

BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE / SCHOOL COMMITTEE VIRTUAL MEETING

Wednesday April 29, 2020 – 6:00 PM via Zoom

PRESENT: Pat Callahan, Finance Cte., John Mason Finance Cte., Steve Patterson, Finance Cte., Roger Manzolini, Chair Board of Selectmen; Neal Pilson, Selectman; Alan Hanson, Selectman; Danielle Fillio, Town Administrator; Bob Gniadek, Finance Cte.; Bob Youdelman, Finance Cte.; Dewey Wyatt, Richmond School Cte.; Peter Dillon, BHRSD School Superintendent; Sharon Harrison, BHRSD Bus. Admin.

Guests: An estimated 35 people participated via Zoom.

Bob Gniadek opened the meeting at 6:00 PM with a reading of the Governor's Executive Order covering the changes in the Open Meeting Law for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency.

Approval of Minutes: The minutes of the March 25, 2020 and April 23, 2020 meetings were not available for review. They will be approved at the next meeting.

Review of School Budget: The new version of the school budget submitted to the committee included an increase of \$20,000. A discussion of the reasoning behind that decision by the School Cte. offered the explanation that the increased funds were included as a contingency to be able to address concerns that might arise in the future over the reduction in hours of the School Adjustment Counselor and the Music Program. The \$20,000 was added after the public hearing as a compromise. The actual amount needed is higher; the staff will look for ways to find additional funds to address the needs of the students through other means.

The addition of that \$20,000 resulted in an increase over last year's budget for the school of 3.9% as opposed to the 3.4% in the previous version. The change was approved by the School Committee in a vote of 2 to 1.

The School Committee is seeking the endorsement of the Finance Cte. for this new budget with the understanding that SPED costs are going up and this increase is much less than would normally be requested.

Roger asked about the Superintendent's Salary line which he saw as an indication that the decision had been made to break up the school union and eliminate the Richmond School students' ability to choose any high school they wish to attend. Roger was reassured that the figure included in the line item was essentially a placeholder; that a consultant has been hired to help the Town make the necessary decisions concerning the school's future arrangements for superintendence support. The budget reflects a continuation of the status quo and does not commit Richmond to any decisions.

Neal reminded the group that neither the Budget Advisory Committee, the Finance Committee or the Board of Selectmen approve the school budget. Approval is given by the townspeople at a Town Meeting. The Finance Committee's decision to support the budget as presented or not is reported at the Town Meeting and is published in the Annual Report.

Review and Vote on Warrants and Articles: Bob Gniadek noted that he had suggested some revisions in the budget that reduced several revenue items by 10%. That revised budget was sent to the Committee for their consideration. Considerable discussion of the need for such drastic cuts was held. Danielle cautioned that the use of Stabilization Funds to eliminate a property tax increase could make future budgets more challenging. She further pointed out that his cuts are contingent on a projected loss of 10% in State Aid funds and other sources of income, but there is no huge impact for Richmond of a loss in room tax revenue or State aid as is true in many other communities. Even if the Town experiences such a loss, Danielle believes that Chapter 90 money would still be available, and a Special Town Meeting could be held to reallocate Reserve Funds as needed.

Bob G. saw the OPEB funds as discretionary and suggested that it not be funded, which could compensate for a projected 10% reduction in State aid.

It was noted that the date by which the Town Budget must be finalized in order to get the Warrant to the printer for the Annual Report is fast approaching and a decision needs to be made soon. Neal suggested that the committee look at Bob's various suggestions and decide what needs to be done.

Bob G asked that someone a report be prepared by the Town Administrator, the Accountant and the Treasurer/Collector, to keep close track of the cash flow and revenues over the next several years and present a monthly report to the Select-board and the Finance Cte. That information could be used to guide funding of items which were delayed.

Roger agreed that the Committee should advise the School Committee to go ahead with the budget as it stands but discuss the defunding of OPEB.

It was decided that the Committee would review all the above possibilities and meet again on Tuesday May 5th at 5:00 via Zoom to vote on the Warrants and Articles for a final resolution.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 PM

Signed:

Bob Gniadek, Chair