

TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON
FINANCE COMMITTEE
TOWN HALL
334 MAIN STREET, GREAT BARRINGTON, MA
MINUTES
JUNE 25, 2013
5:00 P.M.

PRESENT:
SHARON GREGORY, CHAIR
WALTER ATWOOD
MARK LEFENFELD
LEIGH DAVIS
THOMAS BLAUVELT

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 P.M.

I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: Thomas Blauvelt

SECOND: Leigh Davis

VOTE: 5-0

Buddy Atwood stated that we had a piece of information that was passed over to the committee and he thought the individual who gave it to us was uninformed about what he was talking about and factually wrong.

Introduction of Town Manager – Jennifer Tabakin- she noted that she is looking forward to working with the Finance Committee. She advised that at a former meeting economic strengths, taxes and forming a strategic approach and also looking at the budget in a much planned way was discussed. The bond rating for Great Barrington has been upgraded to AA+. The Fire Truck is going to be rebid because of the bond market. The costs will be approximately \$2,000 to \$3,000 in printing costs. We are looking at the best time to rebid the fire truck bonds. She noted that the announcement was made about 6 weeks ago that liens were going out on properties where taxes have not been paid. Sharon said we are looking for a process to develop the collection of taxes. It was suggested that Sandy Larkin could submit periodic totals quarterly.

2. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Expanding the role of the Finance Committee – Sharon noted that even though the Finance Committee is an advisory board, the committee would like to ask the Select Board to include the Finance committee on any preliminary discussions on any upcoming purchases greater than \$100,000, be involved in initial planning of union contracts and purchase and sale of town property.

MOTION: Tom Blauvelt to forward a letter to the Board of Selectmen and Town Manager requesting that the Finance Committee be included in preliminary discussions for purchases greater than \$100,000, any involvement in initial planning of union contracts and the process for the purchase and sale of town property.

SECOND: Mark Lefenfeld

VOTE: 5-0

B. Budget Development Process and Schedule – Sharon noted that the committee would like to schedule meetings with the School Committee and Board of Selectmen to review policy and department allocation costs once we know what the school budget is. Some of the discussions were to mothball Housatonic School so we wouldn't be heating it unnecessarily which will happen July 1. Last year we asked for a level funded budget with 2% decrease in operating expenditures and 5% reduction in capital expenditures. Sharon said she would like to see fully allocated department costs.

C. Tour of Town Facilities – Sharon said she thought it would be helpful if we went to see places like the Fire Station, Wastewater Treatment Plant, Housatonic School and the Court House. She said Buddy Atwood has volunteered to coordinate this. She thought the first place they should tour is the Housatonic School because it is going to be mothballed soon. Buddy said sometime in August we would visit all the places. He asked that a Housatonic date and a Great Barrington date be sent to him to help him coordinate the visits. It was noted that once the dates are set, it will have to be posted.

D. Consolidated Calendar – Sharon said she is concerned that the calendar is not far out enough. She is thinking it should be three months out. She noted this is true for the Main Street reconstruction project. Sharon said she contacted Peter Dillon to post the place and subject to be discussed by the School Committee along with the meeting dates.

NEW BUSINESS:

A. Special Reports from Individual Finance Committee Members – Board members volunteered to be the Finance Committee representative to various boards. Tom for the Community Preservation Act, Buddy Atwood for the Main Street Reconstruction Project and Leigh with Sharon as backup for the School Committee. Mark volunteered to be the representative for the sale of town property.

Tom noted he had nothing to report.

Jennifer noted she asked for a reschedule date for the meeting on the Main Street Reconstruction Project. She said they are looking for 2 or 3 weeks ahead and off cycle on Board of Selectmen's meeting schedule. The first meeting will be to update on the status of the design. The state will advertise it for bid in September. The RFP process is a month to two months. Then in the fall the contractor will apply for permits and it would depend if the contractor wanted to begin work in the fall. Sharon noted that there was a diversion of Chapter 90 Funds going to the design fees for Fuss and O'Neil and others. She noted hereafter the committee would like to be apprised of expenses. Sharon asked if it is necessary to rehire Fuss and O'Neil because they have been difficult to work with. Jennifer noted that she wants to have a meeting with everyone present to discuss the Main Street project.

Leigh noted that she and Sharon attended the last school committee meeting to talk about the school resource officer. Her report is as follows:

On Tuesday, June 18th I met with Superintendent Peter Dillion and Select Board and School Committee Member Steve Bannon in the offices of the Berkshire Hills Regional School District to discuss the submission of the federal grant application by the Great Barrington Police Department for a Student Resource Officer. My personal impressions of

the meeting were as follows: With regards to the financial implications of this grant, both men seemed unclear as to the details of "where this money would come from" and admitted that this still needed to be "flushed out. Some questions that were posed, but of which were left unanswered included:

- 1) What percentage would each town in the School District would be expected to contribute, and how would this be divided?
- 2) Would the officer's salary be based on a 365 day schedule, or a 180 day *I* school year schedule, and if the position was only needed during the school calendar, what other roles would the officer be expected to perform.(i.e. community policing?)
- 3) Since many of school activities happen after normal school hours, would this officer be required to work during these hours, and would they be entitled to higher union overtime/evening rates.
- 4) Would an additional police cruiser be required?
- 5) Rather than a new hire, what existing school and police department resources could be reallocated to address the needs and concerns that this grant seeks to address?

