

MINUTES OF THE JOINT TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING, COUNCIL BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING, AND BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2020 AT 6:30 P.M. VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE (PER EXECUTIVE ORDER OF THE GOVERNOR OF CONNECTICUT)

*Public access made available through live streaming on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4_xey3QjJmwe57R_6K94Dw
Public comments accepted at Comments@cheshirect.org and by voice mail message at 203 271-6638. Video will be available on Channel 14 and on demand at www.cheshirect.org as soon as possible.*

Present

Robert J. Oris, Jr. Chairman; Timothy Slocum, Vice Chairman; David Borowy, James Jinks, Sylvia Nichols, Peter Talbot, David Veleber, Donald Walsh.

Staff: Sean M. Kimball, Town Manager; Arnett Talbot, Asst. Town Manager; James Jaskot, Finance Director; George Noewatne, PW Director; Louis Zullo, Asst. Town Manager/Personnel; Town Attorney Al Smith.

Dept. of Education: Supt. Jeff Solan; Asst. Supt. Marlene Silano, COO Vincent Masciana; BOE members: Anthony Perugini, Chairman; Adam Grippo, Vice-Chairman, Kathryn Hallen, Faith Ham, Andrew Martelli, Tim White.

Chairman Oris called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Chairman Oris welcomed everyone and thanked the public for watching the special meeting of the Town Council and BOE.

1. ROLL CALL

The clerk called the roll and a quorum was determined to be present.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Group Pledged Allegiance to the Flag.

Chairman Oris welcomed everyone to the special meeting for the FY 2020-2021 budget workshop.

3. Acceptance and appropriation of donations to the Human Services COVID-19 Assistance Program.

On behalf of the Town Council, Board of Education and staff, Chairman Oris thanked the donors for their generosity to the Human Services Account to help those in need in the community. He said this is another example of the people in Cheshire coming forward, supporting and responding to the needs of their neighbors.

MOTION by Mr. Borowy; seconded by Mr. Talbot.

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council approves Resolution #043020-1

RESOLUTION #043020-1

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council accepts and approves the following donations totaling \$8,825 to the Human Services Gift Account for the COVID-19 Assistance Program:

Kim Wantroba - \$600
Richard and Elaine Lau - \$200
Christopher and Pamela Rutka - \$50
Kenneth and Elizabeth Allen - \$100
Laurent and Michelle Madeux - \$1,000
Harold and Fellis Jordan - \$600
Arnett Talbot - \$200
Michelle Piccerillo - \$100
Anonymous - \$50
Jeffrey and Yolanda Belmont - \$300
Marcia Neistein - \$25
John and Rosanne Purtill - \$500
Norman and Betsy Bond - \$100
Cheshire Lights of Hope - \$5,000

Discussion

Mr. Borowy expressed appreciation to the donors for their generosity. He stated the programs in place are reaching out to those in need. Ms. Piccerillo is using the gift account and finding ways to collect donations for people in the community who have needs during this difficult time.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

4. Recap of previously discussed budget items

Discussion later in the meeting.

**5. Proposed FY 2020-2021 Operating Budget, Annual Capital Budget
Five Year Capital Expenditure Plan.**

EDUCATION

BOE Chairman Perugini thanked the Council and BOE for their work on the Town and Education Budgets.

Supt. Solan thanked the Council for the opportunity to present the BOE budget for FY 2020-2021. He stated the BOE budget was adopted in January, much in the world has changed since that time, and this is the BOE budget which will be presented to the Council. In his presentation, Supt. Solan will review what has transpired since the onset of the Coronavirus, changes made, some savings and additional costs, and how all feeds into next year's budget cycle. Mr. Masciana will review the BOE capital budget presentation with the Council.

Goals of the Cheshire School System – Complex Thinking, Social and Emotional Learning...which are critical to the students, community and school system. Beyond that it is the mental health, nutrition, music, theater, arts, athletics, transportation, specialized services and diverse opportunities for the 4,285 Cheshire students. The focus is on the students in the school system providing opportunities for success.

