

Selectmen's minutes of meeting Dec. 22, 2014

Members present: Patrick Barrett, Jeffrey Gray, Lisa Blackmer, Steve Harasyko, Dolores Harasyko

Members absent: Rosario Messina

The All Boards meeting was called to order at 7:08 p.m.
Sign in sheet attached for the record

Lisa addressed the members, reviewed timelines for budget submissions. She reviewed the 2% salary increase for the union contract. If any board is going over that they will need to justify it. She then called on each board to give a review of the upcoming budget and to give a preliminary assessment of any large items or increases as follows:

Moderator John Skrip, he is level funding

General Government, Dolores explained that they are creating a separate line item for legal services and will reduce the general government budget by that same amount.

Lisa reviewed the phone system and asked everyone to contact her to let them know how much and what service they currently use for phone and internet.

Administrative Assistant Dolores Harasyko is seeking a 2% increase

Town Administrator Lisa Blackmer is seeking 2% increase per her contract.

Finance Committee – level funding

Board of Assessors 2% salary increase, expenses level funding.

Treasurer, not present

Info System Support, Jean Atwater Williams will meet with Lisa to discuss backup and server. We may have to increase this budget.

Town Clerk, Dolores explained that she has to budget for the Presidential Primary. She has level funded the town clerk salary for several years and is seeking 2% this year. She is also seeking 2% for registrars, election workers and constables.

Conservation Commission, not present

Planning Board, slight increase in expenses

Zoning Board, no members, level fund

Strategic Planning Committee, level fund

Master Planning Committee, revolving account, level fund

Highway Dept. 2% salary increase per contract. There will be a new line item to replace the 1999 Intl truck which has over 200,000 miles on it. They are putting more into the truck in repairs than the truck is worth. We will be budgeting the snow and ice differently this year. All salaries, excluding overtime will come out of Highways and Bridges. The Snow and Ice budget will be for overtime related to snow removal and for all materials related to snow and ice.

Discussed Chapter 90

Representatives from the school were unable to attend. They sent a message to Dolores that they will be happy to attend a Selectmen's meeting once they have their numbers prepared.

Library, no one present

Veterans Services is going up for administrative costs. This is based on population.

Cemetery Committee, this is a new committee and will be a new line item. Kathy

Burrows reviewed some of the issues they will be addressing.

Custodian of Town Buildings, 2% salary increase

Mowing of town properties, level fund

Police Dept., Police Chief Michael Morrison is seeking 2% salary for police personnel, level funding expenses

Fire Dept., Chief Ralph Morrison 2% for fire, emt personnel and adding a separate line item for replacing 8 defibrillators.

Street Lighting, Dolores reviewed the 30% increase from WMECO starting Jan. 1, 2015. She will be increasing the budget by 30% to cover the increase.

Emergency Management Director, level fund

Inspector of Animals and Dog Officer, Kim unable to be here

Board of Health, level funding expenses. Margaret suggested lowering their budget.

VNA, Brien Center and CHP, we will not know their numbers for a month

Roof for the Town Hall Annex, Jeff Gray is working on the specs.

Memorial Day Parade, level fund

Council on Aging, level fund

Elderly Transportation, level fund

Cultural Council, level fund

Historical Committee, level fund

Recreation Comm., not present

Insurances, Teresa responded that the numbers are not yet available

Berkshire Regional Planning, slight increase

Southern Berkshire Regional Emergency Planning Comm., John Burrows will follow up
Reserve Fund, level fund

Kathy Jacobs asked about funding the new truck. We have not gotten that far in the budget process to decide that.

Kathy Jacobs representing the finance committee explained that there is a lot going on in town financially, Wired West and New Buildings. There will be very large bonds for these projects. Reviewed tax rates, she discussed the lack of services. Discussed the bond process, explained that we have to pay it back. She feels we are on the edge with our finances. During a recent finance committee meeting they decided unanimously that they will not vote in favor of any budget increases except for the contracted 2%. David Hubbard reviewed their desire for GPS units for the highway dept trucks. He feels it is necessary to know how much a 3, 6 or more inch snow storm costs. He reviewed bond issues and time clocks. Dolores asked them to clarify their stand on salary increases, do they mean that only the 4 contracted union highway employees get the 2% increase but no one else. She expressed her frustration with them that they attack the salary of the lowest paid part time employees, this will only save a few hundred dollars. They stand by their decision to not vote for any increases. Dolores asked the finance to respond to the WMECO increase. Are we supposed to shut the power off, turn off the lights. She asked them how to absorb the 30% increase when there is no wiggle room in the budget now. They had no response. Dolores asked the Assessors to clarify the assessed values and the tax rate. The finance committee is giving a miss conception regarding the tax rate and assessed property values. A higher tax rate does not mean a higher tax bill. Jackie Bitso addressed this issue. She has explained this to them several times in the past. There are a lot of factors when assessing properties. She reviewed the tax classification hearing. She reviewed the fact that there is no new growth in town. Nina Carr also agreed with Jackie and provided further explanation. Ralph Morrison explained that surrounding towns have much more second home lake properties.

