BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES
JULY 17, 2012
SENIOR CENTER

Members present: Michael Stauder, Chair
Chris Norcross, Clerk

Member absent: Matt Castriotta, Vice Chair

Staff present: Brian Bullock, Interim Town Administrator; Elaine Peterson, Town Secretary

Finance Committee members present: Ed Blanchard, Faye Zukowski, Ben Prentiss, Phil Churchill

Others present: Tom Howlett, Walter Ducharme, Karen Chick, Dan Galante, Dave Simmerer, Jamie Pitney, Tim Williams & Bill Hansen, School Committee members; Maureen Marshall, QRSD Superintendent; Cheryl Duval, QRSD, Brad Miner, Telegram & Gazette; Eleanor Downer, Barre Gazette, Mark Haranas, Gardner News;

Barre Attendees: Kathlyn Inman, Rich Jankauskas, Leif Erikson (Selectboard); Diane Cook, Ted Twarog, David Tuttle, (Finance Committee); Charles Miller, Mark Brophy (School Committee)

Oakham Attendees: Matt Broderick, Paul Rochette, Clare Hendra, Finance Committee; Dennis Bergin, Eliot Starbard, Bill Storie (Selectboard); Steven Labarre, School Committee

Hardwick Attendees: Eric Vollheim, Rich Kmiec, Selectboard

New Braintree Attendees: Robert Hunt, Selectboard

Meeting opened at 6:03 pm

The meeting opened with everyone introducing themselves. Dr. Stauder welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending the meeting this evening. He requested each community relate how they are addressing the increased school budget requests from Quabbin.

Selectmen Vollheim stated Hardwick had level funded the school budget and went with the Proposition 2 1/2 override down the line for the amount the school had asked. The Town can't continue to cover all of our costs and personally would like to get out of the antagonistic manner and start working together and approach the state to pay for all their imposed mandates which is currently unsustainable.

Bob Hunt of New Braintree stated they consider the school as important but also consider the police, fire and highway just as important. He stated he would like to see a more civilized interaction and we would like to see this worked out to fit the communities. We have to be cognizant of the fact that things have changed. He talked about being unable to support the school spending and would like to see some sensible stance from the district communities.

Oakham stated they couldn't support the increase; the bottom line is town services have taken a lot of cuts every year, and with reduced local aid and assessments increasing, we can't afford it. Oakham did not try to pass a Proposition 2 ½ override. Mr. Starbard stated we've consistently made cuts to save money. We've taken a bigger cut than the schools have. The state needs to either pay for these mandates or take them away.

Mr. Stauder reported Hubbardston's budget is bigger than some, but there's not much extra to put in the budget to put towards schools. We tried a Proposition 2 1/2 override and had a two to one failure. What can we as a district do next?
Mr. Stauder stated does not want to continue to put out override votes and call more town meetings. How can we work with the school district, do we let this go to the state to decide? There is a lot of mistrust right or wrong, with the school board as far as administrative costs; are the cuts in the right place? Do we say as a district that we are not going to pay for anything else? He then encouraged Finance Committee members to comment. How can we make this the best for the kids?

Superintendent Marshall stated she hears loud and clear relative to the Hubbardston vote, obviously they are saddened by that. There is a legal process to reexamine the budget and make judgment on what we can offer. We are going to recommend hundreds of thousands of dollars in cuts tomorrow night; particularly in transportation by rerouting and having longer bus routes and fuller buses. We will be making some administrative cuts, one by attrition. We welcome more scrutiny on the budget but you have to come and ask us. Ms. Marshall's concern is we get about the business of opening the school in the best possible way. If we have to cut in excess of a million dollars, we will not be able to save all the programs. Maybe that has to be in these economic times. She hoped that some of those present tonight will attend the school committee meeting tomorrow night and we will walk through the cuts. We are here to work in concert with all of you. When you write me letters stating you won't support us, this is troubling to me. I would never shortchange your children to have another administrator. Come look at our books, look at our audit reports, we welcome that. We are trying to put a budget together to give our children the best possible scenario.

Dr. Stauder stated he wanted to address her statement about letters from Selectboards and is encouraged by the fact that you are now looking at other options such as cutting some transportation costs and other funding. There was a statement that the first $550,000 in cuts (if this didn't pass) would hit the elementary schools and that was directly from the district, so when you want to talk about the district playing as many games as everybody else does, when you do that, it doesn't sit very well with people.

