



TOWN of
THOMPSON

BOARD OF FINANCE

Minutes: Special Meeting
Thursday, September 14, 2017
Thompson Library/Community Center
7:00 PM

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Chairman Aaron McGarry called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM.

I. Roll call

- A. Members Present: Jim Bellavance, Ray Faucher, Jr., Larry Groh, Jr., Aaron McGarry, Rhonda Rooney, and Susanne Witkowski.
- B. Members Absent: None
- C. Staff Present:
Tina Fox, Recording Secretary
Orla McKiernan-Rafferty, Finance Director
- D. Also Present: Members of the Public

II. Correspondence

- A. Email sent August 22nd and again September 12th from the Selectmen's Office about a workshop for How to Run Legal and Effective Meetings.
- B. Email sent September 5th from Joe Lindley regarding the House's rationale for cuts to Thompson.
- C. Email sent September 10th from the Selectmen's Office regarding the Governor's new budget proposal.
- D. Email sent September 14th from O. McKiernan-Rafferty regarding a 90 day budget statute.
- E. Email sent September 15th from Alison Boutaugh regarding the Library budget. A. McGarry read this correspondence aloud.
- F. Suggested cost savings measures received at the meeting from R. Faucher, Jr.
- G. Summary of State aid received at the meeting from R. Rooney.

III. Citizen's Comments

- A. Joe Lindley, 24 Hill Rd., stated that the Town Attorney was consulted after the previous BOF meeting regarding the transfer for the window project. There needs to be a motion by the BOF. Windows have been removed from the building so time is of the essence. It is just a formality because this would be a precedent setting event. The Town Attorney recommended that the three boards vote specifically on transferring the funds rather than reserving the funds.
- B. Bill Witkowski, Clarence Dr., BOE Chair, stated that the BOE is putting together a small sub-committee for strategic planning, and he extended an invitation to have a BOF member on the sub-committee.
- C. Mike Lajeunesse stated that because the State does not have money to give out, he hopes the Board would consider not funding engineering studies for projects that the Town won't be getting for a couple years, and instead utilize the NECCOG services for one important project. The other projects can be done when the State might be in a better position to help the Town.

IV. Budget Workshop

- A. O. McKiernan-Rafferty stated that the latest State budget proposal has the pilot, revenue sharing, and Pequot Indian grants all reduced. A Municipal Assistance grant was created and Thompson could receive \$44,543 for that grant. Level funding for ECS is now proposed, and the new special education grant has been removed. The bottom line is a \$194,000 increase to revenue over the numbers at the last referendum in June. Teacher's retirement contribution has been added at \$173,335, and the Building Committee engineering study has been added at \$166,200. Those changes make the proposed mill rate 28.22, a 2.163 increase over the previous mill rate.
- B. There was some brief discussion on the State budget, and whether or not to move forward with a budget workshop, or to wait until the next meeting.
- C. A. McGarry suggested removing the \$50,000 placed into the Economic Development Commission budget. There was some discussion about the suggestion and the Branding Study. No change was made to the EDC budget.
- D. L. Groh, Jr. asked for an update on the pension/MERS situation, and suggested that the \$123,000 from Pension-prior catch up for MERS be removed. There was some discussion and no change was made. L. Groh, Jr. also suggested that the amount be put into a transfer fund so that the \$123,000 does not go back into the general fund at the end of the year. There was a consensus to move the \$123,000 to a transfer fund. This change did not affect the proposed mill rate.
- E. R. Faucher, Jr. suggested removing the proposed personnel increase in the Selectmen's Office. There was some discussion and the Board agreed to revisit the suggestion at the next meeting.
- F. A. McGarry read an email from R. Faucher, Jr. aloud that contained suggestions regarding budget cuts.
- G. R. Rooney asked if the BOE was going to end Fiscal Year 2017 with a surplus, to which N. Breen answered that the BOE surplus should be \$829.
- H. J. Bellavance asked questions about the school's principals and psychologist positions. Melinda Smith, Superintendent, stated that she does not think the schools could share an administrator. They have looked at not filling some positions that have resigned/retired. Scott Sugarman, Director of Pupil Services, stated that Putnam has about 1,100 students with four psychologists and three social workers, whereas Thompson operates with less. Thompson's psychologists have to also function as social workers. The psychologists complete evaluations and are the primary contact to outside providers. There is no law requiring a school to have a psychologist, but there are indirect laws that the school would be violating if they did not have access to psychologists. B. Witkowski stated that administration has been reduced by 12.5% over the past few years; a new kindergarten teacher is needed; and 12 students just moved in to Town with 6 of them having high needs.
- I. R. Faucher, Jr. asked if there is still a law that says if the school budget is reduced below the prior year, then the State cuts two dollars for every one dollar of reduction. O. McKiernan-Rafferty stated that the act is no longer valid, but will likely be added into the State budget once it passes. S. Sugarman stated that there are also federal requirements for school districts to maintain funding for students with special needs.

