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Town of Becket Finance Committee

March 19, 2009 Minutes

Present: Mike Falk, Ann Spadafora, Steve LaBelle, Amy Fyden

Also present: Richard Furlong and members of the CBRSD (John Les, Joshua Lombard, Stan Harvey, John Chivers, Donna Harlan, Susan Carroll, Marge Foster), and Kathy Hayn-Burt, Doug Walter, Geri Walter, Bill Elovirta, George Fuller

TOWN CLERK
TOWN OF BECKET

The meeting was called to order at 7.09 pm.

1. Minutes of the 3/12/09 FinCom approved.

2. Central Berkshire Regional School District Committee:

- Discussion of FY 2010 budget - Some retired staff were replaced with new teachers at lower salary levels, classes remain essentially the same size. Total budget reflected an overall increase of 3.49%.
- The E & D (Excess and Deficiency) Appropriation increased by \$50,000 to \$250,000. This is for emergency funding.
- Becket's increase would be approx. \$127,000 (3.16%) including pre-school costs.
- (Note: There has been a declining enrollment over the past 12 years. John Chivers stated that the school choice to go out of Becket is fairly high).
- Fuel costs a big savings has been locked in for heating oil. The \$290,000 saved will be re-allocated to other things like textbooks, Teachers' Column Movement, Health Insurance for active employees, Retiree health insurance, Contingency Maintenance.
- Looking for new secretary and need an extra \$17,568.
- Mike brought up the concept of 'Super Regional Districts'. John Chivers said South County is studying that possibility. Dennis Guyer had mentioned the possibility of combining the CBRSD with Pittsfield but Richard Furlong felt that would not happen for a long while. He said mid-west experiments do not produce better quality education although costs were lowered. Susan Carroll said that even if the Becket & Washington School was closed those towns would still own the debt (School Committees lease the buildings from the towns). Also, there would be additional busing and other costs. The Bond itself is held under the CBRSD.

Mike asked whether students might opt out of the school. Donna Harlan said they would probably transfer to the most convenient schools. Susan Carroll said things are alright for the coming year.

3. Bill Elovirta and requested budget for Police Dept:

- Bill had requested 2.5%% increase in salaries then scaled back to 1.7% to align with other department budgets.
- Community Policing Funds will be cut next year so this might be our last chance to benefit from the 3-years COPS grant. The department currently has 1 full time and 7 part time officers. Two of those serve in the military - one is already deployed through September.
- Mike asked about a wage study for police dept. salaries. (Part time salaries are OK

But full time salaries are under the range). Bill stated he and Maddy will both be retiring fairly soon. He asked for a dept increase of \$4,900 - which covers the 1.7% COLA in expenses. The dept also needs a new camera.

4. Discussion of the latest FY 2010 Town of Becket Warrant:

- a) Check whether anyone is being paid over the range.
- b) Highway Dept. lock-in for diesel price - the supplier is not willing to underfund. We do not have the exact price at this time with volatile market. All users to specify their gallon-usage projections.
- c) Tax Collector - Will check on how much increase for demand fees for the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax payments are allowed.
- d) Library - Possibility of using some CPA funds.
- e) Submissions of cost savings and revenue ideas -

Anonymous ideas from municipal employees to increase revenue:

- Auction Land parcels (Check what is in Land Court. Chris Bleau, as Treasurer, has this authority. She can prepare list).
- Increase fees for use of Town Hall (Richard said Town has never charged)
- Fees charged by dept (We are at mid-range or above).
- Investment policies (Controlled by State Regs).

Cost Savings suggestions by anonymous municipal employees:

- Mass Mailing - stop informational mailings (Not practical to stop the few mailings).
- Insert information with tax bills (Not legal).
- Change Assessment Book printing bylaw (On warrant).
- Change Assessor's hours to coincide with other depts (Will ask the Assessors).
- If layoffs or staff reductions are on the table - discuss reducing paid perks, or perhaps fewer hours or vacation pay (Not an issue with FY 2010 budget).
- Highway Dept hours and overtime - could they be more flexible (Bill E. said it is just not practical since we need to know the workers are right here and it is not possible to predict storms to save overtime).
- Proposal to close Town Hall on Friday (a real burden especially for second home owners who need access to the Town on Fridays in summer. Friday can be a very busy day at Town Hall. To close would also mean drastic reduction in employee hours).
- Should dog officer's salary be on a pro-rata basis (Need to log calls and account for mileage etc. Not too practical).
- Review need for Building Inspector to work so many hours - 32 in winter, 40 in summer. Could hours be reduced due to slow building starts. (Richard said there are many renovation projects and the Inspector is kept busy).

f) Additional spending cuts - Mike and Richard had some ideas which included:

- Use Stabilization Fund for \$65K which is Town's estimated cost after FEMA monies have been used for Ice Storm cleanup.
- Layoffs not practical - we pay 65% of COBRA (can this be deducted from Medicare?)
- Do not finance parks and recreation for one year.
- If Highway/Police Dept is ever built - consider adding Fire and Ambulance to have a centralized EMS.
- Offer to handle Otis ambulance needs - we already do through Municipal Aid.
- Reduce FY 2009 expenses starting now. (Too late)

- Winterize and close The Mullen House (It is privately funded and IS shut down during winter months).
- Close Transfer Station one day a week in both summer and winter. (Not practical.....there would be long lines).

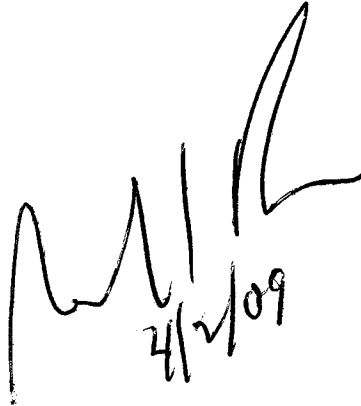
5. No Reserve Transfers.
6. Federal Stimulus update - nothing at this time.
7. STRAP Grant - no info.
8. McNerney Road update - nothing more.
9. Yokum Pond Road update - no news.
10. Ambulance Grant Writing - Maddy Elovirta is moving forward, not yet submitted.
11. Public Input - none.

Meeting was adjourned at 9.10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ann G. Spadafora
Vice-Chairperson

/ags



4/2/09