

**BRATTLEBORO SELECTBOARD
TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2018
SPECIAL MEETING – 6:15PM
SELECTBOARD MEETING ROOM, MUNICIPAL CENTER
MINUTES**

Selectboard members present: Brandie Starr, Tim Wessel, John Allen, and Dave Schoales.

Staff Present: Town Manager Peter Elwell, Assistant Town Manager Patrick Moreland, Fire Chief Mike Bucossi, Assistant Fire Chief Len Howard, Public Works Director Steve Barrett, Police Chief Mike Fitzgerald, Police Captain Mark Carignan, and Executive Secretary Jan Anderson.

Media present: Chris Mays representing the Brattleboro Reformer and BCTV staff and volunteers.

Others present: Franz Reichsman and ASL interpreters Elizabeth Fox and Janet Dickinson.

Acting Chair Brandie Starr called the meeting to order at 6:20pm. She confirmed that the meeting was properly warned.

Town Manager Elwell announced that Chair Kate O'Connor was not present due to a family matter and Vice Chair Brandie Starr would be Acting Chair for the meeting.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

FY19 Budget -

- (i) Capital Projects and Equipment*
 - (a) Staff Proposal, including Fire Aerial Ladder Truck*
 - (b) Sidewalk Snow Plow*
 - (c) Downtown Street Lights*
- (ii) Day Work Jobs Program*
- (iii) Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategies (SeVEDS)*
- (iv) Use of Fund Balance and Property Taxes*

(i) Capital Projects and Equipment - Town Manager Elwell provided a summary of the budget items that were decided at the last meeting on January 2. He said that the Board approved the following three items which would be included in the FY19 budget, as well as being separate articles on the Representative Town Meeting Warnings: (1) Human Services Review Committee's funding recommendation of \$146,000 (up \$26,000 from last year), (2) contribution to Green Up Day (\$300), and (3) contribution to Southern Vermont Watershed Alliance (\$1,000). He said that the sum of \$20,000 from the Unassigned Fund Balance had also been approved for the construction of the skatepark at Living Memorial Park. He said that item would be reflected in the Capital Program but would not impact taxes. He then addressed the changes in revenues and expenditures that the Board had previously approved for addition to the proposed FY19 Budget, including capital projects and equipment, as set forth in his memo dated January 5, 2018. He summarized that by adding all of those changes to the FY19 budget, the tax rate would result in an increase of 3.92 cents. He noted that with regard to the downtown street lights, staff was unable to provide a detailed report and low cost recommendation at this time, but would continue to research ways throughout the year to improve the downtown lighting. The Board then asked to hear from Fire Chief Mike Bucossi and Assistant Fire Chief Len Howard about their request to purchase a new aerial ladder truck. Chief Bucossi noted that a 1991 ladder truck was recently taken out of service and the Town purchased a used 1994 ladder truck from Sharon, Massachusetts. Bucossi spoke about the unknown condition of the 1991 truck and about its design not meeting the full needs of the community because it lacked a water tank and pump. He also said that the Fire Department would apply for another grant this year but would request half of the funding for the ladder truck rather than full funding. Assistant Chief Howard spoke about the reduction of the fleet over the past several years and the need to keep capital equipment on target with the capital improvement plan.

Allen noted that although he previously opposed purchasing the ladder truck at this time, he was now in support of it and for keeping it in the proposed budget, so that the matter could be brought to Representative Town Meeting (RTM) to decide. Wessel offered other options rather than purchasing the truck at this time, including assistance from Mutual Aid, rental options, and pointed out the working condition of the 1994 truck that was recently acquired. He indicated his preference to earmark some money now for the purchase of the truck in the future. There was substantial discussion by the Board about whether to purchase the truck this year, or delay it for another year, or set aside funds now (in a "sinking fund") for purchase at a later date, whether and how much to use from the Unassigned Fund Balance, at what level to keep the Unassigned Fund Balance, cascading effects on the capital equipment plan, and the resulting increased tax rate.

The Board asked to hear from Public Works Director Barrett about residents' request to purchase a second sidewalk plow and the resulting financial effect. Barrett said that he was captain of the ladder truck for the Fire Department for several years and he spoke of its importance to the community and whether the plow would compete for funds with the ladder truck. He said that the second plow was not requested by his department but it was being discussed as a result of residents' request and that having a second plow would decrease the length of time need to clear the sidewalks.

