

Joint Budget Subcommittee

May 11, 2020

MINUTES

**Comprised of Members of the:
Town Council, School Committee & Finance Committee**

Members Present:

Town Council: Tom Mercer, Matt Kelly, Andrew Bissanti, Brian Chandler, Glenn Jones, Melanie Hamblen

Finance Committee: Michael Dufour, William Dowd, George Conley, Michael Kasberg, Susan Dewsnap

School Committee: Anne Bergen, Jen D'Angelo, Timothy Keenan, Judith Pond-Pfeffer, Denise Spencer

Also in Attendance:

Jamie Hellen - Town Administrator, Chrissy Whelton - Assistant to the Town Administrator, Sara Ahern - Superintendent of Schools, Lucas Giguere - Assistant Superintendent, Joyce Edwards - Assistant Superintendent, Christopher Sandini - Finance Director, Miriam Goodman - School Business Administrator, Kerri Bertone - Treasurer/Collector, Alecia Alleyne - Administrative Assistant

Meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM.

Town Administrator Jamie Hellen gave opening remarks regarding the current state of our budget. Mr. Hellen noted that Franklin's EMS ALS/BLS rates were increased, which will generate additional revenue, the tax levy will remain the same because it is set by State Statute, and local receipts are expected to decrease. He notes that the budget stabilization fund has no remaining money in it, and the real budgetary wild card is going to revolve around state aid which is truly unknown at this time. We will most likely see State numbers after Labor Day, so we will have to make adjustments to our budget accordingly throughout the year. The COVID-19 pandemic will exacerbate and expedite any current difficulties that we may have within our budget.

Councilor Hamblen reiterated the fact that the stabilization fund is empty and the Town really will not know what will happen until we get State Aid money and budget revisions will need to be made throughout the year.

Councilor Mercer noted that we would need to look for every dollar we can and be prepared for the worst case scenario when preparing for the FY21 budget and beyond.

Mike Dufour notes that the Town's primary responsibility is to produce a balanced budget with the revenue we have at hand. It is up to the Town to decide whether the services we receive from our revenues are adequate and if not, it is our responsibility to find other alternatives (Overrides etc.).

Susan Dewsnap inquired as to how the Town Administrator and Staff determined the break out of the 118.9 million budget.

Mr. Hellen explained that the Town looks at cost drivers and tries to address them to determine what the Town can afford. They go through every line item, specifically on the Municipal side, they go through the budget department by department. The Town Administrator puts out a series of instructions every year at the department head level. When creating a budget there is no rule of thumb, the Town reevaluates its situation every year.

Susan Dewsnap states that she would be happy to send out a list of metrics (call volumes, personnel, population numbers) that she thinks will be helpful in this budgetary process that will help to quantify how the Town is spending money.

Councilor Kelly suggests having a budget forecast, to give people a better understanding of the current state of the Town.

Mr. Hellen states that there is an appendix of 20 years of local receipt data and new growth history, and the budget narrative contains a lot of quantitative and qualitative data to speak for every department.

Superintendent Sara Ahern speaks on the school department's budget. The schools have delayed some of their budgeting processes, the budget is put together from requests from Principals and School Council. They start with level service, identifying critical services to students and families and what their current needs are. There are ongoing needs which we have been unable to support, specifically the focus to expand specialized programs within the district. The School Budget Subcommittee will be taking a look at updated budget figures and will assess ways to reduce the overall budget during FY21. The Schools have reduced 14.5 positions, nursing services, and reduced

consultants in a couple of areas, they had also negotiated contracts with creative language to get to a 1% COLA last year.

Jen D'Angelo stated that the schools are looking at revising what they had originally put out for a budget and notes that under these circumstances, the school is looking to make cuts that have the lowest impact on students.

Anne Bergen would like for the Town to take a look at the big picture budget and tell its story. She notes that the highschool needs to educate the public on what 21st century skills are and what it takes to support them. We have to close the gap between Special-Ed children and the other children in the district, this is a mandate by the state and we are obligated to close that gap. People have to understand the cost of special education in our public schools. Decreased performance and a decrease in resources provided by Public Schools affects people's desire to move into Town. At this time we need to ask the community what is it that we need to keep our schools competitive.

Councilor Kelly states that the Town has made a commitment to work with essential services so they can provide more services on tightened budgets.

Mr. Hellen notes that the structural issues within the budget were here before we had any COVID-19 related issues. We are required to present a balanced budget and we need to engage the community in this process.

Councilor Mercer reiterates the need for the community to understand this process, and the continued need for the Town to educate the community.

George Conley requested raw budget data so he can create graphs that may aid in the communities understanding of where budget money is being allocated.

Meeting Adjourned at 6:27 PM.