

Board of Selectmen
Memorial Town Hall

March 7, 2017, 6:00p.m.
Approved: April 11, 2017

Selectman Brian Moriarty, Chair
Selectman Edmund Jaworski, Jr.
Marlene Michonski, Town Administrator

Selectman Moriarty opened the meeting at 6pm.

Announcements-

Selectman Jaworski & Selectman Moriarty attended the MMA legislative breakfast where the budget was discussed.

No one was present for public forum.

Warrant

Ms. Michonski prepared a draft and will have an update for the next meeting. A citizens' petition was received and verified by the town clerk. It will become an article at Annual Town Meeting. The Board acknowledged receipt of this, a resolution supporting greater transparency of political donations. No advice may be given to citizens regarding this petition. Town Counsel need not review it as it is up to the petitioners to speak to this at Town Meeting. Ms. Szych said she makes it clear that everything is on them and the article is to be added to the warrant just as it appears. Responding to a question from Selectman Jaworski, Ms. Szych said only certain articles are reviewed by the state. Selectman Moriarty asked Ms. Michonski to photocopy an associated article in the paper for the Board.

The Board will review and talk with Ms. Michonski about an edit to warrant article 1 later. Marijuana establishment moratorium is added. The Board can call Ms. Michonski to discuss as necessary.

Housing Authority Membership

Ms. Szych noted a change in the law in November which decreased the number of members allowed on the Housing Authority. She said the legislature wants a tenant to be a member of the Board. Mr. John Wilkes will resign his seat as he is interested in being appointed to the State position. Ms. Szych will forward the chapter and verse to Ms. Michonski since the Board of Selectmen actually makes the appointments. Selectman Moriarty asked if Mr. Wilkes resigns his current position would the authority then be at the right number. Ms. Szych will re-check this.

Municipal Hearings Officer

Ms. Szych said in 1983 the town accepted chapter 90, sec. 20a which allows the Board of Selectmen to appoint a parking clerk to take in fees and do hearings or designates someone to do this. She is in the process of exploring this. Ms. Bertram is now collecting fees. The collector and the person doing the hearing shouldn't be the same person. Ms. Szych is to discuss this further with Ms. Bertram. Selectman Moriarty said 2 separate people is a good idea. She said training is coming up in April as the person doing the hearings must be certified.

The Board briefly recessed until the budget hearings

Finance Committee members Mr. Fran Gougeon, Mr. Sean Barry, Mr. Paul Fisher, Mr. Darryl Williams joined the meeting.

School Department

John Robert, School Superintendent, Heather Cahill, Andrew Berrios, Mike Paszek

Overall budget for FY18 including maintenance, curriculum, construction, costs to run the schools, with grants, revolving accounts and school choice to offset local appropriations is \$4,372,844.32 – requested from the town. Based on the governor’s budget, the town is to receive via Chapter 70 – \$3,550,768.32.

Mr. Robert noted the regular offset from school choice at 500k, SPED = 371491.27 spending over 800k via school choice. The school is reimbursed @ 100% for IEP’s (Individualized Education Programs). Self-contained special education programs with transportation costs are budgeted under school choice. He noted grants via the state, special education, circuit breaker. Usually coaches, referees, preschool and food service programs are self-supporting. There is a 3.2% increase in the overall budget, 3.2% in local appropriations.

Mr. Robert noted that enrollment had decreased in school choice students. Nine are being lost as seniors. He said we have to sell ourselves as some students leave to go to larger schools, possibly for athletics. School choice is always an unknown, as newly built schools are always a draw. He said Hatfield has students from Granby, Chicopee, and Holyoke. Mr. Robert discussed previous budgets saying in FY15 the school started to freeze school choice funds used @ 500k. Last year he cut 1.5 positions to keep the budget request from town appropriations low.

Hatfield spends less to educate students than 23 other communities. Mr. Robert said we are very lean, there’s not a lot to cut. He noted the graduation rate last year was 100%. Smith Academy is a level 1 school, with SAT scores higher than the national average.

Mr. Robert went over the FY18 budget. He said it reflects an anomaly in that there are a number of teachers going from BA to Masters’ degrees. The State requires teachers to get their Masters within 5 years and also has many requirements for recertification. Mr. Robert explained lane changes as well as step increases. Mr. Williams asked if teachers also get a COLA. Selectman Moriarty said it’s built into the teacher’s contract. Steps were discussed and Mr. Gougeon said previously they were like an apprenticeship. Mr. Robert said a new band teacher would be hired as Ken Longstreth is retiring. A new computer science teacher will also be hired at Smith Academy in order to keep school choice students. A part time physical therapist is being hired instead of contracting one and one paraprofessional position will be eliminated at the Elementary School.

Mr. Williams asked if there is any wiggle room in the budget. Mr. Robert answered that it is hard and fast. He has held back on hiring and tried to present a lean budget. Mr. Fisher asked about advertising for school choice. Mr. Robert said it’s expensive. Mr. Gougeon said we’re lucky the school is named Smith Academy as it seems part public and part private. Mr. Robert said other schools have created terrific programs and we have to be competitive but careful, not to target a particular community.

