

BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE / SELECTMEN VIRTUAL MEETING

Wednesday April 15, 2020 – 4:00 PM via Zoom

PRESENT: John Mason, BAC; Pat Callahan, BAC; Bob Gniadek, Chair, BAC; Bob Youdelman, BAC; Joy Mullin, BAC; Pat Callahan, BAC; Dewey Wyatt, School Cte.; Steven ? BAC; Neal Pilson, Selectman; Roger Manzolini, Chair Select-board; Alan Hanson, Selectman; Danielle Fillio, Town Administrator; Angela Garrity, Town Accountant, Jill Pompei, School Principal

Bob Gniadek opened the meeting with a reading of the Governor's Order revising the rules for Open Meetings and noting that there was no in-person attendance.

Review of the School Budget: The Committee met last evening in public session and obtained comments from the residents of Richmond and the staff of the Richmond School. The Committee will meet again on April 28th in public session.

Bob noted that everyone at that meeting was upset with the cuts requested in the school budget and suggestions were made that such decisions be put off until more is known about what is going to happen. Bob reported that he explained the reasoning behind the committee's request to reduce the school budget. Roger noted that the committee did not ask the school to reduce their budget from last year, it asked that they reduce the amount of increase.

There was a discussion of what other local schools are being asked to do and Bob noted that the Town of Lee is reported to have reserved the right to go back later in the year if the situation warrants it and make further cuts if the town approves the current budget proposal. In response to the question, "what recourse does the Town have to reduce the budget in the middle of the year." Bob said that once the budget is approved, the school is in charge and there is nothing further that the Town can do at that point. Therefore, it is necessary if there is reason to believe there will be a problem to prepare for it now.

A discussion ensued of the probable result of this emergency shutdown in terms of funding from the State and from tax- payers. Several options were noted as being in place to help tax payers but a greater concern would be the reduction or loss of revenue from the State from Chapter 70 and Chapter 90 monies because of the loss of tax monies to the State from a variety of sources it normally depends on. It was noted that the State does have \$2 billion to \$3 billion in reserve, but that amount will not stretch very far. Roger said that the Reserve Funds for the Town have not been spent in order to have them available for emergencies.

Bob asked Dewey which version of the school budget will be brought to the public meeting. Dewey replied that they have not made that decision yet, but he knows that the School Committee would not go to the public with a budget that the Finance Committee could not support.

The conversation turned to the large increase required for the Town's SPED funding and consideration to separate those funds into a separate article, which had been done in the past.

Roger pointed out that at the time that was done because the need was for a residential program which was extremely expensive, but that the Town shortly thereafter went back to including that item in the general budget in order to avoid identifying specific families. In any case, no matter where the amount is shown in the budget it is still going to be the same cost to the Town and the SPED costs are mandated by the State – we cannot alter that amount. Neal noted that the large increase in SPED funding this year is a result of increased requirements by the State, which will allow more students to benefit from the programs.

Dewey said that a line-by-line School Budget will be posted on the website, available to everyone. Jill Pompei reported that she has met with Sharon Harris to review the budget to identify any possible reductions but that no decisions have been made yet.

Lauren asked whether some of the alternate budget scenarios that were proposed at the public meeting would be discussed at this meeting. Dewey responded that those discussions are up to the Budget Advisory Cte. and Bob Gniadek said he would prefer that the School Committee meet with the BAC before the next public meeting. Dewey noted that most of those scenarios create an increase to the School Budget in excess of the requested 3%. Lauren said she felt they represented compromises between the suggestion of the BAC and the desires of the townspeople. Dewey suggested that the BAC and the School Cte. meet the following Thursday April 23rd at 6:00 PM.

Bob asked Danielle for clarification of what recourse the Town would have to revise an approved school budget mid-year. She noted that it would depend on which costs were under consideration. Salaries are determined by union contract and cannot be touched.

At this point Bob Gniadek suggested that the discussion move on to a review of the warrants and articles for the Town, which as they stand now represent a 2.6% increase in property taxes. He said that absent any objection, he felt there was no need to go over those items in detail again. The complete Town Budget will be revised when the new School Budget is received.

It was noted that the June 17th date for the Town Meeting looks problematic at this point and reminded the group that if it does not take place and the budget is not approved by the Town, spending will have to be relegated to 1/12 of last year's budget per month.

There being no further business before the Committee, a motion was made to adjourn. Motion was seconded and adopted by unanimous consent.

Signed:

Bob Gniadek, Chair