

**Town of Seymour ~ Board of Finance
MINUTES
Budget Deliberations
Monday, February 8, 2021 at 7:00pm
Via Zoom Teleconference # 883 8229 8313
(646) 558-8656**

Members Present: Bettyann Peck, Bill Sawicki, Beverly Kennedy, Kristyn Haniewicz, Jim Cretella, Zani Imetovski, Richard Demko; Jessica Nunez (alternate)

Members Absent: Grace Brangwynne, Gary Popielasz (alternates)

Others Present: Rory Burke, Monica Dimon, Annmarie Drugonis, Sherry Holmes, Edward Strumello, Christopher Champagne, Mike Wilson, Jay Hatfield, Kristen Harmeling, Vonda Tencza, Kristen Bruno, James Garofalo (7:40pm)

Item #1 – Call Meeting to order

Chairman Bill Sawicki called the meeting to order at 7:03pm.

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 2021/2022 Budget – Board of Education

Chair of the Finance Committee for the Board of Education, Kristen Harmeling presented the Board of Education Budget for 2021/2022:

- Kristen Harmeling has been on the Board of Education for 9 years and was previously on the Board of Finance for 2 years.
- This year the budget reflects an increase of 2.55% or \$882,568. There is a lot of things in flux this year. There is grant money coming from the State. We only just received notice of the grant. We have not had a discussion with the central office about where those funds will be allocated yet. Right now, we understand that these funds will be made available for this school year and next school year. There will be some changes in our line item amounts, but for purposes of tonight's meeting we have provided our best estimate of what our needs are for the coming school year. This does include a few additional items:
 - A new position for a floating Nurse. We feel that in the pandemic, our schools cannot be kept short handed and whenever, pre-pandemic, a nurse was out, it meant that that school would be without a nurse. This just can't be the case during the pandemic.
- Bill Sawicki asked if the budget before us includes any of the grant money from the State. Kristen Harmeling said that it does not. That money still needs to be applied for. Just to clarify, that money would be available to us over the next year and a half. We will collaborate with central office to put together a plan on when that money should be spent. An example that comes to mind – we will have a lot of learning loss to deal with in our next school year – we certainly wouldn't want to front load the spending of that money because we know we will need to be doing things for our students & families in the school year after that.
- Sherry Holmes said that the amount of the grant money is: \$1,019,026. The total grant must be spent by September 2023. Kristen Harmeling said that it is up to us when we spend the money and on what (against a given list of eligible expenses).
- Sherry Holmes said that the main drivers contributing to this increase are health insurance and contractual obligations (salaries and benefits). In terms of new items:

- Nurse Floater. This person will provide district coverage whenever one of our nurses are out and will be rotating between the buildings assisting the nursing staff.
- Special Education teacher at the High School. This position is needed to meet the learning needs of our students transitioning from the Middle School to the High School.
- Two Instructional Paraprofessionals at the High School to meet the learning needs of the students transitioning from the Middle School to the High School.
- Mathematics Resources for our K-5 students needed to support our implementation of curriculum.
- Increasing a Music Teacher from .4 to .8 at the High School. This position is needed to assist in teaching more Music Electives as well as allow dual-certified teachers to teach other subject areas that are needed.
- Add a .4 FTE ELA (English Language Arts) Teacher at the High School. This position is needed to instruct ELA classes in order to help keep the class sizes down as well as to offer more ELA Electives to our students.
- Total budget of \$35,552,977 was broken down in detail in the budget packet sent to the Board of Finance. Total increase is \$882,568 or 2.55%. The Health Insurance rate increase is 9.5%.
- Mike Wilson, Superintendent, said that the original list of requested items was 9 new items. We cut that to only three items that we feel are necessary. Kudos to the Board of Education members and Financial Committee members.

DISCUSSION/QUESTIONS:

