

SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES

January 22, 2024

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Board members present: Chair Kasper, Vice-Chair Hawthorne and Selectman Bugbee

Others present: John and Anne Tappan, Hayley Van Gils, Paul and Annie Gasowski, Deb Sugerman, Katrinka Pellicchia, Matt Brown, Jim Morse, Chris Regan, Brian Cisneros, Amy Ransom, Peter Hoyt, Tom Dronsfield, Steve Bullek, Town Administrator Andy Robertson and Asst. Town Administrator Denise Duval.

- I. Chair Kasper calls the Select Board meeting to order at 6:00pm.
- II. No public comment
- III. Chair Kasper continues with the Budget Public Hearing from 1/16/2024 at 6:00pm.

TA Robertson explains that due to changes in rank and the step table the fire department budget has increased from prior budget. The salary numbers that the Fire Chief needs are \$285,167 for fulltime and \$305,623 for part-time. The chief's salary should be \$92,932 and not \$94k. TA Robertson entered these numbers along with the ancillary costs of \$16,067. TA Robertson says that these numbers were not in the agenda packet but they are on the screen and in paper here tonight. He did not make any changes to the highway department.

Steve Bullek suggests giving the raises that he has proposed and not add a COLA on top of it. Chair Kasper says that they are working on final numbers at this point and that the COLA has already been added. The numbers that they discussed at the last meeting are not high enough per Mr. Bullek. He asks that they be a little higher especially since he believes that they missed an increase this past year. Mr. Bullek says that he is asking for 5% which can include the 2% COLA. Asst. TA Duval explains to the Board that the salaries in the FY24 column were budgeted for; however, the request to move them to those amounts was not submitted to finance therefore, they were not implemented. There is a step after the Board approves the budget and that is to submit a PAR. Selectman Bugbee says that if Mr. Bullek is asking for 5% then that is what they should do. He adds that the Transfer Station should get the same increase as the Highway Department. Vice-Hawthorne and Chair Kasper think that they should go with the department head request and then not do any increases within the fiscal year. The Board wants to immediately move the highway employees to what was budgeted for as FY24 salaries and then add 5% to that for FY25. TA Robertson works on the ancillary costs and states that the bottom line with the additions is now \$5,598,662. Chair Kasper moves approve the FY25 budget of \$5,598,662. Vice-Chair Hawthorne, seconds and votes in favor. Chair Kasper votes yes and Selectman Bugbee votes no.

b. The Board discusses making changes to warrant articles #2 and #6. Article #2 cannot be changed at this point. The Bond Hearing was closed at the last meeting and these must remain the numbers. Selectman Bugbee says any changes would need to be made at the Deliberative Session. After some discussion, the Board agrees to change article #6 to \$200,000. Pat Barbour asks how maintenance and repairs of the Historical Society are going to be handled. TA Robertson if the WA passes then a lease would need to be drafted. Chair Kasper moves to accept the Warrant Articles as presented with the one change to article #6. Vice-Chair Hawthorne, seconds. All in favor. Vice-Chair Hawthorne and Chair Kasper vote yes, Selectman Bugbee votes no. **Motion Carries.**

Before she closes the public hearing, Chair Kasper asks if there are any comments. Paul Gasowski, Lamprey Lane, asks what Selectman Bugbee meant when he said phase 1 of the Town Center project. For the sake of presentation, he will understand this to mean phase 1 is the Library Renovation, phase 2 is the new municipal building and phase 3 is the renovation of the old Town Hall. He suggests following this and Chair Kasper agrees.

Chair Kasper closes the budget public hearing at 6:33pm.

- IV. Dr. James Morse, Superintendent of Schools, begins by thanking the public works department for keeping the roads so nice and clear. It is a noticeable difference between the 3 towns. He also thanks the Chief of Police for all he does for the school system.

Dr. Morse has been here for 12 years. He will make it clear to his successor that the relationship between the 3 towns needs to remain positive and that means that the school will not charge the town for facilities, etc. The new superintendent is transitioning with him over the next 6 months.

Dr. Morse reviews the district highlights includes one of the highest SAT scores in the state. He reviews enrollment both pre-Covid and post-Covid. There are 182 tuition students that come from Barrington, which generates \$3.5 million in revenue. As of October 1, 2023, there were 331 students at Mast Way, 298 at Moharimet, 621 in the Middle School and 841 in the High School. They are seeing a 15.1% increase in health insurance which is approximately \$1,000,000. The bond payment will be incorporated into the operating budget starting next year. Many students are struggling mentally. They will be bringing on a mental health counselor into the school district and a part of the budget. School nutrition program is not borne by the taxpayers of the 3 towns. It is a self-sufficient program but he must articulate the cost increase. Included in the revenue total of \$1,334,732, the Board used \$200,000 from the trust fund to help with the insurance costs. The budget is looking at a 4.17% increase. The proposed general fund budget for FY25 is \$54,415,352. The estimated FY25 tax impact is \$.40 for Durham, \$.82 for Lee and \$.97 for Madbury. Warrant Article #4 is to pay for the new Tutors Association collective bargaining agreement. Warrant Article #7 is to establish a non-lapsing Athletic Field Revolving Fund to keep the money for rentals and to use in the future for maintaining and replacing the athletic fields.

