

Selectmen's minutes of meeting February 11, 2020

Members present: Mark Newman, Brian O'Rourke, George Riley, Joanne Grybosh
Dolores Harasyko, Admin. Asst.

Called to order at 7:00 p.m.

Meeting is being recorded.

Minutes reviewed and signed

Purchase orders reviewed and signed

Superintendent Tom Nadolny, School Business Manager Eric Jesner, School Committee Members Nick DellaGiustina and Jennifer Hibbins in to present a draft of the FY2021 school budget. Jennifer explained that the overall budget including Sandisfield and Otis is up by 3%. This is inline with surrounding communities. They are keeping programs and staffing the same, no new items. Teacher salaries and benefits including retirees and tuitions paid out for middle and high school take up 79.5% of the budget. There is nowhere to cut the budget. They have looked into solar panels but there is a large up front cost so they are not moving forward with this. They discussed setting up a trust fund for retirees benefits, it also has a large upfront cost and are not moving forward with this. Discussed the Excess and Deficiency Fund (E & D). Eric explained that the E&D is set up for unforeseen expenses.

They need a new van, the tiles from the ceiling in the gym is falling, they need sidewalk and driveway repairs but are not budgeting for any of these costs.

Sandisfield's increase is directly associated with the increase in student enrollment.

The fire alarm system needs replacement which approximately \$30,000, not budgeting for it.

Brian asked the following questions:

On page 1 of the draft under Business Office Salaries he noted that the FY19 salary was \$74,168, FY20 \$110,000 and the proposed for FY21 is \$103,926 for the Business Manager and A/P & Payroll Clerk which amounts to 1.5 full time employees, why such an increase in 3 years. Eric responded that they are using a new system which requires extra time to set up. Brian asked why 30%. Eric responded that part is for his salary and part is for the other employee. This should be a one time increase once the system is up and running. Brian asked that they include more detail in their explanation breakdown so that the public will better understand.

Discussed Teacher Salaries, up by \$180,000. They do not have Chapter 70 numbers yet, there is no PreK fee. They will now have Pre Kindergarten not preschool for 4 year olds. The Paraprofessionals increase is state mandated due to severe special needs students.

Media Tech and Staff support are up due to teacher education improvements.

Special needs transportation is up due to new special needs student. Brian asked if they apply for aid from the state for the special needs students. Eric responded that they do through the Circuit Breaker grant, they will start rolling a percentage of the transportation in.

Brian asked about the special needs. Eric explained that the expense is equally applied to both towns not from the town the student resides.

Increase in insurance is based on actual numbers, 3.7 % increase.

Brian asked about the split in insurance. Eric responded that we they are in the ball park with other communities. Jennifer responded that she would like the split to be close to the split that Otis and Sandisfield use. Otis is 75/25, Sandisfield is 70/30. They just finished union contract

negotiations and were unable to negotiate a change in the split but were able to settle the increase in salaries at 2% each year for 3 years. They will continue to work on the insurance split. They did change their insurance plans which reduced the cost. Brian stated that Sandisfield has changed their insurance options to only allowing the HMO which was a good savings. The cost for tuition for students for middle and high school to Great Barrington and Lee increased by 4%.

Special needs out of district increased by 2 additional students for an increase of \$150,000.

Classroom curriculum increased by \$25,000, they have outdated books and are being mandated to replace.

There is no earnings on investments, they need to amend to wording.

George commented that he would like to see a column added with the actual FY2020 budget in addition to projected numbers.

Custodial supplies increased in order to maintain equipment since they are not buying any new equipment.

Brian questioned why this year Sandisfield's increase is 8.9% with only 2 more students when last years increase was also 8.9% with 5 more students. Eric responded that the formula comes from the state. Brian's concern is that the school budget is 50% of Sandisfields total budget.

Brian reviewed the Sept. 16, 2019 Selectmen's meeting that Jennifer attended discussing the rolling average to every 5 years in lieu of every 3 years. Brian understood that the School Committee would approach this change. Jennifer clarified that this change has to happen at the town level. The Selectmen from Otis and Sandisfield need to meet to vote to make this change.

Discussed the E&D fund and choice money. They are taking \$45,000 out of the E&D to help offset the budget. This will leave approx. \$190,000 in the E&D for unforeseen expenses such as special needs or building repairs. Choice money is money coming in from school choice students coming to our district.

Brian reviewed how difficult last years budget process was, he would like to know how we can get numbers earlier. Eric responded that they need to wait until they get their cherry sheets from the state. Brian asked if we could get numbers for at least the known expenses. We have to hold up our budgets until we get the school budget to see where we are with prop. 2 ½. Brian reviewed our budget timeline, we would like to at least get the discussion going earlier. All agreed.

