

Town of Becket Finance Committee

December 4, 2008 Minutes

Present: Mike Falk, Jeremy Dunn, Amy Fyden, Ann Spadafora

Absent: Steve LaBelle

Also Present: Richard Furlong, Kathy Hayn Burt

From CBRSD: Donna Harlan, Susan Carol-Lombardi, Marge Foster (1st part of meeting)

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TOWN CLERK
TOWN OF BECKET

The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm.

1. CBRSD report

- a. New principal search is underway for Kittredge and Becket/Washington School. 16 people on search committee with wide representation of towns & constituencies
- b. Leadership At A Crossroads kickoff meeting was attended by 80 people. 34 enrolled in training; space for more. Must attend all sessions.
- c. Update on District Improvement Plan. Section 2.2 is a Committee to revise the Regional Agreement. Originally proposed by Dalton for changes to Transportation agreement. Now may include a Superintendency union (town management of own elem. schools); super-region considerations, etc. First committee meeting is Jan 7, 7pm at Nessacus library. 6/7 towns must ratify any changes. Dr. Harlan & Susan C-L will attend committee meetings.
- d. Local representatives (Guyer et al.) advocating for (3) large Berkshire school districts.
- e. Excess & Deficiency (E&D) improved from ~\$16k to \$400k over course of Dr. Harlan's tenure to date.
- f. CBRSD still in mediation with paraprofessional (~100 people). ~95 of these are for mandated special-education roles. Funding these roles in the present economic climate is difficult.
- g. Impact of 3-yr teacher's contract is +\$445k in FY2010 budget. There is also ~\$70k in healthcare savings; potentially more if teachers change to value-plus plan.
- h. Local reps (Guyer, Pignatelli, Downing, et al.) inform CBRSD that the State may cut 10-20% from Chap. 70 aid. Governor's 1st budget comes early this FY, in Jan. '09.
- i. CBRSD is presently budgeting for -10%. Goal is 0% increase Y-Y from FY09, net of Chap 70 reimbursement decrease. This will result in larger class size, multi-age groups, cuts to extra-curricular stipends, activities, etc. Budget process has started with CBRSD administration meeting regularly w/ principals.
- j. Future operational cost reductions may help some, e.g. lock-in fuel oil prices in January for FY2010 at lower rate.
- k. Still some discussion about possible closure of Becket/Washington school. Mass. School Building Authority (MSBA) talking about forgiving debt. But if the building is no longer a school, not clear if debt-exclusion is still valid. Legality would need study.
- l. 5-yr transportation contract was recently signed, which has no provision for reduction due to fuel costs declines. Unfortunate given recent enormous decrease in energy prices.
- m. Operational assumption is that 15-yr trend of declining enrollments will continue. Current year district enrollment is -3% from prior year.
- n. New School committee members have been elected, including new Finance Chair. All School Committee and School Finance Committee meetings are open to the public, at Nessacus.
- o. CBRSD accountant recommended certain unused capital funds be returned to towns. Becket will receive \$4,332 within days.

2. No Transfers from Reserve Accts

3. Accountant. Satisfied with her work at the moment. She finished closing FY08

4. State certified Free Cash @ \$57, 486.

5. Major FY09 Expenses in Excess of budget.

Fire Truck \$10k. Voc Transport \$8700. Voc Transport to Washington \$7k. Fire Stipend \$6k. Repairs to Town Hall, including Septic \$10k. Total ~\$42k. Will be covered by Free Cash and CBRSD reimbursement.

6. Preliminary tax rate is 7.98. Average assessment increased 3%. Average tax bill up less than 2%. Bills will be sent on or before Jan 1.
7. Highway/Police Facility
Was defeated at STM. Received majority vote, but not 2/3 required for debt-exclusion.
8. STRAP Grant for bridge(s) on Algeria Rd / Bonnie Rigg Hill Rd.
Grant application has been completed and submitted. The final amount is \$500,000. Needs a public hearing since amount has changed. Abutters have been notified. Mass. Highway employee is working on this project.
9. McNerney Rd. Bridge
Berkshire Eagle reported on 12/4/08 that current estimate is now \$1.4M. Will go to bid within days. MassHighway is paying; reported as their #1 priority.
10. Yokum Pond Rd. bridge
Confirmed delay until Spring 2009, due to MassHighway engineering review for the project
11. Richard Furlong retirement
Additional members appointed. Membership is now: Doug Walter (select board); Mike Falk (FinCom); Nina Weiler (town employee); Bruce Garlow (citizen at large); Bill Elovirta; Beth VanNess; David Bonney.
12. Minutes
 - a. Minutes of 9/9/08 accepted with minor correction
 - b. Minutes of 11/6/08 approved
13. REVISED schedule of 2009 FinCom meetings:
 - a. Thurs Jan 8, 2009
 - b. **WEDS** Jan 28, 2009
 - c. No meetings in February unless needed. Mike & Jeremy are away
 - d. Thurs March 5, 2009
 - e. Thurs March 12, 2009
 - f. Thurs March 19, 2009
 - g. Thurs March 26, 2009
 - h. Thurs April 2, 2009
 - i. Thurs April 15, 2009
 - j. Thurs May 7, 2009
 - k. Thurs June 4, 2009

There was no public input.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jeremy Dunn
Clerk