Chris Regan, Earle Drive, asks what is causing the increase in health insurance. The 15.1% increase is based on usage, nothing new. People delayed going to the doctor during Covid and are now getting caught up on medical care which drives the cost up. The town is projecting a 14.8% increase in health insurance costs. Ms. Regan asks what percentage does the state cover for school costs. Dr. Morse says that unfortunately for Oyster River the state covers only 10% of the budget. The towns pay the remaining 80% with the federal government and grants covering the remainder. Dr. Morse says that the district offered a retirement incentive so now they can hire new people at a lower rate. Approximately 12 professionals took this offer. Selectman Bugbee asks if there are mental health counselors for the teachers. Dr. Morse says there is an employee assistance program for the adults. There is a small percentage of people that are still struggling from Covid. Selectman Bugbee thanks Dr. Morse for his 12 years of service. (applause)

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- V. Steve Bullek, Public Works Director, says that there is a trailer at JSJ Auctions down in Epping that he would like to purchase. It's in good shape for its age. This is in the CIP to buy. A 2022 one is \$16,250. There is a used one that is one year newer for \$8500. Chair Kasper moves to grant the Public Works Director permission to purchase a 1998, 18' Hudson Trailer from JSJ Auctions in Epping, NH in the amount not to exceed \$6000. Funds to come from the Highway Equipment Capital Reserve Fund. Vice-Chair Hawthorne, seconds. All in favor. **Motion Carries.**
- VI. a. TA Robinson has done a cost benefit analysis on renting vs. building. He and Caren Rossi will be meeting with the town engineer this week. He has spoken to a bond attorney from Devine, Millimet who will assist with the article and bond process. He says that the Municipal Bond Bank does not suggest going through this process without counsel. He offers to show the Board his cost benefit analysis.

While we wait for the projector, Chair Kasper moves to accept the consent agenda as presented. Vice-Chair Hawthorne, seconds. All in favor. **Motion Carries.**

TA Robertson presents his analysis. There is a discussion between the Board members about adding years, calculating the rent through the years and adding the \$300k that they want to take out of the Town Buildings CRF. Paul Gasowski asks if insurance on the Daley building is built into the lease amount. TA Robertson says that everything is separate. The property liability insurance is about \$70k per year. Mr. Gasowski says that this would be worth mentioning. Mr. Tappan wants to correct a misstatement that he has heard multiple times and that is that money coming out of a CRF is free money and doesn't affect taxes. Tax money is what went into it. He says if you spend it you need to replenish it for expenses going forward. Deb Sugerman, Stepping Stones Road, is impressed with the bond issue but asks how the Board is going to market this to the town. Chair Kasper says there will be meetings, photos and ads posted online or in public spaces. Maybe more people will attend the Deliberative Session with this on the warrant. The TA has not solidified childcare for the Deliberative Session yet. Ask the boy scouts if they want to sell food. Chris Regan asks if there is an estimated tax rate that the Board is projecting. Selectman Bugbee says that he thinks it is 6.35% before tonight's additions. He says that taking \$100k from the unassigned fund balance and putting it towards the tax rate will reduce it by 13.5 cents.

VII. No old business.

VIII. No new business.

- IX. a. Chair Kasper moves to enter into a non-public session RSA 91-A:3-II (a) at **7:25pm**. Selectman Bugbee, seconds. **Roll Call Vote. Vice-Chair Hawthorne, yes. Chair Kasper, yes. Selectman Bugbee, yes. Motion Carries.**

The Select Board returns from non-public session at **7:51pm**.

- b. Chair Kasper moves to seal the nonpublic minutes. Selectman Bugbee, seconds. **Roll Call Vote. Chair Kasper, yes. Selectman Bugbee, yes. Vice-Chair Hawthorne, yes. Motion Carries.**

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The Board discusses the run through for the Deliberative Session. TA Robertson will send everything to the Board electronically and they will meet on 2/2/24 at 11am here to go over all the slides.

The Board reminds everyone to vote tomorrow.

The Board will meet with Careno again on 1/29/24 at 6pm. Careno should be sending the schematics as soon as they can.

Filing for candidacy is 1/24/24 – 2/2/24.

X. Chair Kasper adjourns at **7:56pm**. All in favor. Motion Carries.

Minutes transcribed by:



Denise Duval, Asst. Town Adm.

Minutes accepted by The Lee Select Board:



Katrin Kasper, Chair

Rebecca Hawthorne, Vice-Chair

Scott Bugbee, Selectman

411124

Date