Initial/Internal Budget Request – FY 19-20 - \$73,356,511; FY20-21 \$78,930,202; this is an increase of \$5,573M or +7.6%; average four year budget increase – 1.47%, lowest since 1976.

Management Strategies – Decline in Enrollment; Line items kept the same or lower than five (5) years ago; Engagement in more shared services with ACES (i.e. transportation services for special need students); Enhanced services reducing costs, i.e. restructuring of office copy machine leases with savings. These are offset by an increase in special education needs and full-day Kindergarten.

Superintendent's Budget Recommendation – Supt. Solan reviewed the BOE 7.6% (increase) budget. He presented to the BOE a budget recommendation of \$76,330M, with increase of \$2.973M, or 4.05%.

BOE Recommended 2020-2021 Budget – Following BOE review and adjustments the proposed BOE budget is \$75,502,554; increase of \$2,146,043, or 2.93%. 80% of this budget is for salaries and benefits; the remaining 20% is for support services, instructional expense, maintenance and operations.

Recent Budget History – FY 2015-16 to 2019-20. The chart shows the BOE recommended and Town Council approved budgets; FY 2019-20 budget increase was 2.39%. Budget element increase for FY 20-21.

Increase by Budget Element – BOE Budget - \$1.572M or 73% is allocated to contractual increases; \$373,526 or 18% for Restoration; (medical benefits plan, closing gap between annual claims and funding to the account; currently in deficit mode); \$200,000 or 9% allocated to improvements.

Budget Highlights - Services for Enhancement (Advance) - two (2) Security Monitor positions for Norton and Chapman Schools; .5 BCBA; .8 Math support/remediation and coaching (non-certified) at Dodd; one (1) FTE Special Education position (2.5 positions/1 at Darcey and 1 Transition Position; Strategic Planning (expires in 2020).

Restore – increase medical benefit funding to meet a slightly larger portion of medical claims.

FY 2020-2021 Recommended Budget - The budget increases by \$2.146M, 2.93%; Salaries are 65% of the budget; Benefits are 15% of the budget; Transportation and Additional Support Services/Instructional are 20%.

Items \$100,000 or more – Teacher Salaries - \$989,387; Medical Benefits - \$350,100; Instructional Asst. Salaries - \$126,246; Tuition Outplacements - \$100,350. These items represent 73% of the total budget increase. Supt. Solan pointed out the fact that outplacement of students is very costly; Cheshire provides services in the local school system for students, and they receive a better and quality education at lower cost.

FY 2020-21 Projected Revenue – Total revenue is \$10,351,823. The largest revenue is ECS funding from the State - \$9.313M.

Supt. Solan reviewed some of the “what if” items. The list is attached to the minutes.

Enrollment – 2020-2021 projected enrollment PK-12 is 4,152 students; this is a reduction of 47 students from the current year; this number changes as students move into Cheshire and enroll in the school system.

NESDEC report – Supt. Solan read an excerpt from this report into the record. Projections are provided based on birth rates, and Cheshire is expected to have larger enrollment in a few years.

Class Sizes – K-6 average class size is 17.9 students; Dodd grade 7 – 21.4 students; grade 8 – 24.1 students;. Class sizes are expected to be the same as the current year. The graph (trend data) illustrates the PK-8 class sizes FY13-14 to FY 20-21.

CHS Staffing/Students per Gen Ed Teacher – Cheshire is in the DRG-B; CHS ratio is 16.04 students per teacher, and ranks 20 out of 21 DRG high schools.

Special Education Staffing – Supt. Solan explained that additional Instructional Assistants (+6.7) were hired in FY 19-20 (\$100,000 increase) and will be carried over to next year to service special education students. The budget has a request for a .5 special ed teacher at Darcey to address IEP requirements for Kindergarten; .5 special ed teacher for transition services; and .5 for BCBA services.

Teacher Staffing Trends 2020-2021 – Net staffing change -1.0. Enrollment change -47; staff has been decreased at rate of one (1) certified teacher per every 30.2 students declined in enrollment over the past 7 years, while adding special education programming.

Per Pupil Expenditure (FY 18-19) – Average DRG-B PPE spending is \$17,948.