Leigh then read her motion which is included with these minutes.

MOTION: Leigh Davis-

Whereas a grant application has been filed on behalf of Great Barrington by the School Committee which obligates the Town of Great Barrington to provide incremental service coverage to the three Berkshire Hills School District Campuses, and with-

1) The incremental cost over the following four years being approximately \$150,000, (not including overtime, or benefits such as health and retirement costs},

And-

2) ...that police staff hires are covered by union contracts and the continuance of the position would increase the budget at full cost unless some agreement were made to supplement a current position after that time (please note that NO displacement of an existing position is allowed)

We recommend that if the general consensus is that a resource officer is sought, that the School Committee request the Town reallocate existing resources to address the problems outlined in the grant application.

We further suggest that any assigned school resources be incorporated into the School budget and allocated against all member districts.

If the grant is desired and approved:

1. The Board of Selectman publicly announce the projected annual cost of the new police staff member for a period ten years to factor in the probable infrastructure costs that the town will be committing to (unless contracted otherwise.)

According to the completed COPS Grant application, the approximate total costs per year of the new hire are as follows: (please refer to pages 34-36 of the attached document.)

1. Y1: \$66K (local share - 16K)

11. Y2: \$68.6K (local share- 28k)

111. Y3: \$70.0K (local share- 35k)

IV. Y 4 : 73.K (local cost- full cost of hire)

V. Total local share cost for 4 yrs. = 153K (80k + 73K)

SECOND: Tom Blauvelt

VOTE: 5-0

Notes:

I) No overtime expense has been included, and based on the 2014 municipal budget, this currently is 9% of current officer salaries. In addition, no incremental costs for other expenses, such as a police car for example, have been budgeted.

Mark said his understanding was that the School Committee was going to apply for the grant and assuming the grant was approved then make the decision to accept the grant.

Ongoing costs from year four of the grant would be borne in full by the Town and the Town would need to negotiate special terms with the Police Union to exact what the ongoing costs would be.

Thus, the Finance Committee makes the recommendation:

2. The School Committee not accepts the award without the express consent of the Town

3. The School Budget is allocated the full cost of the resource officer within its current, so that all member Towns share in the expense.

SUMMARY OF REPORT from SCHOOL MEETINGS ON RENOVATION PROJECT BY SHARON GREGORY AND LEIGH DAVIS

The MMRHS renovation project is wrapping up. A special Town Meeting in early November is planned to seek approval for the project. The building is the oldest high school (50 years) in Southern Berkshires needing major structural and other improvements. After considering three options, the current one (to renovate and expand) was chosen as being the most cost/effective. The enhancements will include a proposed addition for science, technology, engineering and math.

* The State has offered to cover 41-48% of the total cost, but it expires 12/31/13.

* This means \$56 million will be covered through a 20 year bond of which \$23 million is expected to be reimbursed by the state and the remaining carrying cost of \$33 million would be covered by taxpayers.

* The estimated annual cost burden for the average GB homeowner is expected to be \$345-400.

Since the School Board is an entirely separate body, the Finance Committee can only offer advice to it, and, at Town Meeting, make a "yes" or "no" recommendation on the proposed budget. Seizing the opportunity of time, we would like to send a letter to the School Board, suggesting ways to modify or clarify the impact on the Town's budget and its tax rate.

MOTION Mark Lefenfeld

"With the numerous issues facing the Town's taxpayers in the near future, I move that the Finance Committee request the School Committee provide information that would help us understand the long term impact of the MMRHS capital expenditure on our Town's finances:

1. What is the annual projected operating cost including maintenance (not including teaching salaries) versus the average of the last three years. Is there any way to achieve savings with the new building renovations that could mitigate the annual cost of the new bond?
2. What are the capital expenditures and bond cost projected over the next ten years including the retirement or refinancing of debt covering the other buildings. Would the retirement of other debt offset some of this increase in the next few years?
 - o If so, when would this happen?
 - o Is there any other new capital expenditure not yet discussed that might be proposed in the next decade?
3. With the recent rise in interest rates and using the worst case scenario, what increase in interest rates will ostensibly change the estimated annual cost of this proposal?

PURPOSE

With this information, we are hoping that the Town Finance staff would be able to help project the net increase in the tax rate from school operations and capital expenditures over the next ten years assuming:

* The same population and proportion of school children from the three towns

- * The current level of state contributions
- * The rate of inflation or salary increases and retirement benefits inherent in the existing union contracts
- * No other increase in the Town's basic expenses

SECOND: Buddy Atwood

VOTE: 5-0

CITIZENS SPEAK TIME:

John Breasted commented on the resource officer for the Berkshire Hills Regional School District. He said he didn't think there was adequate disclosure to the public on costs etc. at the school committee meeting on May 25, 2013. He noted he did agree with the research that was done by the Finance Committee.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Carolyn Wichmann
Secretary