

Joint Budget Meeting, Selectboard and Finance Committee
Town Hall, 334 Main Street Great Barrington MA 01230
Monday, March 19, 2018 at 7:00 PM
MINUTES

PRESENT

SELECTBOARD

Sean Stanton
Dan Bailly
Ed Abrahams
Bill Cooke

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Walter Atwood
Eugene Curletti
Thomas Blauvelt
Janet Lee
Ann O'Dwyer

I. Call to Order

Chair Sean Stanton called the meeting to order at 7:00PM. Chair, Thomas Blauvelt called the meeting to order at 7:00PM.

II. Report on Identified Budget Reductions

Jennifer Tabakin reviewed the budget process for FY19. Ms. Tabakin said at the last budget meeting the Finance Committee and the Selectboard asked her to look into what a \$200,000 decrease in the total proposed FY19 budget would look like. Ms. Tabakin met with each department and the Town Account and identified the areas in which, if necessary, the proposed budget could handle a 2% cut.

The Town Account said the revised FY19 budget with the proposed 2% reductions would total \$11,295,953.00, this would bring the Town's budget down to a 1.7% increase from FY18. The Accountant said this would bring the tax levy to \$23,257,000

III. Discussion of Budget to Present at Public Hearing

Ed Abrahams said when he reviewed the proposed FY19 budget cuts he divided them into four categories; funds that are getting pushed to a future year, professional development, program cuts, and hopeful savings.

Ann O'Dwyer asked for clarification about cutting the parking enforcement position. Sean Stanton said that the cut would remove the current parking enforcement attendant, which is a stipend position. Mr. Stanton said that they would not be cutting the parking enforcement tasks an on duty police officer would likely absorb the parking attendant responsibilities. Mr. Stanton continued it might not be a good idea to cut the position because right now the position brings in more in revenue than is expended to pay for the attendant. Police Chief Walsh said the day-time shift is the busiest shift for the officers and parking enforcement would not be a priority. Michelle Loubair asked if this is currently a part time position. Sean Stanton said that the parking attendant is a part time position paid \$15,000 a year. Jennifer Tabakin said the parking attendant is paid \$15.00 per hour. Ed Abrahams said that cutting the hours is reducing the level of enforcement. Dan Bailly said that we are not reducing parking enforcement we are focusing the enforcement, stating "maybe it tickets are not written in between 9am and 10am but more often between 11am and 12pm." Ed Abrahams said this is an example of cutting foolishly and that with all of these cuts combined we are saving \$74.0 for the median assessed value home. Dan Bailly said that \$74.00 is not nothing and it makes a difference when he or his parents pay their bills. **MOTION:** Dan Bailly motioned to reduce the parking attendant stipend to \$10,000 for FY19 **SECOND:** Bill Cooke **VOTE: 3-1 Ed Abrahams**

MOTION: Tom Blauvelt motioned to reduce the parking attendant stipend to \$10,000 for FY19 **SECOND:** Ann O'Dwyer **VOTE: 3-1 Walter Atwood.**

Sean Stanton moved the discussion to the Animal Control officer stipend. Mr. Stanton said the intention is for this position to also become absorbed by the Police Department but wanted Police Chief William