Cheshire spends \$16,514 PPE; State average is \$17,439; difference of \$945 per student; Cheshire ranks 122 out of 166 CT school districts. If Cheshire spent \$17,439 per student the BOE budget would cost \$6,073,695 more per year. 18 of the 21 DRG-B communities spend more per year per student than Cheshire.

Cheshire's Return on Investment – Supt. Solan stated Cheshire is #10 best in ROI of the 166 CT school districts; SBAC Performance Grades 3-8, Cheshire ranks #5 in Connecticut; #13 Math rank and #9 ELA rank...average rank of #11 in the State.

Special Education Performance – English/Language Arts #2 and Math #2 in Connecticut.

Supt. Solan cited the excellent value of the Cheshire Public Schools. They include the following: Record high student achievement, multiple elementary schools are CT Schools of Distinction, top community for Music in America, 93% of CHS students participate in extra-curricular activities, CHS Athletics won CIAC Michael's Cup recognition for 6th consecutive year, and is the Top Best Buddies Chapter in CT.

Key Take-aways – The initial budget request of over 7% has been reduced to 2.93%; Cheshire Public Schools are an outstanding value for the community spending \$6M less than the average DRG-B district with incredible results; the addition of one (1) certified position in special education will address needs at the elementary and post-secondary levels; a total of 6.7 IA's hired this year are included in the new budget.

Remote Learning (RL) started 7 weeks ago. Supt. Solan is inspired by the way the students, parents, educators and community are dedicated to insure student needs are addressed to the greatest extent possible in these unprecedented times.

Tuesday, May 5th is Teacher Appreciation Day. Supt. Solan commended CPS teachers who dedicate their lives to the success of their students and support each other every day.

Supt. Solan thanked the excellent educators, great students, involved parents, and community support to the Cheshire Public Schools.

In conclusion, Supt. Solan stated ***“Investing in Schools = Investing in Cheshire”***.

BOE FIVE-YEAR CAPITAL PLAN & ANNUAL BUDGET FY2020-21 TO 2024-25

Mr. Masciana introduced the BOE CEP to the Council.

FY 19-20 – Approved BOE request - \$3,545M; There was an additional \$150,000 for a School Modernization Plan; Funding Request by category is attached to the minutes. The BOE is working and planning for these projects.

FY 20-21 BOE Funding Request - \$585,000; District Paving/Roofing etc. \$470,000 or 80%; Interior Building Improvements \$50,000 or 9%; HVAC Improvements \$65,000 or 11%. The request is lower this year due to the proposed School Modernization Plan. The CEP has received BOE approval and is submitted to the Council.

Funding Request by School Building - \$585,000; \$115,000 is for design work.
Highland \$45,000/8% - replace 750SF roof and roof deck on Government Freezer Building.

CHS \$45,000/8% - Initial design work to complete unit ventilator and a/c phase-in projects; total \$1.2M in future years.

Chapman \$50,000/9% - FY 20-21 egress solution for school gym that was identified in developing person-trap security solution.

Doolittle \$50,000/8% - New request for design work to complete 75,000SF Hypalon roof replacement in future years, totaling \$2M.

Dodd \$270,000/46% - New request for Parapet repairs, mid-field roof replacement at new addition Science wing; entire replacement at Lecture Hall, Computer Room & Music Room; \$20K request for initial design to complete RTU replacement totaling \$400,000 in future years.

Districtwide Projects \$125,000/21% - Funding for sidewalk replacement with priorities to be determined and possible replacement of areaway grates.

Capital Requests for FY 20-21 to FY 24-25 - \$25,787,500. Mr. Masciana pointed out that the requests are for maintenance and repair needs for the district school buildings and grounds. A chart outlining these requests is attached to the minutes.

Mr. Masciana noted the BOE has \$3.5M in projects, many are not completed, so the \$585,000 request makes sense.

Council Budget Committee Chairman Borowy stated it is unlikely the Capital Budget will be adopted at the end of May at the same time as the Operating Budget adoption. He believes the CEP will be adopted soon after that time, probably in June.

