

**Town of Seymour ~ Board of Finance
MINUTES
Budget Deliberations
Tuesday, February 11, 2020 at 7:00pm
Norma Drummer Room, Seymour Town Hall**

Members Present: Bettyann Peck, Kwame Dunbar, Bill Sawicki, Beverly Kennedy, Jim Cretella, John Stelma; Gary Popielasz, Paul Wetowitz (alternates)

Members Absent: Grace Brangwynne, (alternate)

Others Present: Mike Wilson, Sherry Holmes, Vonda Tencza, Ed Stumello, Kristen Harmeling, Doug Thomas

Item #1 – Call Meeting to order

Chairman Bill Sawicki called the meeting to order at 7:04pm.

Item #2 – Pledge of Allegiance

Everyone saluted the Flag and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Item #3 – Public Comment

None

Item #4 – Deliberation and discussion of 2020/2021 Budget

Board of Education

- Ed Stumello said that the Board of Education is requesting \$35,366,381 which is an increase of 3.58%. This was a little bit higher than the Superintendent's budget which requested an increase of 3.54%. The Board's increase is due to the addition of an Assistant Athletic Director. This was in response to concerns from parents. We are hoping that the insurance #'s go down. There are new initiatives in here that will keep us improving our educational program for the kids.
- Kristen Harmeling said that when we saw the increase, we were a little surprised because it is higher than we have requested for the last five years. The large part of it is the "place holder" for the insurance. In an effort to be responsive to the community's concerns & needs in the prior academic school year, we felt it was important to maintain that Assistant Athletic Director position; we have a high percentage of high school students involved in extracurricular sports (which is a great thing – shows a high level of engagement in school).
- Mike Wilson said that a lot of hard work goes into preparing a budget.
 - What's different – for the last few years we have come in under 2% increase, but eventually there are certain things that are needed in order to maintain that growth model.
 - What's new
 - High School – two additional monitor paraprofessionals @ the High School – this would be both during and after school to cover the media center; the music teacher going from a 0.4 to a 0.8; the Capstone Project (started by the State and adopted by the Board of Education) must be graded.
 - Middle School – the number of Special Education students have been increasing, so we need another Special Education teacher to address the needs of the (number of) students and the (number of) service hours.
 - Elementary Schools – to assist in the REACH room (to help keep students in-district – which has been great) we need a new Instructional Paraprofessional; also, we are increasing the Art Teacher from 0.6 to 1.0 in order to cover the UA block.

- Under Administrative we are asking for a 0.5 Assistant Special Education Director (we would promote from within). After an analysis of the number of students & service hours we service in Seymour, one person is not enough for the workload.
 - The insurance number is the “X” card. Hopefully these numbers can be low. Thank you for your consideration.
- Ed Strumello said that last week he and Mike Wilson attended the CABE (Connecticut Association of Boards of Education) Area 7 Meeting in Derby; the educators made it CLEAR to the legislators that need to help with more Special Education funding. They give us a number but that amount never comes. Hopefully they will do something positive.
- Ed Strumello also said that by promoting from within to the Assistant Director Special Education we would be saving money. This way we can higher a lower level teacher to replace them. We need an administrator at all IEP Meetings; having this position, that person would be qualified to be present if the principal could not be there.
- Bill Sawicki said that under “Retirements & Resignations” there are two computer teachers listed. What is the effect on the kids with this? Mike Wilson said that with putting the Art and P.E. teachers full-time, we have the capacity to cover the Unified Arts block. We are not losing the knowledge base. The teachers are incorporating this technology in the classrooms and integrating it into their learning. Kristen Harmeling said that the idea of pulling the kids out of class to go to a “computer lab” is an outdated idea.
- Bill Sawicki said that what would be helpful to the Board of Finance is if we could have dollar figures associated with the new positions and retirements/resignations on Page 1 (Management Summary).
- Bill Sawicki said that with the healthcare issue: if we do nothing and stay with Cigna, we are looking at a 23% increase (would be over \$1 million). We are getting other bids. Bill asked Mike Wilson why there is a decrease on line 210 (health insurance). Mike said that the 15% number was a placeholder. But Sherry Holmes did an actual determination of each employee’s classification (Single, Married, Family). Bill asked what accounts for the decrease. Mike and Sherry said that it is based on actual numbers for each classification compared to last year. Sherry said we also had a number of spouses coming off our insurance.
- Bill Sawicki confirmed that the Board of Education has coordinated with the Town HR Department for the census. Sherry Holmes said they did.
- Bill Sawicki asked if the REACH Room has produced any revenue for the Town yet. Mike Wilson said no. Currently is just in-town. It will take at lease two years to gather the data. Mike said that they had a student that went back into the regular classroom. This is a positive result.
- Bill Sawicki said that he is sure that the \$1.2 million will not fly. It is way too high. Bill requested that the Board of Education could tweak their numbers and come up with a lower number. There are also many other departments asking for additional monies. Our first deliberation night is March 4th. We recognize that we need good schools. We have a good relationship; we are all on the same side. We want to give you what you need and satisfy the residents – try to balance all the departments. The Registrar of Voters asked for additional money due to the Presidential Election Year. **Please pass on to Doug Thomas your corrected numbers.**
- Richard Demko asked what the current enrollment is. Kristen Harmeling said it is 2,058. (Down 30 from last year). What is the current Special Ed enrollment? Kristen said it is 376 students with 28 of these outplaced. The hours (broken down by school – this is PER WEEK as required by their IEP’s): Bungay = 391, Chatfield/LoPresti = 640, Middle School = 635, High School = 694, Preschool = 482. Richard Demko also asked if this budget includes any money for the “Turf Repair Fund” (for the High School)? Mike Wilson said this is part of the Capital Plan for the Town.