- Richard Demko asked – regarding the music position. Are you looking to increase the musical education courses or supplement someone leaving? Mike Wilson said that the increase allows us to continue to offer the full array of courses currently offered and utilize the dual certified teachers (better use of staffing). Rich Demko clarified that this will not mean new courses would be offered. It would just allow you to continue with the courses already offered and utilize teachers dual certified to assist in other curriculums. Mike Wilson said that we could offer more this year.
- Richard Demko asked if there has been any discussion about having a marching band? Mike Wilson said yes, they have surveyed the students to determine interest in this, but so far, the interest level is not there yet. Our music program has increased at the elementary level which will eventually filter to the high school level. It is not a “dead” issue. We will continue to revisit. Obviously with a marching band comes added costs (uniforms, instruments, stipend positions).
- Bill Sawicki asked about the Employee Benefits. It is a pretty sizeable jump – about \$73,415. Social Security, Medicare, MERF. Are these paid as a lump sum or paid over 2,3,4 years? Sherry Holmes said that it is a combination, depending on the individual. The increments are from when we offered an early retirement incentive. As long as they notify us by January 1, per contract, they will receive the lump sum by August 1 following retirement. This year we have 4 teachers.
- Are there payouts for accumulated sick time? Sherry Holmes said it is up to a certain cap. If a teacher has 75 sick days, they will get 3 months salary; if a teacher has 150 sick days, they will get 4 months salary; if a teacher has 170 sick days, they will get 5 months salary. 170 is the maximum. Over that is not included in the calculation. This is paid in a lump sum on August 1st following retirement (as long as they notify us by January 1st). There are 4 teachers this year getting the lump sum payments. Bill Sawicki asked if that is the only type of Longevity Pay? Sherry Holmes said that there is an option for Early Retirement Incentive. Only 1 person this year is taking this option.
- Bill Sawicki asked since COVID began back in March of 2020, is there any costs for Transportation that we had to pay for the time the buses weren’t running? Sherry Holmes said they are negotiating with the Bus Company to give us a credit for the time the buses were idle. Now that they are back running, if we need to use less of their service (due to not being back full-time) they will negotiate a lower rate for that. Last year we negotiated a side agreement that we saved in the overall Transportation contract. Bill said that we paid about \$300,000 (Regular) through December – any idea what the total amount will be for the school year ending in June of this year? Sherry Holmes said pretty close. We are continuing to receive bills. They are behind in billing due to COVID. We will catch up in the coming months. Special Education is a moving target, but I expect to spend all of the budgeted amount. The amount for Student Activities will probably not

be spent. So, overall, we will be pretty close – not going over. Bill Sawicki asked what the credit would be for the time the buses were idle? Sherry Holmes said that so far, we have received \$15,000. Bill said he finds it hard to believe that we will receive only \$15,000 for the year for unused bus usage. Sherry said that they are still negotiating another credit. They will be working very closely with the Operations Manager to see if there is additional money that can be given back to us. What is driving these numbers are encumbrances. So, I have to take these encumbrances and disencumber the amount of money that I successfully negotiate with the Transportation Company. Bill just asked if you could please let us know when you receive these credits. Kristen Harmeling said that every month we have a Finance Committee Meeting we ask about contracts and any give backs available to us. Something to remember is that now we are back to hybrid learning, the buses are running on a full schedule even though there are only half the number of students. There will be credits coming through in other areas/lines in our budget. The reason that we were not comfortable lowering these line items for this budget year is because we haven't gotten our Special Education Excess Cost Grant. Often, we don't get back what we are expecting from the State. Once that first Grant comes in, we can make some adjustments at that point. It is due in on 2/28/21. Sherry Holmes said that she is working on a projection to include some things we anticipate realizing some savings. Bill Sawicki said given all the moving pieces in the budgets for all departments, we want to get the best estimate. Please keep us in the loop and let us know. Sherry Holmes said that we JUST received this COVID Grant on Friday. This MUST be used for COVID related expenses. Also, we do have a Minimum Budget Requirement. We will come up with a plan to spend for lost learning, remote learning, technology upgrades. We are in the last year of our contract with All Star Transportation and will be going out to bid this year. This usually nets some savings.

- Richard Demko asked if we could get a detailed list of the COVID relief spending expenses that qualify. Can we use some of the Grant money to offset some of the money in our budget already? Sherry Holmes said that we do have a document we can share with you. Kristen Harmeling said that we do have a list of last years and we can share that with you. This year, we cannot take the Grant money and supplant the operational money for this year. Where we can, and where it makes sense to do so, we will do so. When those numbers are more solid, and we know what we have in our accounts to a more definitive degree we will be looking at those numbers to see what can be purchased because of COVID. We can't just select something from the budget for next year and use the Grant money for that. We will work with the General Services Office to use the money appropriately.
- Richard Demko asked if the Floating Nurse position would qualify as a COVID expense? Sherry Holmes said that they have asked this question and were denied. This was a position that we were looking for before the pandemic started. They would not be inclined to approve that.

Item #5 – Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 8:00 pm.

Submitted by:

Monica Dimon
Recording Secretary