Ms. Marshall stated before this is done depending on what you want me to try to back into and you back into a level funded assessment, you will see some of those cuts. I will have to cut $1.6 million to back into....trust me; there will be impact on those classrooms. There will be impact on those classrooms at $800,000. There are some things I cannot cut. Once we make a new budget and the new assessment comes to you, you have to go to town meeting within 45 days or you accept the other budget.
Mr. Stauder asked do we not support the budget at every town meeting until the state comes in.

Ms. Hendra stated the school budget's fixed costs are a third of their budget. There is only 50% of the budget left to work with that's discretionary. We are in a down economy which means that 2 ½ percent is not enough to fund anybody's needs. We can go after state taxes but I can't guarantee the money will come back to us and the state is going to raise taxes! Those taxes are going to go to the biggest voting district. . If we say as towns that we are going to support what we see tomorrow night, at least we would know our money is going to be spent in our area.

Finance Committee Ben Prentiss commented a lot of municipalities in the area are facing the same issues, the state may turn around and look at these unfunded mandates and release the towns from them.

Finance Committee member Tuttle related a story about going and meeting with the Department of Education (DOE) to go over our budget. We told them we couldn't afford it; we asked what would happen if we pushed it to the state. The Department of Education stated their job is education not police departments. If we don't resolve this locally they (DOE) will set the budget.

Bob Hunt stated we should approach the state. The poor economy is an important factor and not just feeling the state will make the wrong decision. We have no stimulus money, we can't give the school anymore money. Let the school make the cuts but if a school needs to cut, they need to cut. There seems to be enough agreement in all the towns this needs to be done. I support going all the way to the state but I certainly trust the school to make the cuts to the budget. We need to keep these things in mind.

Attendee comment:, if we try to resolve it here ourselves we'll be doing this again next year, it's time we bite the bullet and get the state involved and get a final determination and answer. We are all spinning our wheels.

Ms. Marshall stated the sooner we can resolve this the sooner we can get the school open and make adjustments. Do I lay off big with draconian cuts across the district and I am going to pay tons of unemployment? Mr. Stauder stated Hubbardston failed an override; can we go back to our budget and get $400,000 out? But you have at least two other communities that really can't afford the increase. Ms. Marshall stated if the DOE Commissioner comes in, our budget will be decidedly less than it's been in years. Those will be cuts I can't recover from. She suggested talking to the Gill/Montague school district about the DOE coming in, the commissioner is back there every year.

Mr. Vollheim stated you invite us in to go over your budget line by line, we go over our budgets line by line. He stated at another time we tried to start a citizen audit committee. It was suggested to place the school check register on the website. Ms. Marshall stated we were never requested to do that, we produced tons of documents and it never went anywhere. Mr. Vollheim suggested placing the check register on the website; you have good transparency. Everyone will see how the money is being spent.

Matt Broderick, Oakham Finance Committee, stated we have structural problem financially with a 2 ½ percent revenue increase that happens every year. The school budget increases are simply outpacing levy increases over the past twenty years. I don't understand why the state is surprised if there is a structural problem; we were more than double last year in the school increases. Something has got to give. Our strategy in Oakham is to put 2 % in front of the voters and out town voted in favor of it at town meeting. I would suggest to the school committee that they be thinking more of a number in that range instead of what we have had to deal with over the past couple of years.

Ms. Hendra stated her town's budget is skimpy. She stated if Oakham has to go for capital expenditures, I don't know how we are going to pay for them. She asked the others how the 2 ½ percent override increase was explained to voters. Do they really understand what that means? Mr. Stauder stated in Hubbardston we educated a lot of the voters via a mailing explaining the yes and no vote and had a group of parents calling homes. Dan Galante reported he had made some of the phone calls and voters did not trust the fact that after the second year the 2 ½ proposition tax increase would be applied to the school. Mr. Stauder stated we did not even get 50% of the school age parents approve the override question.

Jamie Pitney spoke that he was hearing a couple of common messages tonight. Do you want to use what divides us to unite us? Do we need another party to remediate for both groups? What can be done to pursue a legislative route? Could we not act as an injured party seeks remediation from the courts to fix this? Ms. Marshall stated you would need a student as an injured party. Mr. Stauder volunteered his daughter.