BOE Chairman Perugini stated the FY 20-21 CEP request is the smallest request in many years. The PBC and BOE have reached the max of what projects can be done, and many projects are already underway.

COVID-19 Budget and Financial Impact –

Supt. Solan commented on May 20th as the day for opening of some businesses in Connecticut.

For centuries, schools were brick and mortar institutions, relying on face to face instruction. For the last 6+ weeks this has shifted to providing adequate technology to students and staff for Remote Learning (RL), professional development provided to support teachers for RL, navigating legal and privacy considerations, addressing parent and staff morale on a different scale.

Future Orientation – This is undetermined at this time. The last Governor's report is to return to school on May 20th; social distancing has implications for staff instruction; sanitation efforts will be enhanced; instruction must be designed to support assessment and remediation for students following RL, and delivering support to needs of students. There is a therapeutic component to all this with returning to school in August. Continuation of RL has other variables such as transportation, intervention, instruction.

Fiscal Considerations – BOE budget request \$2.146M, 2.93% increase. The projected flat mill rate increase would require a \$1.8M reduction in the BOE budget. This can be accomplished through Council approval of carryover of 2% FY19-20 savings to FY 20-21 budget. If this is approved it will help mitigate the \$1.8M reduction.

Anticipated COVID-19 Savings – These savings were calculated based upon return to school date of June 1, 2020; if school remain closed the savings would be greater. The list of savings include:

Substitute Teachers

Overtime

Transportation

Spring Sports

Trash/Utilities

Total anticipated savings of \$656,477; there are anticipated costs of \$200,000 for return to school in late August; net COVID savings \$456,477.

Spring Sports – Supt. Solan addressed the issue of spring sport coaches not being paid for the spring season. There have been no contests or practices. On March 12th there was a signed Memorandum of Understanding (Union and Superintendent), and no one anticipated schools to be closed for the rest of the school year. In the MOU document there was payment for winter coaches as they had completed the season, but no payment for spring coaches if the season was not coached. Supt. Solan met with coaches (via Zoon) with agreement to review the issue and get back to them next week. Supt. Solan spoke with Mr. Perugini, union leadership. He will evaluate what is best for the school system with union leadership and others, and make a determination on how to address this situation.

Additional FY 19-20 Reductions – It was pointed out by Supt. Solan that school is still in session; facilities are closed with some savings; the administrative team has met to review reductions for the remainder of this year, and carry over to next year to mitigate the FY 20-21 budget. Items looked at include: defer hiring for the Security Manager

position, reduction in instructional supplies, curriculum materials, library/media supplies, reduce maintenance and repair accounts...additional reduction savings of \$491,283.

Supt. Solan reviewed details on the calculation of these savings.

- Teacher salaries with unanticipated retirements (4)
- No substitute teachers required
- Elimination of overtime
- No substitute nurses required

Instructional Assistants and Nursing staff are playing a pivotal role in the lunch distribution program, and Supt. Solan acknowledged them for their service and assistance with this program.

Friday, May 1st – Lunch Lady Appreciation Day. Supt. Solan recognized the Cheshire Lunch Staff for their excellent work on behalf of the students.

Medical Benefits Costs are higher than anticipated; Unemployment Compensation costs have increased;

Total budget savings between COVID-19 and additional spending reductions totals \$1,147,761. The estimated COVID preparation costs are about \$200,000.

The chart displayed illustrates COVID impact costs, plus CARES act money through Title 1 Grant. Cheshire usually receives \$112,000 Title 1 Grant; the State will pay out 83% of that grant amount...Cheshire will receive about \$99,367. Of the \$1.8M to be recuperated for next, BOE will recoup \$1M. Reductions will affect programs and services, but reflects the current circumstances.

List of items to achieve the extra \$800,000 – the lowest impact on students would be budgeting three (3) additional retirements into the budget, Security Manager, Hall Monitors. Everything else on this list will impact positions, larger class sizes (Dodd) and would be significant. None of this is set in stone; BOE and administration and community would work through identification of areas for consideration.

Savings and Impact Summary - \$1,047,166 from the next school year.

