Select Board Meeting

May 20, 2020

5:03 pm meeting called to order by Ericka.

Select Board members present: Mike Bedini, Ericka Oleson and Neil Oleson.

Select board members absent: None

Others present: Christine Dobbert, Heidi Dugal, John Franzoni, Jennifer Macksey, Judy Oleson, Stephanie Pare and Vicki Winchell (Heidi, John, Jennifer & Judy were present viritually)

Ericka Oleson made a motion to approve the minutes from the 5/13/20 meeting. Neil Oleson seconded. Unanimous.

Selectmen:

* Budget Review for Fiscal Year 2021 took place with the school administration.
  + Neil questioned the per student cost at Gabriel Abbott Memorial School (GAMS). He was informed there are 95 students at a cost of $17,673 per pupil.
  + Neil also asked what the Tuition costs were for Savoy/Monroe students to attend GAMS. He was informed the regular student rate is currently $9124 per pupil and the Special Education rate is $16,500. When Neil questioned the difference between tuition costs vs actual per pupil costs Jennifer informed Neil these rates were agreed upon by the last administration to oversee the school department. There is a 3 yr contract in place, which is ending this year. She also stated the school committee is currently reviewing the rates and will be discussing new tuition rates at their June meeting.
  + Preschool tuition was questioned as well as Neil asked if last years PK tuition covered the costs per student. Heidi explained education is not for profit and therefore tuition costs would never be at the per student cost.
  + Neil asked for specifics regarding School Choice costs. He was informed the per student reimbursement is $5000, with an additional increment for special education students. He questioned the reimbursement costs vs the actual costs, wondering why allow students into our school at such a lower rate than what it costs. Concerns were expressed that having school choice and tuition students actually costs the town money. Stephanie Pare explained that the school costs would remain the same whether there was school choice/tuition students in the class room or not. Allowing these students to attend from out of district actually brings money in the town that otherwise would not be received but the costs would still be incurred because they are fixed costs that do not change no matter how many students are in the classroom (teacher’s salary for example).

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* + Neil also asked how many PK students currently attend GAMS. Heidi answered there are 21 Florida resident children in PK - (9) in the 3 yr old program; (12) in the 4 yr old program plus 3 attending from Monroe paying tuition, as well as an additional 8 from out of district. Neil questioned the cost per student in PK. Heidi explained one of the expenses is that each room must have 2 adults working in it at all times. She did not have the specific salary information on hand however Jennifer stated she would get that information to Christine as soon as possible. Heidi explained if staff cuts were to be made it would leave the school without the 3 yr old PK program. This had been attempted in the past to save money and several residents complained. The program was then reinstated.
  + Neil questioned how many high school children there are currently. He was told 15 McCann, 5 Drury and 3 at BART.
  + Ericka commented that they are pleased to see the school return to the town unused funds each year but questioned which line did the majority of these unused funds come from. Heidi responded one line item to be refunded is tuition. They set a certain amount in the budget for their High School tuition to Drury however the budgets are decided upon so early (February/March) that most students have yet to make their choices as to which High School they’ll be attending. If more choose McCann then that is less tuition money that is needed. The other line item often is the Special Education line. In the event that a student moves to town who is in need of attending a special education out of district placement, for example the E3 Academy in North Adams, it can cost the district thousands of dollars. Therefore, they build this figure into the budget so it is available for any special education children.
  + Jennifer applauded Heidi’s work on the budget and her frugality. As well as Heidi’s strong desire to be able to return funds to the town each year. Jennifer is working on a new calculation but it is difficult with the special education component.
  + Mike questioned how many students were from Monroe and was informed 10 were from Monroe and there were 3 from Savoy.
  + Christine questioned if Savoy was considering moving their children to Hoosac Valley Middle & High School? John responded Savoy is reviewing their options due to the transportation costs associated with transporting so few children to Florida. The Savoy School Committee was going to attempt to vote on this however 2 members had a conflict of interest and therefore could not currently vote on the matter. Neil questioned the cost of tuition from Savoy vs the per pupil costs. Jennifer responded the the tuition for Savoy is $12,000. Heidi explained the costs are still the same therefore the tuition should be considered extra funds received by the town, not a hinderance.

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* + John asked Vicki to explain the Medicaid program briefly. Vicki explained it was a program she discovered in 2014 that the district had not been participating in. When she inquired with the Superintendent and the Special Ed Director they were not particularly interested in it however they said she could investigate further. Medicaid allows the towns to recoup some of the expenses from the state based on a child’s IEP and the services they receive that are medically necessary. Upon further research she found a company that oversees the program and was given the approval to start this program within our district. Vicki is the administrator of this program for our district and to date, district wide, this program has brought over $224,000 into our district. The schools do not get access to spend this money, it is deposited directly into the town’s general fund.
  + Christine asked Jennifer for the exact school budget amount that is needed for the annual town meeting. Jennifer responded $1,453,845.98. She also mentioned last year $49,606.00 was returned to the town from the school.
  + Heidi mentioned the current administration worked together well with her to return funds to the town. Heidi has never run into a deficit with her spending and likes to plan well and work with the town if a large financial need should come up. Neil felt having a buffer in their budget is a luxury most departments don’t have room for and the school is the only town department to do this. Judy disagreed with him stating the school always returns any unneeded funds to the town and this is a budgetary process not a luxury.
  + The Selectmen have chosen to request the school level fund their budget for FY 2021.
* Ericka Oleson made a motion to accept the power supply aggregation plan through commonwealth choice for the Town of Florida with the new rate of .09603 per KW hr for three years. Second by Mike Bedini. Unanimous.
  + The new rate will be locked in for residents for 3 years. There is also a greener choice residents can opt in that is at a rate of .13217 per KW hr.
* Mike Bedini signed the Annual Town Meeting Voting Warrant the other selectmen signed during the 5/13/20 meeting.

Christine Dobbert, Town Administrator:

* Highway Department will be shutdown for vacation June 24, 2020 through June 30, 2020. Eric’s vacation will stagger as he will continue to work at the compactor on Wednesday and Saturday. Jacob is short 1 vacation day and Kyle is short 3. Jim is giving up 4 of his vacation days so that Jacob and Kyle can be paid the full week.
* Helicopters will be flying around checking the high-tension lines for National Grid.

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* Christine contacted Seth Bean, Assessor, on behalf of the Selectmen questioning when the Assessors plan to start meeting again, as they have not met since March. She offered several options to Seth for them to meet so that they may still accomplish the necessary tasks while social distancing and practicing safeguards. One of which was to meet every other Monday when town hall is normally closed in the evening, and limit town hall capacity to anyone needing to meet with the Assessors.
* Christine will strongly recommend estimated tax bills be sent so as not to double bill taxpayers again.

Stephanie Pare

* Stephanie questioned the noise level of the railroad on Central Shaft Road now that the cave in had been repaired. Mike responded that since the new blower has been installed, he’s heard several complaints from residents. He recommended sending a letter to the railroad questioning what exactly was done during the repair process. Christine will compose a letter and stated no permits were issued for any new blower or electrical work.

7:05 p.m. Ericka motioned to adjourn the meeting. Neil seconded. Unanimous.