Bob Hunt did not believe the specter of litigation should hang over this. We have five towns here. We have invited all five towns more than once to our town (New Braintree) but nobody ever came but Oakham. Maybe things have shifted. We have gone down this road before and we have to make a decision and people are not going to like the decision. We are not going to pay any more money and we will not go back to the town for money in New Braintree. Let the school make the cuts and make the decisions on the cuts. We can't tell them what to cut. We'll be back here next year in the same situation.

Ms. Marshall asked for clarification on his statement. Mr. Hunt stated you make the cuts and come back to us and we will look at it again.

Dave Simmerer stated he thought it was remarkable that all the district towns are sitting together to address one problem. He'd like to see all that energy diverted to Boston.

Comment from attendee- we are not going to get Boston to resolve our problem this year. We need to address the state mandates. Two letters from Town Administrators in Spencer and Shrewsbury were published in the Telegram & Gazette; both groups were looking for other towns to join them and approach the state legislature to get rid of the state mandates. We need to stick together to bring to the legislature and get this resolved.

Steve LaBarre stated if the towns tonight decide they are not going to support the budget, I'll change my vote; the school committee puts out a budget they think is best for the students. I will not vote to reduce the budget if no one is going to look at the reduced budget. I urge everyone to continue the process. When/if the state comes in September, they are going to tell the towns what to pay. I think this group could work with the schools while still trying to change things in Boston.

Mr. Stauder asked if the state should come in, is it an easier sell if the state comes in and decides the final number. Is that an easier discussion with townspeople at that point to say the DOE came in and this is the number? Someone commented we still have to work off the 1/12th budget.

Karen Chick stated if it's the prerogative of boards to wait for the state to come in; we have not been happy with the state so far. I'm not sure this would be a solution.

Mark Brophy, School Committee Chairman (Barre), stated he believes in suing the state for inequity of local aid. Bob Hunt stated the underlying theme here is on whose for and against the school budget. He proposed if we can do something to help this process and get one representative from each town and meet, he was for it.

Mr. Stauder inquired about the possibility of a graduated income tax in Massachusetts. David Tuttle answered a graduated income tax is unconstitutional. Mr. Starbard stated the school committee is elected by the taxpayers; therefore the committee is 50% accountable to the taxpayers and 50% accountable to the kids. From personal experience I can say with litigation the only ones who win are lawyers. He has no interest in litigation. We need to contact our state legislators. We all know them.

Mr. Blanchard reported the Finance Committee met last night in preparation for tonight's meeting and revoted the budget numbers and voted to not reduce municipal services that we approved at Town Meeting because we worked so hard to get where we are. If we are going to look at a number we can deal with. There are other school districts have gone back to the teachers and in some cases the teachers have decided to have a full staff and have made other concessions elsewhere.
Ms. Marshall corrected Mr. Blanchard that it is not a million dollar increase for staff. We had $500,000 of grant money that has been discontinued. When we shifted that teacher pay into the regular budget it looked like a big increase. Mr. Blanchard stated the Finance Committee is committed in staying with the process and working with the Board of Selectmen and the other towns to try and get some balance with this.

Mr. Stauder stated he is hearing two things, the first is let the process play out and let the school district come back with new numbers and see if what our fellow citizens want to tolerate. The second thing to come out of this is to hold regular meeting of the district towns to review periodically. Mr. Vollheim concurred. Each town will rotate on hosting the towns.
Mr. Simmerer suggested also forming a committee to approach the legislature as well. Mr. Vollheim stated he would be asking his Selectboard to write a letter of support and send it to Spencer and Shrewsbury.

Mr. Stauder also requested from the School Committee some form of projection for the next couple of years. It would have been nice for the Towns to know the federal stimulus money was running out. Any foreseeable things coming up in the future such as contract renewals etc. would be helpful.

Mr. Pitney stated asked when we look at the budget structurally what if any correlation does that have on our students' performance. Ms. Marshall stated the state recently received a waiver on no child left behind. We will participate in performance based teacher evaluation; if students are achieving, then it is working.

Mr. Blanchard stated we get around 2 million dollars in school choice students. This is important revenue for Quabbin. If the quality of education goes down we could lose those students.

Kathlyn Inman stated up until seventeen days ago I was a teacher. I agree that we need to band together and let's go the state house and sit on the steps and tell them we can't afford state mandates. We have to do that together, it's very important.