Police Department

Chief Osley explained his department is level funded except for the \$2 per hour increase for the full time lieutenant and sergeant. Everything else would be the usual COLA. He said there is an increase for officers training. Mr. Williams asked about the new chief having specific training available. The Chief said the regional lockup cost is due to population.

Chief Osley said the regional lock up is the best thing that ever happened. Mr. Fisher asked if the department is well staffed and the chief said we’ve been doing good; he likes to keep the number close to twelve.

Redevelopment Authority

Lary Grossman, Chris Smith

Mr. Grossman said last year the Redevelopment Authority asked for \$500 and didn't spend it. This year they are asking for 5k. They hope to do a town inventory of buildings and what might be developed, for example the Holy Trinity Church for the Council on Aging. Responding to a question from Mr. Williams, Mr. Grossman said they are independently elected and can cover a wide range of things from commercial to housing and have the ability to bond. He said they would be a good partner with the Board of Selectmen. Selectman Moriarty noted not with the 3rd paragraph in their letter. Responding to a question from Mr. Barry about how HRA's role finding undeveloped properties and converting them to the tax rolls applied to municipal use, Mr. Grossman said development doesn't always mean taxable development.

There was brief discussion around Council on Aging's possible plans. Mr. Cahill may be asked to do a study. Selectman Jaworski said there's a study listed for COA on the Capital Plan. Mr. Grossman said others in the Council on Aging want to look at a move or other construction. Mr. Grossman said a town wide building and land inventory is planned. Selectman Moriarty said the town should have a certain amount of affordable housing by a certain date. Ms. Michonski said that is the housing production plan.

Resident, Mike Cahill said previously the HRA wanted to develop an inventory of properties zoned industrial and business and begin to market to developers to increase the tax base of the town. They may need money to market and promote the community. He sees that as a primary focus of HRA. He said they could also work with PVPC, landowners and existing businesses.

Mr. Smith said an economic development study done with PVPC in 2006 was a good starting point. It may be worth updating and expanding for marketing. If we get more commercial it would help taxpayers in town. Mr. Williams asked about potentials. Route 5 & 10 with sewer is a potential. Mr. Grossman said we can show you what we're working on. He said they would like a line for legal services. We were not allowed to have access to the legal services like any other department in town.

Also, briefly discussed was a request for a Finance Committee limit on pay for town officials other than the town collector and clerk, perhaps capping at \$100/person per year. Mr. Barry asked if this was an article or a function of putting together a budget. Mr. Williams suggested inviting the Redevelopment Authority to a future meeting.

Accountant

Mr. Geser said he is requesting clerical support and more money. He is getting buried trying to get the accounting done. He said he is putting stamps on envelopes while trying to get cash/receivables done. He didn't run expense reports for a month to see who would notice and only Ms. Michonski, Ms. Szych and Ms. Jane Betsold did. He said there is no financial oversight. He reduced voided checks from 60 per year to 5. He explained that the accounting department doesn't pay bills but rather, writes journal entries; it's the department head's responsibility to make sure bills are paid. He said he just got a Comcast bill from the EMS department for 1k and that is 3 months' worth.

Mr. Williams said so it is the police and fire chiefs' responsibilities to pay those bills. Mr. Geser said it is Mr. Genovese's responsibility since it's under facilities management. Selectman Moriarty said these topics should be addressed but not without having the departments here to tell their side. Selectman Moriarty said the schools get bills then we bring them to you. Department heads are supposed to submit bill schedules to the accountant. Ms. Michonski said this has been addressed multiple times at department head meetings but there continue to be problems. Mr. Geser said Ms. Davis puts in 16-20

hours now inputting invoices. He gave an example of Ms. Davis being out sick. Mr. Fisher asked if there could be a floater and Ms. Michonski said the accountant and treasurer can't share a person.

Resident, Mike Cahill asked why the town doesn't look to software solutions. He said that would be less expensive than several years of a part time person. Ms. Bertram said we would need to turn on a feature of Tyler Technology but the accountant has to clean up the chart of accounts in order to start this up. Selectman Moriarty mentioned that sister software for that is on the capital plan for the school. Selectman Jaworski asked what the major holdup is and Mr. Geser said there are different reporting requirements for the town and the schools. Selectman Jaworski asked what needs to be done to get to the next step and Mr. Geser answered funding: it's an expensive proposition at over 50k. Mr. Cahill said it will pay for itself in 2 years.

Mr. Geser said some complex financial issues require his time but some gains have been made, such as enterprise funds. He needs someone who can get checks printed if he's out. He noted time he has donated to the job and said he spent half his 1st year doing FY15. He said the financial team needs help rather than doing clerical work that can be done more cheaply. Mr. Geser said there are probably 400 accounts that need to be closed out. There are 15 years of funds that haven't been closed. He has been sending out 1099's to get the vendor data base updated. Regarding his request for help, he said it would be nice to have someone working only with him.