Walsh to weigh in. Chief Walsh said that he believes this position will go away they do not have enough time or availability to respond to the animal calls in the way that Shep Evans can. Chief Walsh said that this position involves immense paperwork and follow up and his officers cannot take on all responsibilities. The Police Department will take calls when Shep is not working but he handles all major issues and investigations. Jennifer Tabakin read a 2017 report from the Animal Control Officer, the report included 139 misc. public calls, 69 responses to problem animals, 21 transported animals to kennel, 29 misc. calls which required in person follow up, over 260 checks on public spaces (parks, cemeteries etc.), 37 citations issued for expired dog license, 8 citations issued for violation of animal bylaw, and 2 court appearances for animal complaints. Jennifer Tabakin mentioned that the State of MA requires Animal Control Officers to complete several trainings. Tom Blauvelt said that this position has value but not worth \$11,000.00. Sean Stanton asked if this is a position that can be filled for less than \$11,000.00. Jennifer Tabakin said she would not recommend cutting this position stating that it is an important position that receives a lot of calls. Walter Atwood said that it is an important position that affects the entire town not just a small section of town. Mr. Atwood said this is a rural area with lots of animals and many people have dogs and it should not be position that is removed. Dan Bailly asked if there is potential for a shared service opportunity with another town to fulfill this position. Jennifer Tabakin said that this stipend position is a bargain for the Town. Shep Evans is a qualified individual with the appropriate trainings and he had occupied this position for a long time. **MOTION:** Will Curletti motioned to not amend the proposed cut of the Animal Control Officer **SECOND:** Janet Lee **VOTE: 4-1** Tom Blauvelt

MOTION: Dan Bailly moved put the Animal Control Officer position back into the FY19 budget set as \$11,000 **SECOND:** Ed Abrahams **VOTE: 4-0**

The Town Manager cut the advertising budget from \$16,000 to \$8,000.00 for FY19. Sean Stanton said that this budget line cannot be cut because it is a legal obligation to advertise the public hearings.

MOTION: Will Curletti motioned to leave the advertising line at \$15,000 for FY19. **SECOND:** Walter Atwood. **VOTE: 5-0**

MOTION: Dan Bailly motioned to fund the Town Manager's Advertising budget line to \$15,000. **SECOND:** Ed Abrahams **VOTE: 5-0**

Ed Abrahams said the professional development budget lines are helpful and should be left in the FY19 budget. Sean Stanton said that looking at what can be cut each year is an important exercise and should have been done in the last two budget cycles. Ed Abrahams said he disagrees, the budget had been getting tighter each year but this year we have less free cash and that is why we have this problem and need to budget more. Ed Abrahams said we are tightening the budget even more, adding that this is okay with him but it doesn't solve the problem. Jennifer Tabakin said that each budget reduction has an impact, some more significant than others. Ms. Tabakin suggested going through each line and if cuts are made spelling out all of the impacts so that the Department Heads and the Town Manager is covered. Sean Stanton said that he was anticipating to make cuts based on a level of service that the Selectboard and Finance Committee can live without. Ann O'Dwyer asked about potentially cutting the Tree Warden position. Ms. O'Dwyer said that at a previous meeting there was a presentation about hazardous tree removal and she would like to know more about what will happen if this position is cut. Sean Van Deusen of the Public Works Department said that he has some prior experience in tree removal services. Mr. Van Deusen said that he and the highway superintendent intend to absorb the responsibilities of the Tree Warden. The Selectboard and Finance Committee asked about the impact this will have on service. Mr. Van Deusen said this change will slow the response time that residents normally receive. Mr. Van Deusen said he has proposed a reduction in the parks budget but ultimately it is the decision of the parks department. Mr. Van Deusen said this year is the end of a contract with Berkshire South and if bids come in low Parks might not need to reduce services.

The Council on Aging has a smaller budget than most and reductions would eliminate activities at the Senior Center, these activities would include; exercise classes, entertainment and art classes, supply and coffee hour. Senior Center Director Polly Mann-Salenovich said that seniors make up 24.9% of the Great Barrington population and the Senior Center has less than 3.8% of the overall budget of FY19. Thomas Blauvelt said that many non-Great Barrington Senior utilize the Senior Center. Mr. Blauvelt said there is no charge for out of town seniors to use the Community Center and that is unfair for the Great Barrington tax payers.