BOE Chairman Perugini talked about the medical benefits trust fund having a hefty balance in January and it being impacted by larger than expected medical claims, transportation costs, increased enrollment, COVID savings as a one time event, and concerns looking out the new 2 or 3 years.

Supt. Solan advised that student enrollment information over the last 10-12 years is on the BOE website. With regard to \$80,000 line item, CHS course offerings, Supt. Solan clarified this is one teaching position.

Chairman Oris commented on not knowing how bad the budget impact will be, the Council trying to address needs and financial impact on the Town. He cannot support a large budget increase, is looking at a zero mill rate increase while maintaining services. It was stated by Mr. Oris that labor is the bulk costs for the Town and BOE. And, he believes "labor" needs to be at the table; the budget assumes standard increases in wages to employees; and this is a tough ask in the current economic environment. The goal is to keep the status quo, keep people employed with their benefits, and do this for the foreseeable future. Mr. Oris hopes for a zero mill rate increase without salary increases for the next 12 months, and noted the teacher contract increase is 2.7%.

Mr. Borowy agreed with Mr. Oris' comments, and people working together and collaboratively. The target is a zero mill rate increase. The BOE will still get a budget increase, but less than requested. Mr. Borowy pointed out that 1,000 people in Cheshire filed for unemployment in the last three weeks. There must be a discussion on spending, ability to continue services, and a zero mill rate increase. He said the BOE budget presentation was excellent; it showed the high test scores and overall student performance and achievements, excellent staff, involved parents, and community support.

Mr. Grippo stated there is concern about the budget out 2 or 3 years, carry over costs, and Finance Committee review of the Superintendent's budget. There is a commitment to maintaining class room ratios, but sacrifices may be involved.

Councilor Talbot asked FY 20-21 budget for summer school this year, and if Supt. Solan is hearing from other administrators about returning to school on August 28th.

In response Supt. Solan said there is \$50,000 savings in not returning to school; summer school has enrichment/elective activities; it is on a fee basis so enrollment covers costs. Special Ed programs are held in summer for students getting extended services, so he could not state potential savings.

Mr. Masciana explained the savings, which are based on June 1 return to school for 13 days built-in. There is no signed agreement with the bus contract to date; savings of \$52,000, plus savings for no extra staff hours; total savings about \$75,000 based on going past June 1 in COVID savings. There is no clarity on what is happening in the Fall. There is an ACES meeting (Supt. Solan will attend) to discuss possibilities and operational point of view. The possibilities (conjecture/ideas) include continuation of RL mode; return on alternate student presence basis, i.e. a.m. and p.m. sessions or alternating school days; if school reopens in August it is expected wearing of PPE (masks etc.). At this time everything is unknown, but plans are being considered, and getting through May and June.

The Council was informed by Mr. Masciana on the executive order for the towns to pay the bus contractors, even when buses are not running...this does not carry into next year.

Mr. Talbot raised the issue of silver lining in all this, lessons learned for the future, potential for savings, doing education differently, seeing snow days becoming RL days, and graduation date being set in stone.

According to Supt. Solan this could happen. As part of the MOU signed with teachers, this would not be precedent setting for snow days; neither party wanted to say this was the new normal going forward. Supt. Solan said much is being learned from this situation; some has been painful; some has been insightful/eye opening; there are students thriving with RL, and there are students who want to go back to school as soon as possible. This is also the situation with staff and parents. Things are focused on a day to day basis, and not in the place to think about leverage and what is gained from this experience.

Mr. Borowy commented on the budget being adopted, there always being changes/medical updates, etc. and asked about what other numbers can be updated in the next 30 days when the budget must be done.

The Council was told by Mr. Masciana that the numbers presented were actual expenditures through March 31st and projecting from that. There will be an update as of April 30th on the first full month of RL, with a look at payroll for the remainder of the year, open purchase requisitions (3,000 per year), and a better estimate within two weeks on the COVID numbers presented.

Mr. Borowy is looking for changes in the upcoming BOE budget, i.e. adjustments and refinements and projections to help the situation.

BOE Chairman Perugini said the BOE works with the number, and gets a better update with the May and June numbers...i.e. more retirements. He said things are on the table for negotiation of changes.