Mr. Barry said training people on software requires a time investment that Mr. Geser doesn't have now. Mr. Williams said if he started with the school it would take half the work off the plate. Mr. Geser said things like the fuel analysis is what he really wants to do for the Finance Committee; find ways to save money for the town. He said he sees it as his job to present options and information to facilitate committee decisions. Mr. Williams asked about getting free cash certified. Mr. Geser said he has to set aside time to work with Ms. Bertram. Mr. Williams wants a solid cash number that will be good with the DOR. He said the write up was nice to see. Ms. Michonski asked about the 7k expense for professional services. Mr. Geser doesn't want to give that up.

Collector/Treasurer - Laura Lee Bertram, Jen Day

She has increased hours for assistance. She said she spent quite a bit of time on tax title foreclosures her 1st year and noted one at 107 Prospect. She hasn't foreclosed on an old gas station.

Unemployment Fund stays the same. Hampshire County Retirement – this is the 1st year it has increased. Ms. Bertram said we make 1 payment which saves us 10k and estimate being short 3k for the current year on Medicare.

FY17 Health Budget

Mr. Barry said soon there will have to be dramatic increases driven by the cost of generic drugs. An increase over last year is being subsidized by the health insurance trust. The numbers are up @26k over last year's 475,398.72. Mr. Barry asked if the town offers any incentives to not take the insurance. Mr. Williams asked how many people are taking the insurance. 61 employees are now taking the insurance.

A \$2500 increase for Zobrio annual support is the only increase to the treasurer's expense budget. There is a one-time cost to increase the number of concurrent users to 9 licenses. She said we can make do with what we have for right now.

FY18 Loan Payments – This is the last year for septic loan betterments.

Wages

Ms. Bertram showed options with no change, and with the addition of a clerk. She presented a sheet and explained that Hatfield is 1 of 5 municipalities operating its own school district. Our workload is comparable with towns twice the size yet smaller towns have more resources than we have. She said she can't do the bank receipts and reconciliations because she is doing all the clerical work. Ms. Bertram talked about using the former collector's office in order to have a quiet place to do work and discussed because trying to close the office to get more work done

Ms. Day said she constantly has to get up to wait on the counter. Ms. Bertram said if we get someone the office could be open more. She said she is currently trying to get the treasurer's job done in 25 hours/week. The collector's office does take precedence since the people are there and the treasurer work gets put to the back burner. Mr. Gougeon asked if electronic bill paying lessens her work and Ms. Bertram said it increases the work. Mr. Barry said it creates just as much work. Selectman Moriarty said it's a convenience for the taxpayers. Water/sewer wants to do quarterly billing. Ms. Michonski said Mr. Genovese hasn't brought this up to the Board. According to Mr. Lastowski quarterly billing would find water leaks faster.

Mr. Williams asked Ms. Bertram how close she was to reconciling the first quarter of FY17. Ms. Michonski asked if there's a possibility that free cash won't be certified for town meeting. Ms. Bertram will give Ms. Michonski a better idea after a couple weeks working with someone she's hired.

The Board and Finance Committee discussed what might happen if free cash is not certified by town meeting. Town meeting can be opened then closed and postponed until we have the figure. Selectman Moriarty said he can't believe it won't be done. Ms. Michonski said DOR can certify it in 1 – 2 weeks. Selectman Moriarty said we were led to believe we would have free cash in November and it wasn't done. He said this is a big deal – I don't want to open and close it.

Ms. Michonski said the accountant can't do anything more without information from the Treasurer's office. Discussion centered around the level of help that might be needed. Mr. Fisher suggested she cut back on work for tax title. Mr. Williams questioned Ms. Bertram's work knowledge saying she asked for payroll help last year and now this year is asking for more help. He said perhaps Ms. Michonski could be town manager and have charge over everyone, elected or appointed.

Ms. Bertram said she has money in her budget to hire assistance from E. Longmeadow. There was discussion around confidence in the capability of people currently in these jobs. Mr. Gougeon said Mr. Geser is on a learning curve but maybe the process needs to be tweaked or changed; he can make recommendations moving forward. Mr. Barry said the software stuff is a whole new program he doesn't have time to roll out now. Mr. Williams asked if Mr. Geser and Ms. Bertram get the assistance they're looking for does that mean we'll have the numbers we need in Oct. Selectman Jaworski asked to have a follow up meeting and Ms. Michonski said she could do that.

Mr. Barry said we need to change our idea of how to go forward with the process of having the treasurer/collector positions appointed and thinks the town needs to hire somebody to look at how the town is managed and run to make recommendations.

Selectman Moriarty said this is a 12 mil dollar business and it should be run like a 12 mil dollar business. Mr. Gougeon said the town previously had a million dollars in stabilization. Mr. Barry said for years we were not getting done what needed to get done. Mr. Williams said he has no way of knowing if another clerk will make a difference. Mr. Barry said is the question, we need more people or

we need different people. Ms. Michonski said she would like to see what Tom Scanlon has to say and what other comparable people are doing.

The Board will meet again on 3-20 at 6:30pm. Ms. Michonski said the Board might also do the police chief candidates that week or perhaps both in 1 night.

Selectman Moriarty moved to adjourn. Selectman Jaworski seconded. All voting in favor the motion was approved. The meeting ended at 9:25pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ki J. Eno
Executive Assistant