Michelle Loubair asked what grants are pursued for the Council on Aging's Senior Center. Jennifer Tabakin said the Council on Aging applies for and receives money from multiple sources of funding. Ms. Tabakin said the Senior Center receives a Community Outreach grant, an Elder Services Grant, and regular donations are made to the Senior Center. **MOTION:** Ed Abrahams moved to put the 2% reduction, \$3,200.00 back into the budget for FY19. **SECOND:** Dan Bailly **VOTE: 3-1 Sean Stanton.**

MOTION: Walter Atwood moved to restore the \$3,200 to the Senior Center FY19 budget **SECOND:** Janet Lee **VOTE: 4-1 Tom Blauvelt**

Ed Abrahams asked the Fire Chief if it is his recommendation to cut the budget for additional personnel. Chief Burger said it is not his recommendation. Jennifer Tabakin said it is difficult to find anyone to volunteer for most things not just firefighting. Ann O'Dwyer said the Selectboard and Finance Committee should plan for additional firefighters in the coming year or two but wait to see what the report indicates before allocating new funds for this budget cycle. **MOTION:** Ann O'Dwyer moved to keep the revised FY19 budget. **SECOND:** Will Curletti **VOTE: 3-2 Tom Blauvelt and Walter Atwood**

MOTION: Dan Bailly motion to keep the revised FY19 budget for the Fire Department. **SECOND:** Bill Cooke **VOTE: 3-1 Sean Stanton**

Ed Abrahams said that for the Library's budget, the proposed reduction is slightly above the legal limit. Library Director Amanda DeGregorgis said that this cut will limit the number of magazines, newspapers, books, audio books, and children's books the libraries will receive in FY19. Ann O'Dwyer said that she is interested in not reducing the libraries budget a full 2%. Ann O'Dwyer said that our libraries get a lot of use and it sends a bad and depressing message to our community. Jim, Housatonic asked if it is an option to only have one employee staffed at the Ramsdell library. Ms. DeGregorgis said this is an issue of safety and it is not an option to only have one staff present. Holly Hammer, Seekonk Cross Road said if you cut the supplies budget you limit the usage from patrons and this can occasionally be a source of revenue. Ms. Hammer said the funds for library programs are already low and she would find it heartbreaking if it further cuts were made. Kathy Plungis, a Library Trustee said she is in favor of the \$10,950.00 budget reductions. Ms. Plungis said this is not the consensus of the Trustees but she feels budget cuts need to be made. Ms. Plungis said the library is able to sustain these budget reductions but only for this year. Ms. Plungis said the Town has to make these cuts. Michelle Loubair, Housatonic, said that it doesn't do the community any good to make it so that the folks that live here cannot afford to stay here. Ms. Loubair said many seniors move into affordable housing communities like Flag Rock Village or Brookside just to be able to stay in Great Barrington.

Dan Bailly said the Building Department can sustain travel and training cuts. Ed Abrahams said there is a new Building Inspector and he needs to complete certain trainings in order to become a certified Building Commissioner.

Police Chief Walsh said the Police Department is proposed to make a cut to the Code Red Program administration position. Jennifer Tabakin said that this year there was a big push to get the residents of Great Barrington onto the Code Red system. Ms. Tabakin said the Parking Ticket Hearing Officer stipend position will also be eliminated from the FY19 proposed budget.

Sue Carmel said the revisions for the new proposed FY19 budget cuts total \$190,706.00. Jennifer Tabakin said these cuts have a minimal effect on the overall affordability of living in Great Barrington or Housatonic. Ms. Tabakin said the effect of these reductions is severe for level of service the town but minimal in terms of the overall affordability. Ms. Tabakin said that if cuts are continued each year the Town is risking affecting the desirability of the town and thus impacting growth.

MOTION: SECOND: VOTE:

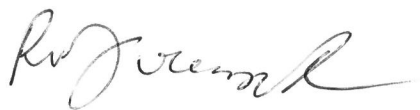
IV. Citizen Speak Time

V. Media Time

VI. Adjournment

On a motion made by Dan Bailly, Seconded by Ed Abrahams, with a unanimous vote the meeting adjourned at 9:15PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Jurczyk', with a stylized, flowing script.

Rebecca Jurczyk
Recording Secretary