Elwell suggested another alternative to proceed with the purchase of the ladder truck and sidewalk plow, but reasonably adhering to maintaining the 10% guideline in the Unassigned Fund Balance. He said that more money could be borrowed for the ladder truck which would free up cash for the sidewalk plow. He said that such borrowing would have a minimal effect on the current tax rate but would impact the debt service over the next 10 years (by about \$15,000 each year). There was further discussion about the sidewalk plow, the purpose and use of the Unassigned Fund Balance, deviating from the 10% guideline, increases in the tax rate, and responsibilities of Representative Town Meeting. Franz Reichsman, from the Finance Committee, asked about the life expectance of the sidewalk plow and if borrowing money for it was prudent. He also noted that having attended budget discussion by the Selectboard and School Board that he sensed "a storm was brewing."

Wessel suggested that since the taxpayers requested the sidewalk plow, they decide whether to purchase it and the resulting tax consequences. Elwell suggested that the matter could be added as a separate article on the RTM Warnings. He also noted that this year's proposed budget included support for services rather than a focus on decreasing the tax rate. He then summarized options that had just been discussed and were undecided: (1) have a separate warning article regarding tax funding for the sidewalk plow and keep the ladder truck in the budget, (2) approve buying both items, incorporate the sidewalk plow into the proposed budget and recommend that the sidewalk plow purchase price (\$140,000) come from the Unassigned Fund Balance, and increase borrowing for the ladder truck from \$500,000 to \$640,000, (3) approve purchase of the fire truck as proposed and not include the sidewalk plow in the budget this year, (4) setting aside funds ("sinking fund") with the intent to purchase the ladder truck next year and then buy the sidewalk plow this year using the Unassigned Fund Balance, and (5) buy the sidewalk plow using the Unassigned Fund Balance which would then drop the reserve to 8.8%.

MOTION BY JOHN ALLEN TO HAVE SEPARATE ARTICLE ON THE REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING WARNING FOR THE PURCHASE OF A SIDEWALK PLOW AS A TAX-FUNDED ITEM AND NOT INCLUDE IT IN THE PROPOSED BUDGET. MOTION CARRIED 4-0.

MOTION BY DAVE SCHOALES TO APPROVE THE PURCHASE OF THE LADDER TRUCK AS PRESENTED IN THE BUDGET WITH THE USE OF \$450,000 FROM FUND BALANCE AND BORROWING THE SUM OF \$500,000 [OR USING GRANT FUNDS, IF RECEIVED]. MOTION CARRIED 3-1 (WESSEL OPPOSED).

(ii) Day Work Jobs Program - Elwell provided a status report on the Day Work Jobs Program that was being discussed with Groundworks Collaborative. He said that the program was conceptual but not concrete enough to define, implement, and fund. He vowed to continue to work on development of the program in the coming months.

(iii) Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategies (SeVEDS) - Elwell provided a history of Town funding to the Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategies (SeVEDS) and said that

SeVEDS was requesting \$3 per person for FY19. Assistant Town Manager Moreland was asked to comment on his previous association with SeVEDS. He said that the organization provided a value to the area. There was much discussion by the Board about other economic development in which the Town was involved, assistance through the Small Business Assistance Program, and the remaining balance in the Program Income Fund. Schoales and Allen spoke in favor of contributing \$1.00 per person, and Starr and Wessel spoke in favor of a \$2.00 contribution. The Board agreed to a flat contribution of \$24,000.

MOTION BY TIM WESSEL TO PLACE AN ITEM ON THE REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING WARNING FOR \$24,000 TO COME FROM PROGRAM INCOME AS A CONTRIBUTION TO SOUTHEASTERN VERMONT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES (SeVEDS). MOTION CARRIED 4-0.

(iv) Use of Fund Balance and Property Taxes – Elwell suggested that the Board consider this matter at its next meeting after staff had a chance to include the Board’s decision from tonight’s meetings into the FY19 Budget. He asked the Board to schedule a special meeting on January 23 to discuss this matter and review the draft Representative Town Meeting Warnings, and to schedule a special on January 30 for the purpose of approving the FY19 Budget and the final Warnings. The Board generally agreed.

NEW BUSINESS – *None.*

Schoales (also a member of the Town School District Board) said that the School Board recently approved its elementary school budget which would not have an effect the current tax rate. However, he said that the Brattleboro Union High School budget would be added to the FY19 Budget and the State indicated that the State’s increase would be higher. He then discussed provisions from Act 46, the removal of “phantom” students, and other impacts on the school budget. Franz Reichsman also spoke about his understanding of the school budget process and remaining unresolved issues.

There was no further business.

MOTION BY JOHN ALLEN TO ADJOURN AT 8:45PM. MOTION CARRIED 4-0.

Tim Wessel, Clerk