which is now added in the amount of \$4,644.
3. The Board discussed adding an amount to the budget for the certification of the new Zoning Enforcement Officer. P. Lenky specified that there would be no need for travel expenses because the ZEO would be using the Town Vehicle. **There was a consensus amongst Board members to add \$1,750 for certification for the ZEO.**

4. The Board discussed the possible addition of the purchase of an ambulance. R. Faucher, Jr. clarified that John Sharpe stated that he would not be asking the Board for money for a new ambulance, and that there is not a new ambulance in the proposed budget as is. **There was a consensus amongst Board to not add the purchase of a new ambulance to the proposed budget.**
5. K. Forrester provided the Board with information regarding the Town Clerk and Assistant Town Clerk positions. She stated that beginning June 1, 2015, the current Town Clerk would take a reduction in hours down to 14 hours per week, and a corresponding reduction in pay. She also updated the Board on costs for training, certification, and the overlap in pay of the current Assistant Town Clerk and new Assistant Town Clerk. Orla McKiernan-Rafferty stated that the overall effect would be to reduce the budget by about \$10,000. **There was a consensus amongst the Board to authorize the necessary changes to the budget, with a net reduction of about \$10,000.**
6. Orla McKiernan-Rafferty explained that the revision to the health insurance premiums would change the original Board of Selectmen proposal from \$500,000 to \$535,000. **There was a consensus amongst Board members to change the health insurance line from \$550,000 to \$535,000.**
7. **Larry Groh, Jr. moved and Laurent Guillot seconded the motion to send the total proposed budget of \$24,242,518 to Town Meeting.**

Discussion:

- a. P. Dery believed that the increase in the education budget at more than 7% was still too high.
- b. S. Witkowski stated that she would hate to see more of the budget cut.
- c. R. Faucher, Jr. believed that it would be a waste of time and money to send the proposed budget as is because there is only a 10-15% chance of it passing.
- d. L. Groh, Jr. stated that the reason he is for moving forward is because of the comments made that the Board only listened to half of the voters after last year's referendum.

Ray Faucher, Jr. – No

Paul Dery – No

Larry Groh, Jr. - Yes

Laurent Guillot – Yes

Aaron McGarry – No

Susanne Witkowski- Yes

The motion failed.

8. A. McGarry wanted the Board to consider reducing road paving by \$25,000 and reducing the education budget by \$140,000.
9. R. Faucher, Jr. wanted the Board to consider cutting \$20,000 from the library's budget to encourage the library to utilize volunteers, \$50,000 from road paving, and \$48,000 from the education budget to bring the mill rate increase to .75.
10. The Board decided to set a special meeting immediately following the referendum results (approximately 8:30 PM) on May 27th. The Board further decided to set a budget workshop at 7:00 PM at the Library/Community Center on May 28th, if the referendum fails.
11. L. Guillot stated that he would not like to see \$20,000 cut from the library budget, and that if the Board is willing to take a chance on sending the budget to Referendum at a .75 mill rate increase, then the Board should take the chance on a .95 mill rate increase. S. Witkowski agreed.
12. L. Groh, Jr. did not want to cut the library budget, but he did agree with cutting \$50,000 from road paving; he believed having the Highway Department do the road paving would save the Town money.
13. P. Dery wanted to cut neither the library nor road paving budget.

MUNICIPAL BUILDING

815 RIVERSIDE DRIVE · NO. GROSVENORDALE, CONNECTICUT 06255
TELEPHONE (860) 923-3593 · FAX (860) 923-9897

14. The Board discussed decreasing the road paving budget by \$50,000 or \$25,000. **There was a consensus amongst Board members (with L. Guillot disagreeing) to reduce the road paving budget by \$25,000.**
15. The Board discussed decreasing the education budget by \$60,000. There was not a consensus to do so.
16. The Board briefly discussed the possibility of decreasing the Recreation Department's budget.
17. The Board discussed health insurance costs in the education budget. Dr. Jolin mentioned that there is a possibility the health insurance increase will drop from 9.5% to 8.5%, which would be about a \$25,000-\$30,000 decrease. **There was a consensus amongst Board members to reduce the education budget by \$25,000.**
18. **Larry Groh, Jr. moved and Susanne Witkowski seconded the motion to send the total proposed budget of \$24,192,518 to Town Meeting.**

Ray Faucher, Jr. – No

Paul Dery – Yes

Larry Groh, Jr. - Yes

Laurent Guillot – Yes

Aaron McGarry – No

Susanne Witkowski- Yes

The motion carried.

V. Adjournment

1. **Aaron McGarry moved and Susanne Witkowski seconded the motion to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously.**
2. Chairman Ray Faucher, Jr. adjourned the meeting at 8:50 PM.

Tina Fox
Recording Secretary