Jean addressed Wired West. The state has allocated 40 million dollars to help member towns. The current cost to Sandisfield is now 3.8 million dollars. They need 40% of households to participate and this will cover the cost. She feels strongly that we need this in order for the town to grow.

Dolores asked the finance committee for answers to her previous questions. Most budgets are level funding. How do we keep the lights on if we are not going to budget for a known increase. How does the finance committee justify giving the highest paid employees a 2% increase because of their contracts but the rest of us aren't allowed the 2%. The finance comm. responded that if we implement a time clock and gps it should pay for our raises.

Discussed the energy aggregation program.

Kathy Jacobs provided an update on the Strategic Planning Comm. They are looking into rebuilding the DPW garage on the same site. She will be meeting with each town employee to review floor plans. The new proposed complex will include a library and council on aging center. They are working on the master plan.

Jean discussed the towns website. The only board consistently using it is the Selectboard. Jean has 2 candidate for the job of posting items to the website. The goal is for all boards to be able to send their postings, agenda and minutes of meetings to one person to post to the website. Kathy Burrows, Jean and Kathy Jacobs have been volunteering since 2010 to post and update the website. The selectmen thanked them for their dedication to the town.

Dolores reviewed the ethics testing. There are still many people that need to take the test.

Motion by Jeff, second by Patrick to adjourn the all boards meeting at 8:25 and to convene the regular selectmen's meeting.

Regular Selectmen's meeting called to order at 8:27 p.m.

Lisa reviewed the energy aggregation program. There is no fee or penalty to opt out at any time. Lisa is looking into different companies. Patrick would like to place this on the annual town warrant. This will give Lisa time to explain this program to all residents and allow for time to do informational articles in the Sandisfield Times. Dolores asked about second homeowners households. Lisa explained that all households are committed to this program unless they opt out. Dolores is concerned that second homeowners cannot vote on this and they may have concerns. We would be changing their electrical company without their input. Dolores suggested Lisa prepare a mailing that would go to all households and businesses. Jean asked for clarification on the distribution charges and supply charges. Lisa will look into this. Jeff and Patrick agree to wait until the annual town meeting instead of the special town meeting to present this for a vote.

John Burrows from the finance committee would like the selectmen to support the Wired West project and to allow the town to vote on it at the annual town meeting. Patrick asked if other companies can jump in and derail the project. Jean responded that no for profit company has shown any interest. Jean does not feel that a large company such as Verizon would take over and reduce their prices for DSL. Kathy Burrows ask what

“build” means. Jean responded that it means poles and wires. Kathy Jacobs asked when the first payment is due. Jean responded 2016 or 2017 on interest only. Kathy said we may need to add a line item in FY2017. The first 3 years payments are interest only. Full bond payments are \$230,000 a year. Jean feels that if 53% of the town signs up with Wired West that it will be self sufficient and pay for itself and not cost the town anything. Motion by Patrick, second by Jeff to adopt the Non-Binding Resolution of Support of Wired West.

The article will be placed on the annual town warrant. Kathy Burrows asked if the finance committee supports Wired West. Kathy Jacobs responded that they understand the risk and its up to the voters to decide. Kathy Burrows asked if the finance committee is supporting this amount of spending for Wired West but are against the 2% increase for the non contractual employees. No response from finance.

Reviewed and signed the Southern Berkshire Elderly Transportation Agreement.

Discussed having a special town meeting. We need one to replenish the machinery maintenance budget to cover the cost of expensive unforeseen repairs to the two oldest trucks. We also need to transfer money from one account to another for the repairs from an insurance claim. Lisa would like to add the meal tax and also a hotel/motel room tax of 6% to the special town meeting. Patrick does not completely agree with the meals tax. He feels our businesses are already stressed. It would only effect the 3 businesses, Villa Mia, M J Tuckers and The New Boston Inn. Patrick would like input from the business owners before we would allow a vote on it. John Burrows explained it would be a good will effort to not put this added burden on the businesses.

Lisa will check if it is possible to grandfather the current businesses and only apply the tax to new businesses.

Kathy Jacobs what happened to the piece of land at the end of Hammertown Rd that was voted on at the last town meeting. Lisa explained the RFP process. She is working on it.

Minutes reviewed and signed

The Selectmen agreed to give all town employees half day on Christmas and New Years eve.

Warrants reviewed and signed

Mail reviewed

Meeting adjourned at 9:50

Patrick Barrett

Jeffrey Gray