- Richard Demko asked what the 46.2% increase in line 440 Equipment Lease/Rental was for. Kristen Harmeling said it is for copy machines. Sherry Holmes said that the contract for copiers is coming due in June. We will be going out to bid. Bill Sawicki asked if she had gotten together with the Finance Department to see if they have a need for new machines and can work together to maybe get a better price if we get more machines. Sherry said that she did. They will coordinate in June when going to bid.
- Richard Demko asked with the increase for the Music Teacher @ the High School, does that include any plans to incorporate a High School Band Program. Mike Wilson said no, the increase is to offer additional courses (dance chorale, two choir courses – based on survey of the students). The Band would be a stipend position. There hasn't been enough interest to form one. Rich said that we have the Hurricanes and one of the best band directors in the area in Seymour. Ed Strumello said that when he was at Bungay school, he encouraged them to identify athletes in music. Many times, it comes to a choice of sports OR music.
- Bettyann Peck asked about the security services (line 130). Ed Strumello said that we have Security Resource Officers at Chatfield/LoPresti and Bungay and have School Resource Officers at the other schools. Kristen Harmeling said that the Security Officers are retired police officers that we hired in collaboration with the police department, the emergency services, the school district, and the security director. It turned out that Seymour was the one of the only schools in the district who did not have armed security at our schools. We did this with a combination of Security Resource Officers (lower wage) and School Resource Officers (middle & high school).
- Bettyann Peck asked about the tuition reimbursement. Sherry Holmes said that with our outplacements we take 4.5 times our base rate per student that the reimbursement is based on. When we get a total cost for the students, we submit all the information to the State. They total amount of that grant and give us 78% reimbursement (two payments, one in February & one in May). When this money comes in, we credit the Tuition Line & Transportation Line. Kristen Harmeling said, from a taxpayer's perspective, we are responsible for paying up to 4.5 times what the regular student enrollment rate is, which is currently about \$12,300. Any amount over that goes into the grant amount that we get 78% of. Many people think that we get 78% of our tuition & transportation costs. That is not the case. We pay 4.5 times regular student cost; anything over that we get 78% of that. Ed Strumello said that the Federal Government kicks in only 5%. This is why we need our legislators to push for more money.
- Beverly Kennedy asked about line 517 Transportation S/Ed (Non-local) – as of 12/31/19 we have spent \$942,212 but only have a budget of \$592,740. Is this correct? Yes, we are waiting for the grant money to come in.
- Bettyann Peck asked why line 580 Travel has increased. Sherry Holmes said this is a projection based on our staffing and using the IRS Reimbursement Rate. This is used when employees use their personal car for travel for work purposes.
- Bettyann Peck asked if there is any money in the budget for moving the Board of Education to the High School. Mike Wilson said no. Bill Sawicki said it would be more of a Capital Expense.

Discussion:

- Bill Sawicki said that the \$1.2 million is way too much. That equates to a rise of 1.2 mills. This would not pass and is too much when combined with all the other departmental requests. They (BOE) are aware of our position to maintain the mill rate as stable as possible.
- Jim Cretella said that the move for the Board of Education from 98 Bank Street to the High School will be in the Capital Non-Recurring Line. Bill Sawicki said that we need to get that new scale for the Transfer Station. The current one does not give accurate readings. So, we are losing money by not getting the proper weight on the scale for people dumping large loads. We also have dump trucks that need replacing for Public Works. We need new elevators for this building (costs about \$25,000). We can't possibly do everything at once. Not enough money to go around.

- Bettyann Peck asked what the Dog Warden budget is for. Bill Sawicki said that we have a contract with Woodbridge, so we do not have to maintain a kennel here. We are renting out our Shelter building to PAWS.
- Bill Sawicki said that although the Police Department budgets for 41 full time officers, due to sickness, vacation, etc. they will NEVER use the full amount. So, we will not include the funding for cars in their budget. Regarding the bulletproof vests for the PD, we should start putting \$5,000 per year away going forward so that we won't have to buy them all at once again. This is a safety issue; we have no choice but to spend the \$20,000 this year. We will get reimbursed by the State for half (\$10,000).

Item #5 – Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 8:31pm.

Submitted by:

Monica Dimon
Recording Secretary