

## **BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE VIRTUAL MEETING**

**Thursday April 23, 2020 – 6:00 PM via Zoom**

**PRESENT:** Bob Gniadek, Chair Finance Cte.; Bob Youdelman, Finance Cte.; Steven Patterson, Finance Cte., John Mason, Finance Cte., Pat Callahan, Finance Cte., Dewey Wyatt, Chair School Cte.; Sharon Harrison, School Cte.; Jill Pompei, School Principal; Lauren Brussel, Finance Cte.; Pat Callahan, Finance Cte.; Peter Dillon, School Super.; Joy Mullen, School Cte.; Roger Manzoloni, Chair Select-board; Neal Pilson, Selectman; Alan Hanson, Selectman; Danielle Fillio, Town Administrator;

**Guests:** An estimated 35 participants attended via Zoom

Bob welcomed the attendees and opened the meeting at 6:02 PM by reading the Executive Order from the Governor revising the Open Meeting Law requirements during the COVID-19 emergency.

**Approval of Minutes of March 11, 2020, April 1, 2020, April 8, 2020:** Bob Youdelman made two additional minor changes to the March 11<sup>th</sup> and April 8<sup>th</sup> minutes, which were accepted. A motion was then made to adopt all the outstanding minutes before the Committee at this meeting as amended. The motion was seconded by Roger and adopted by unanimous vote.

**Public Discussion:** Bob Gniadek invited the public in attendance to put forward any questions they had for the Budget Advisory Committee.

The following issues were addressed:

Tammy Jervis asked what the percentage has been of townspeople who normally have difficulty paying their real estate taxes. Bob Gniadek could not find that information in previous audits, but felt it was irrelevant as the situation the Town is facing now is unique and the history of the Town's finances will not offer much help in the way of planning. Roger noted that the plan was to level-fund the 2021 budget and remove Articles slated to be funded from Reserve or Free Cash funds so that those monies will be available for emergencies. It was never the intention to reduce the budget from 2020. Neal added that it will be far more impactful to the Town if there are serious cuts in State and Federal funding. Lauren pointed out that because Richmond does not rely on State funding as heavily as Pittsfield does, even if the State cuts their budget to Richmond by 10% or even 20% , that will not represent a huge deficit in the operating budget.

**Review of the School Budget:** The School Committee submitted a revised budget as requested. Dewey noted that the very difficult work of finding ways to cut the budget were done with the cooperation of all parties. He pointed out that the School has certain fixed costs and legal obligations which equal 4% of the total budget. All other items were level funded. Peter admitted that this new budget is still imperfect, but better than the one previously submitted. He outlined some of the places where cuts were made and noted especially that the Garden

project and the Arts Program were cut with the hope of privately raising the funds to be able to continue them.

Sharon added that in making the cuts, salaries were adjusted to school needs rather than cutting programs such as Special Education, which is expected to need to be expanded in FY21 and they have taken an increased amount from School Choice.

Jill noted that the budget preserves some key staff members and she feels that the school will still be able to serve its students well in the Fall.

Bob Y. asked for an explanation of the increases in some salary line items including the School Superintendent, a School Secretary, etc. It was explained that the original number for the Superintendent had been only an estimate and that considerable research has resulted in finding a number that is viable for the position. The other line items do not reflect increases in the salary rate but increases in caseloads and working hours. The Principal's salary is at the low end of the general rate and is appropriate.

Neal interjected for the record at this point that neither the Budget Advisory Cte. nor the Board of Selectmen have the authority to request or suggest changes in the School budget. The review being done here is information only.

Next Tuesday the School Cte. will hold its Public Hearing at which time the school budget will be presented and questions taken from the floor. At the end of the public session, the School Cte. will vote on the budget. It was noted specifically that the School Cte. has always sought the approval of the Finance Cte. on every item in the budget.

Al asked about the cost of electricity and whether the estimate was higher or lower than really anticipated. Sharon said that she had seen savings and expect to realize more with the solar installation, and she felt that she was comfortable, therefore, with the reduction she made in that item.

A question about an increase of \$10,000 for heating, given the current very low oil prices was explained by indicating that the increase is not predicated on oil prices but on dealing with a heating system that is inefficient. There is an Article in the Town Meeting Warrant that discusses a possible upgrade to the school heating system.

Bob G. thanked everyone for their work on decreasing the budget and, as there were no further questions or comments from the floor, moved on to reviewing the warrants and articles for the Town Meeting.

Danielle reminded the group that all the items have previously been discussed, explained and agreed to, but not voted on and that the only change will be the final school budget, when that is completed. She also pointed out that the original increase to taxpayers would have been 2.6% but with the changes made to the school budget, will now represent only a 2% increase. Since the School Committee's final vote on the budget will not happen until next Tuesday, it

was suggested that this committee's vote wait for that final number. Neal proposed that the Budget Advisory Cte. and the Selectmen meet again next Wednesday, April 29<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 PM. That date and time was acceptable.

There was a discussion of the probability of the Town being able to hold its Town Meeting on June 17<sup>th</sup> given how quickly things are changing and possible continuation of the Stay at Home Order from the State. Some possibilities were explored but Danielle cautioned the group to stay with the current plan and wait for additional guidelines.

**Questions from Attendees:** A discussion of the cutting of the Garden Project and the Arts Program in the school elicited a suggestion from John Mason to have the school send a letter of request to the Land Trust to fund the Garden project. He believes they will be willing to do that. The Arts program could also be funded by private donations and it was noted that Richmond residents are very sure to be willing to step up.

There being no further business before the committee, a motion was made to adjourn. Motion was seconded and approved by unanimous vote. Meeting was adjourned at 7:18 PM

Signed:

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Bob Gniadek, Chair, Budget Advisory Cte.