- J. R. Rooney discussed other possibilities for the school, such as regionalizing or consolidating.
- K. J. Lindley stated that the per-pupil expenditure just met average the past year, and was always below the State average. The graduation rate, college placement, and military placement are among the highest in the State.
- L. Tom Angelo, 640 Fabyan Rd., BOE member, stated that the residents need to understand what Thompson's education system is about, and it is up to Board members to promote the school. Sixteen out-of-district students returned to the school. There is a large 8th grade class coming up. School enrollment is up. There are certain items that are State or federally mandated that have to be met in order to keep accreditation. The Tourtellotte family gave the Town a fabulous gift and the Town has to find a way to maintain it. R. Rooney stated that she is hearing people say that the kids are not getting what they need; there's not enough money and as a result, the kids are suffering.
- M. Renee Waldron, 79 Main St., stated that the Branding Study is just a starting point. Thompson has one of the best recreation departments in Windham County, and the best library. It would be a shame to defund 30 years of work the Town did to build these programs. We have to serve all Thompson residents. To defund a program would be a great loss and the Town would never get it back. The Branding Study is a great step. Slashing what is great about the Town is not the right way to go.
- N. Bob Lachance, Rachel Dr., stated that the Library has taken cuts. The Library operates 5 to 6 days a week, and asked for \$6,000 to open a 7th day. The Board is welcome to take that \$6,000, but a \$150,000 cut would decimate the Library. Most staff would be lost, all of the children's programming would be lost, and the Library would be open a couple days a week. The \$75,000 for the roof can wait. He stated that there is money set aside for an engineering study to look at roofs in the Town. Look at cutting areas other than active programs. He asked how the Town could be branded without a library, decent school and recreation department. Putnam is in a good place now and they weren't any better than Thompson before. Thompson won't get better by 'nickel and diming' organizations. R. Faucher, Jr. stated that the engineering study is for the oil tank replacement, roof, and solar project at the school, and those projects are eligible to be reimbursed by the State at over 70% but only if an engineering study is conducted.
- O. Kim Prescott, 20 Church St., stated that the message needs to get out to the people that Thompson needs to raise the mill rate, but it is to keep the Library, recreation department, and other programs active. If people don't know why they're coming out to vote, they only see dollar signs.
- P. Christine Campbell, 861 Thompson Rd., reminded the BOF that at a January 17, 2017 meeting, the BOE did a presentation that stated they would have a \$400,000 positive differential for the fiscal year.
- Q. L. Groh, Jr. stated that no matter what the Town approves, if a program is cut, it will take almost an act of God to get it back.

R. Rene Morin, 130 Pompeo Rd., stated that the most significant possibility he heard tonight to get a reasonable budget passed was to use some of the \$600,000 that is going to be returned to the fund balance. It appears the fund balance could stay at a similar percentage if the Town uses another \$300,000 or so. 8.2% is a key number, but he suspects the auditors will be looking at things differently now because Towns are having problems.

V. Adjourn

A. **Larry Groh, Jr. moved and Susanne Witkowski seconded the motion to adjourn.**

Jim Bellavance- Yes

Ray Faucher, Jr.-Yes

Larry Groh, Jr.- Yes

Aaron McGarry- Yes

Rhonda Rooney- Yes

Susanne Witkowski- Yes

The motion carried unanimously.

B. Chairman A. McGarry adjourned the meeting at 9:02 PM.

Tina Fox
Recording Secretary