Kathy Jacobs commented that all she sees is increases, no decreases. What areas have they looked at for possible decreases. Jennifer reiterated that Sandisfields increase is based on enrollment and moderate increase in salaries and benefits.

Kathy is asking if there is anywhere they can cut 1%. Eric said they did look it over and the cost of most things do increase such as heat and electricity. Jennifer responded that there was some changes made to the bus routes which has decreased that budget. They reduced the amount of big buses from 5 to 3 also resulting in savings. They are looking into using more vans and connecting with the big bus to also save.

Barbara Cormier asked about the cafeteria, she feels this is an area that could be cut. Eric responded that the total cost of the food service is \$100,000. They do get state aid plus what families pay. Eric will try to show the cost more broken out.

Brian asked Eric as the business manager is his salary comparable to other towns our size. Eric responded that he is the lowest paid business manager in our area.

Nina Carr discussed the regional formula. She believes the formulas will be changing. Eric responded that he has not heard of any changes other than the Circuit Breaker.

Nina asked about the pre school grant. Eric responded that the grant no longer exists. They didn't lose the grant it simply doesn't exist.

The Board thanked them all for coming in. They would like numbers as soon as they are available. Superintendent Nadolny thanked our DPW for doing an excellent job with the roads this year.

Joanne asked them for a budget plan of action for their budget process. They are voting on their budget March 2.

The Tarasuk family in to discuss their proposal for a Marijuana Micro Business. It is a tiered program for small farms. They would like to try this very small project on their property. Bob explained that there would not be any lighting or noise. The growth bed would have to be invisible from the road.

Brian responded that he followed up with town counsel. Our town counsel is very good on writing Community Host Agreements which is required for this. There doesn't need to be a town meeting, it falls within an allowed project under our bylaws regarding Section 5.A.2 agriculture, horticulture or floriculture. There is a question which Brian will follow up on regarding whether a special permit will be needed for a greenhouse if the Tarasuk's are going to use one.

The Tarasuk's will be responsible for notifying the community and abutters about this business. They will be cultivating on 1/9 of an acre of land which is approximately 100 plants. The license for this is issued by the Commonwealth and regulated by the Cannabis Control Commission.

This is a strictly wholesale business, no dispensary.

Brian will follow up with town counsel and contact Bob.

There are no budgets to review tonight.

Selectmen's updates:

Brian went to New Bedford to meet with the Governor to accept the MVP Grant. Out of 351 cities and towns 287 applied for the grant, out of that 87 were awarded the grant. Only 15 showed up for the grant award. Brian was there and able to represent Sandisfield and thank them in person for the grant.

Kathy Jacobs asked about internet update, Brian responded that the pole survey is still taking place and that once that is done it will move forward quickly.

Barbara Cormier expressed her concerns regarding new growth in town. When she was on the Planning Board she suggested changing bylaws allowing for shared driveways. She feels our bylaws are too restrictive.

Town Manager updates:

She has been working on budgets, finalizing questions for the Finance Committee.

Working on grants for the Green Community and a culvert grant. She attended a Mass DOT meeting regarding the culvert grant which ties back to the MVP grant.

Reviewed mail

Reviewed and signed warrants

Kathy Jacobs asked about the timeline for the budgets. She is having a hard time putting a meeting together to fit into our March 15 deadline. Dolores reviewed that the finance committee created the budget timeline and that the selectmen were able to meet the January 15 deadline. There are only a few budgets left. We need to stick to the March 15 deadline because this only gives the selectmen 2 weeks for any changes to the budget. This gives Dolores a week to put the warrant together and then the warrant has to go to town counsel for review. They need at least a week to review it. Then it goes to the printer, they need at least a week. This gives the Town Clerk's officer 2 weeks to prepare and mail the warrant. The March 15 deadline has to be adhered to.

Barbara Cormier asked the selectmen if they would consider adding non-residents to committees and boards. Dolores explained that elected boards and committees have to be registered voters of the town. Ad Hoc or subcommittees are appointed by the Selectmen and if they choose could be a mix of registered voters and non registered voters.

Bonnie O'Brien asked about the culvert in front of her house. She has been complaining for several years about it. This board of Selectmen were not aware of the problem and will follow up this week. Joanne will follow up with Brad and Brian will do a site visit.

Brigitte Ruthman asked if she could interview the selectmen about the new fire truck. Mark responded that at this date there is no new fire truck.

Brigitte discussed land that abuts her property that recently sold. She stated that the parcel is 160 acres but the town has only been collecting taxes on 80 acres. She wants to know how this happened. Brian O'Rourke told her that issue will be resolved as soon as the deed is recorded since he is the buyer of the land. He said the deed actually reads 159.6 acres. He will be paying taxes on 159.6 acres.

Meeting adjourned 8:55 p.m.

Mark Newman

Brian O'Rourke

George Riley