Mr. Jinks commended the BOE, Supt. Solan and staff for the amazing speed in undertaking RL, when other school districts were behind Cheshire. He asked about labor concessions and everything on the list being eliminated without the concessions.

This is predicated on the capacity to rolling over the 2% and Supt. Solan said without that and still trying to get to zero mill rate increase, everything would be double, and looked at.

Regarding transportation, Mr. Jinks asked about no school and savings, and future transportation savings...if it was all salaries and fixed costs.

It was explained by Mr. Masciana that the transportation vendor is Dattco. There is always a look at consolidation of routes with routes eliminated over the years...and a seat must be assigned for every student. For CHS students with a parking pass, a waiver is signed by parents for no bus seat or stop. Population of special education students has increased and continues to increase with mandated bus service which offsets other transportation services. There is a new Dattco agreement this year; the first year had 0% increase; the 2nd year has a 2% increase from prior year as part of the contract.

Regarding the 2% carry over, Mr. Borowy said this is something the Council must consider at a meeting very soon for authorization.

Mr. Walsh commended everyone in the Cheshire School System and cited his support and respect of educators and their important role in the lives of students. With a return to school in the Fall, Mr. Walsh said DOE has many changes and costs involved, without savings. In doing the budget now, he questions what happens in the Fall and if there is flexibility for bus routes, smaller class sizes, adding more classrooms etc.

This is all part of the unique challenges, and Supt. Solan said it is unprecedented for everyone, dynamic in nature, and things changing. The social distancing information, two tiers of school, etc. came out of the Connecticut Teacher's Association (CEA) not State DOE. It was not official information.

The issue of student enrollment was raised by Mr. Walsh who noted the 8% reduction in recent years, Connecticut losing 12% enrollment in the next 5 years, and Cheshire looking at other school districts. He asked how enrollment is involved with budget planning, and bus contract negotiations this year.

According to Supt. Solan there is no look too far into the future. For school modernization planning, enrollment is an important piece, and COVID has also affected this perspective. At this time he would not recommend investment of money and pursuit of other organizations looking at enrollment.

There is a bus agreement in place with Dattco for this year, which was enforced through March when COVID-19 arose. Supt. Solan explained the Governor issued an executive order that school systems had to pay for the daily bus runs. He cited the fact that field trips, athletic events, and other things are not taking place, but they do not keep the bus company solvent as revenue generators. Supt. Solan said a reason for the executive order was to keep the bus companies in business...if not, the State would be in great trouble as a society. The Town Attorney is looking at the Cheshire agreement to insure it is appropriate. Cheshire has an excellent Bus Manager and wants to insure her continued employment...all of this is incorporated into the funding stated.

In answer to a question about the grand list following 2002 and 2008 recessions, Mr. Jaskot stated the information is on page 15 of the budget book...but he will research it further and provide more data.

BOE Chairman Perugini said there will be Finance Committee meetings to include enrollment discussion, and in May/June there will be better enrollment numbers. He said there is no cure for COVID-19 or a vaccine, and he expects DOE and CDC will put some guidance on number of students near each other, PPE, and caution about Fall opening of school.

The later we go into the school year, the better sense there is for enrollment numbers, and Supt. Solan said going back 12 years ago there was a big change in private school options for people. This will be monitored through the summer.

Mr. Veleber asked about the Fall, the impact on start of school, dealing with social distancing, PPE costs, busing, and contingency factoring into these costs and how much more they will be. He asked about the new school year with students still learning from home, and associated costs.

Supt. Solan will have more information next week, and said the measured contingencies will be looked at and associated costs. He cited examples of two (2) bus runs per day, reduced class sizes (12 students) and evaluated costs...provision of masks and face shields and costs...all contingency costs. He will be working with New Haven Region staff to review and discuss possible contingencies and evaluation of costs.

There is no contingency built into the BOE Budget and Mr. Masciana said the FY20-21 starts with a cap, and department heads/principals cannot spend above this cap. It starts with spending of no more than 60% of non-payroll items without authorization. It then goes up to 70%, then to 80%...then spending stops...and this year there will be unique challenges ahead.

