Town And School Joint Finance Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes
COUNCIL CHAMBERS
Town Hall
December 13, 2023 – 5:30PM

Members Attendance: Amy Kuhn (Town Council), Jay Trickett (Finance Committee Chair), Bryce Hach (Town Council).

Others in Attendance: Pete LaFond (Town Council), Janice DeLima (Town Council), Analiese Larson (School Board Chair), Nicole Bezanson (School Board), Alicia Johnson (School Board), Emily Martin (School Board), Sara Juli (school Board), Laurel Regan (School Board).

Nathan Poore (Town Manager); Peter McHugh (Finance Director); Gretchen McNulty) School Superintendent), Dan O'Shea (school Finance and Operations Director), Susan Gibney (Assistant Finance Director), Maggie Fleming (Assistant Town Manager).

The meeting was called to order @ 5:30PM

- **Approve minutes from the November 15, 2023 meeting.**
    a. **Councilor Kuhn moved to approve the minutes, Councilor Hach seconded.**
    b. **The minutes were unanimously approved.**

- **2023 Audit and Financial Results**
    a. **Pete McHugh stated that the auditors were unable to provide financial statements at this time. The auditors informed us that there were no audit comments or issues.**
    b. **Pete informed the group that he will forward the FY2023 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report to the Town Council once it is complete. Dan O'Shea also said he would forward the School Financials to the School Board.**

- **Town FY2025 Budget Challenges and Opportunities**
    a. **Pete presented the Town Challenges and Opportunities**

Challenges

Goal: Minimizing Town Tax increases for the next three years
Inflation impacts on product and service pricing
Fuel prices
Electricity Distribution price increase
COLA
Curbside Trash Collection change
Library Budget Request
47% increase in Workers Comp due to increased experience rate
6.5% 2023 Health Insurance increase
Firehouse expansion alternate scenario
Funding CIP and TIF project additions not previously funded

Revaluation impact on TIF balances
Parks and Open Space maintenance and improvements
Climate Action Plan

Opportunities
New TIF Opportunities – Route 100 and New Route One TIFs
Improved Investment returns
Fund balance very healthy after favorable FY2022

- **School FY2025 Challenges and Opportunities**
  a. **Dan O'Shea and Gretchen McNulty presented the outlook for the FY2025 Budget.**

Challenges
● Teacher contract expires August 2023 (in current negotiations)
● Unknown increases - healthcare premium projection
● Staffing shortages / fewer applicants for positions / hiring/retention/competitiveness
○ Ed Tech contract adjustment (Aug 2022) - salary scale adjusted, prior experience awarded) - $225K impact
○ Bus driver hires - now 40 hr positions (hiring/retention)
○ Transportation - van purchases: flexibility, use of non-CDL drivers (shortage)
● Human Resources - increasing demands (leaves, hiring, terminations, other) for staff of 500+, cross-training where possible, additional supports needed.
● Security/Safety - ongoing updates and upgrades (doors, cameras, radios, technology), and costs of disruptions to operations/learning
● Increasing/inflationary costs and availability of goods & services: staff, facilities, utilities,supplies
● Facility capacity (all schools/district office) - increasing need for student support services,appropriate spaces to accommodate special education needs, educational programming (current/future).
● Student needs: ongoing behavioral/mental health/social emotional
● Time for Staff training/meeting/PD - demands for more time for prof development, collaboration, and instructional needs (academic and social emotional learning).
● Legislative changes - recent bill passages have impacted schools (COVID leave, EPL leave, collective bargaining topics, etc.)
● Aging infrastructure/HVAC/systems - cost to maintain FHS (22 yrs), FMS (60+ yrs), FES (11yrs) - Maintenance/Capital budget implications
● Space limitations: specialized programming, aquatics program challenges, etc.
● Enrollment (steady, but trending lower) - State revenue implications (per pupil funding)
● Time and expertise to lead the curricular alignment work - need for additional instructional coaches
● Adequate administrative presence in the buildings to provide appropriate attention to personnel management / supervision and evaluation, facilities needs including safety / security, student behavior / discipline / restorative practices, management of school protocols and schedules, development of strong school culture, work toward goals including data management and analysis

Opportunities
● Program reviews and opportunity for 'revisioning' / creative leadership team approach To budget
● District facilities assessment and development of long-range master plan
● Pre-K Start-Up Grant (up to $500K requested - grant notifications end of Feb 2023)

- RREV (Rethinking Responsive Education Ventures) Grant - ($250K for 2-year support)
- District communications/outreach efforts
- Modular structures - relieving current school space pressures
- Continued State/DOE commitment to 55% education funding
- Continued State/DOE commitment to providing free lunch

- **Library Budget Process**
    a. **Councilor Trickett introduced this item to the Committee. He stated that he is not comfortable with the current process and wanted to discuss ways to improve the process.**
        i. **The group discussed the role of Council-appointed Library Trustees, communication issues, and past budget outcomes.**
            1. **Over the last 5 years, the library budget funding request increased from $573K to $832K.**
            2. **The Library share of the Town Budget grew from 3% to 5% over this period.**
    b. **Councilor Kuhn mentioned budget issues to the Library Board of Trustees and told them she would report back to them after this meeting.**
        i. **Nathan would like them to explain the 45% increase over the last 5 years.**
        ii. **The Committee clarified that the Library was given $90K for a Development Director in total. Since the Town pro-rated the amount for FY2024, the remainder of the $90K would be provided for the FY2025 Budget.**
        iii. **Councilor Trickett asked what the Building Reserve transfer was used for.**
    c. **The group decided that Councilor Kuhn would lay out the Committee's concerns as soon as possible and set up a meeting with the Finance Committee and the Library on either January 10 or 17th at 5:50pm to discuss the issues and determine the path forward.**

- **Work Plan Item – Daycare in the RC Zone, and Traffic and Parking Ordinance**
    a. **Pete McHugh stated that changes to both of these Ordinances are on upcoming Council Agendas and asked if Fiscal Notes should be provided.**
    b. **The group discussed the 2 Ordinances and Land Use Ordinances in general.**
        i. **Nathan stated that these Ordinance changes probably require little to no staff time and minimal cost but that it may be worthwhile to have staff come up with drafts of the notes for the January 24 Finance Committee Meeting.**
        ii. **Nathan explained that by having notes for these items will allow staff to look at Ordinance Changes in aggregate to determine when the cumulative impact will cause incremental costs to be more significant.**

- **Adjourn – Councilor Hach moved to adjourn the meeting, Councilor Kuhn seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:07PM.**

Respectfully submitted by Peter McHugh