Mr. Brophy thanked the Board for this meeting. He believes this is very powerful.
We should give the legislators the minutes so they can hear our concerns. We should also attend the legislative breakfasts. We need to share the information every six months.
Mr. Stauder suggested encouraging our fellow citizens to pick up the phone and call our legislators as well. Mr. Blanchard noted it would have been good to have our senators and representatives to this meeting.

Rich Jankauskas (Barre) stated he had worked for the DPW for over thirty years. We had eleven highway workers and we now have five. We have suffered severe cuts in our town and all our departments and want to praise our Finance Committee for coming up with good ideas. When Proposition 2 ½ was passed, they knew there were going to be some problems. Is there an unfunded mandate committee that we can approach?
Mr. Bullock stated the state auditor can issue a mandate that something has to be funded.

Mr. Stauder stated this was a good discussion tonight and thanked everyone for coming this evening. He hoped the meetings would continue.

The meeting then moved to the other meeting room for Board to continue their business.

Members present: Michael Stauder, Chair
Chris Norcross, Clerk
Member absent: Matt Castriotta, Vice Chair
Staff present: Brian Bullock, Interim Town Administrator; Elaine Peterson, Town Secretary

Others present: Walter Ducharme
The meeting reconvened at 7:54 pm

Ms. Peterson presented the FY'13 Formula Grant/Allocation- Statement of Authorization for the Elder Affairs Formula Grant.
Motion: C. Norcross **2nd:M. Stauder**
To authorize the Chairman to sign the Elder Affairs Formula Grant
Vote: All in Favor

Ms. Peterson presented a mortgage subordination agreement for Steven & Susan Connolly at 21 Evergreen Road. It was approved at a previous meeting. The Board signed the paperwork and Ms. Peterson notarized.

Ms. Peterson presented the CJIS maintenance invoice/acceptance of contract in the amount of $1353.00 for the Police Department radio agreement
Motion: C. Norcross **2nd:M. Stauder**
To approve the CJIS agreement with integratiopartners, 24 Hartwell Ave. Lexington, MA 02421 and to authorize the Chairman to sign
Vote: All in Favor

Ms. Peterson reported the Lions' Club has requested to conduct a boot drive on the first Sunday of August. They will be set up at 8 am in front of the entry to the Town parking lot and will run it until 4 pm.
Motion: M. Stauder **2nd: C. Norcross**
To approve the Lions' Club boot drive request for Sunday, August 5, 2012
Vote: All in Favor

Ms. Peterson reported the Board needed to vote to approve the pledge of the application for the license transfer for Pizza Palace. She presented and amended Form 43 and a letter from the Board stating it was approved on July 17, 2012.
Motion: C. Norcross **2nd:M. Stauder**
To approve the pledge and amended Form 43 and authorize the Chair to sign the letter **Vote: All in Favor**

Ms. Peterson presented a Certificate of Appointment/Election for Town Clerk Joyce Green effective June 12, 2012 for the term expiring 2015 for the Chairman to sign.
Motion: C. Norcross **2nd:M. Stauder**
To authorize the Chairman to sign the certificate of election for Town Clerk
Vote: All in Favor

Ms. Peterson requested the Board appoint Tax Collector Doane for a one year term as it was omitted during the annual appointments.

Motion: C. Norcross **2nd:M. Stauder**
To appoint Cyndy W. Doane as Tax Collector with a term to expire June 30, 2013
Vote: All in Favor

Ms. Peterson presented a page that was overlooked on the MEMA contract that was signed recently for the Chair.

Mr. Bullock presented the signature copy of the agreement between the Town and Police Chief Dennis Perron.

Motion: C. Norcross **2nd: M. Stauder**
To accept and sign the agreement between Dennis Perron and the Town
Vote: All in Favor

Mr. Bullock presented the RFP (Request for Proposals) for a Building Needs Study to the Board. Proposals are due August 3, 2012 by Noon. He also reported the advertisement for the Treasurer position was posted internally and will be in the newspaper on July 22, 2012.

Warrant# 2

Motion: M. Stauder **2nd: C. Norcross**
To approve Warrant# 2 in the amount of $89,252.18 **Vote: All in Favor**

Motion: M. Stauder **2nd: C. Norcross**
To adjourn the meeting at 8:25 PM **Vote: All in Favor**

Respectfully submitted,
Elaine M. Peterson
Elaine M. Peterson
Town Secretary

Approved: July 30, 2012