Regarding PPE, Mr. Borowy does not expect local municipalities would have to pay for these costs, without help from state and federal government.,

There was clarification from Mr. Oris that the Council is talking about reducing the BOE requested increase for FY 20-21...and will not be reducing the FY 19-20 BOE budget. The goal is to achieve a zero based mill rate and still provide an increase in the BOE budget, while still providing community services. Mr. Oris believes this can be accomplished, without layoffs, increasing class sizes, and elimination of fundamental educational services. It was noted by Mr. Oris that many people move to Cheshire because of the high quality school system.

Medical Benefits Trust Fund – Mr. Oris asked for an update on the trust fund and possible use of some of these funds.

Mr. Masciana explained the original recommendation was to add \$680,000 to the trust fund, with most going towards the contributions to the medical claims. It was anticipated there would be an increase to the stop/loss premium, which is part of the fund. Claims were expected to average \$750,000 per month; contributions are \$681,000 per month; there is underfunding of claims by \$90,000 per month. There was a reserve balance of \$3.5M entering the year, and the \$680,000 requested would have evened up the expected claims with contributions, without further erosion of the medical benefits reserve fund.

Over the last few months there have been high claims. The reserve is at \$2.5M or 3 months of reserves. The BOE approved \$350,000 towards medical benefits for next year. Mr. Masciana suggested that this line item not be cut, because if claims continue at the current rate the reserve fund will be eroded. The impact of COVID-19 on claims is unknown. There is some debate over claims dropping as elective procedures and surgeries have been put off, with a possible 1% to 2% reduction in medical claims.

The issue of vacancies and hiring on the BOE side was raised by Mr. Oris who asked for an update...on teacher retirements and replacement without impacting services.

Mr. Masciana reported that two (2) Hall Monitors \$40,000 and one (1) position would be out of the budget. There has been no filling of open positions; teacher retirements are being looked at, four (4) at the present time, and these positions would be filled.

New positions for next year have not been started yet, and Supt. Solan said new positions are reviewed by him and Mr. Masciana as being “critical” replacement, or deferred for savings. Nothing falls into this category right now.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Talbot read 21 e-mail comments into the record of the meeting. A copy of these comments was submitted to Council and BOE. Many e-mails were related to the issue of payment for spring sport coaches.

Councilor Talbot noted many of the e-mails were received prior to the meeting, and Councilors have received phone calls and e-mails on the coach payment issue.

Regarding the payment of spring sports coaches, Mr. Talbot asked “where” the breakdown of communication would be if there was union agreement on March 12th.

Supt. Solan said he would be meeting with the union president on May 1st.

Chairman Oris thanked everyone for sending in their comments on the budget. He explained the Town Council has no statutory authority on how the BOE spends its funding. The MOU laid out the rules and it appears coaches thought they would be paid for services on behalf of students, providing guidance and support of student athletes, and play a huge role in their lives. Mr. Oris asked the BOE and Supt. Solan to take another look at the savings cited and inform Council of any other issues within the savings relative to confusion or miscommunication.

6. Discussion and possible award of bid for \$874,846 to hire JA Rosa for Construction for the School Security Improvements – Districtwide (Main Entrance Improvements at Chapman School, Dodd School and Cheshire High School Project).

Chairman Oris said there is some deliberation for the two projects, with Council deciding whether to advance the projects or not.

PW Director Noewatne explained this first project is a school security improvement with award of the contract to JA Rosa at \$874,846.00. The project was approved by the PBC through the bid process to get numbers for six (6) entrance improvements to various schools. Two (2) bids were received on April 8, 2020; one (1) bid was a partial bid on two (2) locations; JA Rosa bid on all six (6) locations, and was determined to be the lowest qualified bidder.

Both projects have grant awards/reimbursements, and Mr. Masciana cited the \$874,846 at 41% reimbursement, and \$1,029,191 at 43% reimbursement. With regard to a timetable for the grants, portions of the projects can be done this year and next year and still qualify for grant reimbursement.

Mr. Oris talked about the Council pursuing other options while insuring the reimbursement grant is maintained...and having to continue with another competitive bid.

Mr. Masciana said that was correct.

In response to a question from Mr. Slocum about materials and delivery, Mr. Noewatne said there is an updated schedule from JA Rosa for three (3) schools, abatement to finishes, with the project completed in mid to late August. The contractor is confident in getting materials and delivery in six (6) weeks.

With bidding and one bidder for two and not six security projects (\$1M), Mr. Walsh is uncomfortable with having one bid, and asked about why this happened.

According to Mr. Noewatne, there was a walk-through with six (6) attendees; two (2) bids were received for the projects; for the subject project there was the option to bid all or a number of sites; one company did two (2) locations and one did six (6) locations. He said it is possible the COVID-19 situation compromised the bidding. The projects can go out to bid for more bidders, but the work would not make the 2019 summer window. The bids could go out at the start of the new year, January 2021, and have a contractor guarantee work completed by August 2021.

Mr. Jinks commented on the project being a priority of the PBC to be completed this summer, and why not go ahead and do the project.

Regarding a re-bidding. Mr. Talbot asked Town Attorney Smith about issues with a re-bid. He is apprehensive with one bid; much has happened since the last time this project was bid; including a contractor's ability to deliver and get materials. Mr. Talbot has concerns about one bid, not getting a true competitive bid.

There are no legal issues under which bids are proposed, and Attorney Smith said the town reserves the right to accept any or none of the bids, and exercise its judgment in what is in the best interests of the town. There can be a do-over.

Mr. Borowy agreed there are concerns about one bidder, and doing a re-bid in more normal times, and getting a better price doing all the schools together.

Mr. Veleber concurred with these concerns, especially receiving a single bid, and re-bidding in better economic time, getting a better price.

The bids were received three weeks ago and Mr. Noewatne said the town was behind the curve in getting bids out, and there would be best pricing after January 1, 2021.

There are three concerns cited by Mr. Oris, who re-emphasized the Council's strong support for school security as a priority.

- 1) only one bidder;
- 2) while the contractor has said the work can be done in the time before school starts, there are no guarantees; and COVID situation has added more risk of an issue; COVID adds another issue; without the project started, but not completed, there are security risks for the children;
- 3) there was a prior issue with this contractor on a prior job, related to completing the job in the appropriate time frame.

Mr. Oris is not in favor of advancing this project with just one (1) bid, and his recommendation is to re-bid, get more and better bids.

MOTION by Mr. Borowy; seconded by Mr. Veleber.

MOVED that the Town Council directs the Public Building Commission (PBC) to re-bid the School Security Improvements-Districtwide (Main Entrance Improvements) at Chapman School, Dodd School and Cheshire High School projects.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

7. Discussion and possible award for \$1,029,091 to JA Rosa for the Construction of the Code Compliance Improvements – Door Accessibility Upgrades at Cheshire High School Project.

Chairman Oris stated this project falls into the same category as #6, with one (1) bid.

The project is to replace a number of doors at Cheshire High School which are non-compliant. Mr. Noewatne reported that two (2) bids were received; one (1) bid was withdrawn; JA Rosa was the qualified and lowest bidder, and provided a schedule that the work could be done before the start of school in August.

Mr. Oris recommends re-bidding with hopes of more companies bidding on the project, for better use of taxpayer dollars, and better time line for safety in the schools.

MOTION by Mr. Slocum; seconded by Mr. Veleber.

MOVED that the Town Council directs the Public Building Commission (PBC) to re-bid for the Construction of the Code Compliance Improvements – Door Accessibility Upgrades at Cheshire High School Project.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

8. Discussion re: Personnel Negotiations (Executive Session)

MOTION by Mr. Talbot; seconded by Mr. Veleber

MOVED that the Town Council enter Executive Session at 9:25 p.m. to include Town Manager Kimball, Asst. Town Manager Talbot, Asst. Town Manager Zullo, Town Council and Board of Education members, Supt. Solan, Mr. Masciana, to discuss personnel negotiations.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

The Executive Session closed at 10:33 p.m.

9. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Mr. Slocum; seconded by Mr. Veleber

MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 10:33 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk