



TOWN of THOMPSON
815 Riverside Drive
North Grosvenordale, CT 06255

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2020 APR 21 A 11:20
Linda Paradise
TOWN CLERK, Ass't

THOMPSON Board of Finance Regular Meeting
Thursday, April 16, 2020 via Zoom from remote locations
MINUTES

1. The call to order by Chair Aaron McGarry was at 7:03 PM.

Present: Aaron McGarry, Robert Werge, Steve Herbert, Rhonda Rooney, Robert Mann, Jim Bellavance. The chair noted all members are present via Zoom. Orla McKiernan-Raftery (Finance Director), Amy St Onge (First Selectman), Ken Beausoleil and Susanne Witkowski (Selectmen), Kathleen Herbert (Chair, Board of Education), Melinda Smith (Superintendent of Schools). Rich Benoit (Director, DPW), Lesley Munshower (Recreation Director), Bob Gentes (Finance Director/Schools). Many Board and Commission members, and members of the public, Recording Secretary Dotti Durst

2. Approve minutes:

- a. Motion J. Bellavance/ A. McGarry to approve the February 20, 2020 Regular meeting minutes carried, with S. Herbert, who was away on that date, abstaining.
- b. Motion S. Herbert/R. Rooney to approve the March 5, 2020 Special Meeting/Public Hearing Budget Workshop minutes carried, with J. Bellavance, who was not in attendance, abstaining.
- c. Motion S. Herbert/R. Mann to approve the March 12, 2020 Special Meeting/ Budget Workshop minutes carried unanimously.
- d. Motion S. Herbert/R. Werge to approve the April 2, 2020 Special Meeting Budget Workshop minutes carried unanimously.
- e. April 6, 2020 Special Meeting Budget Workshop minutes: tabled.
- f. Motion S. Herbert/J. Bellavance to approve the April 9, 2020 Special Meeting Budget Workshop minutes carried unanimously.
- g. Note: the February 19 Regular monthly meeting was cancelled

3. Correspondence: follow-up emails to the BOF from the Finance Director: the Library provided a PowerPoint about their operations, all sent directly to the BOF members and appropriate parties

4. Citizens' comments- J. Bolte, 1081 Riverside Dr: reiterated her call for Citizens' Comments to appear later on the BOF agenda, providing the opportunity for response to what transpired during the meeting

- Dick Trudeau, 192 Wagher Rd: urged caution in how the budget approval process takes place
- John Rice, 39 E. Thompson Rd: supports the concept of outright purchase of the landfill roll-off truck
- Kathleen Herbert, 122 Wilsonville Rd: as Chair of the BOE, she sent email regarding the Capital expenses previously reviewed with the BOF. As a resident, she advocates for Citizens' Comments to appear at both ends of the BOF Agenda

5. Selectman's Update-First Selectman Amy St Onge: in this, the fourth week of the impact of the virus, the town hall is closed but staff are rotating through being present to handle the needs of the public; a professional firm has been brought in to do a thorough disinfecting of the surfaces in the building. * Zoom-based meetings are taking place, with more Boards and Commission able to handle the matters for which they are responsible * The Governor's Executive Order calls for one of two tax relief programs to be put in place. After review, and



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after consultation with Tax Collector, Rene Morin, the BOS voted for a Tax Deferment Plan, extending the due date for real estate and personal property taxes an additional 60 days beyond the previous maximum date, now until September 30. Water/sewer bills, already mailed, are also extended, until June 30. R. Rooney asked about the new provisions for enacting/voting on the Budget. A. St Onge: a town can extend the process by 30 days, per the Governor. R. Mann- how can the public can do research or handle other matters if the town hall is closed to the public? Some documents can be handed out at the door, some can be emailed. Town Clerk Renee Waldron has provided several other methods of handling business with the town. R. Werge- concerning the extra 60 days for tax payments, are escrowed payments affected? Banks have been ordered to release funds. R. Rooney – situation for Elderly and Disabled qualification? They will carry over without re-application. R. Rooney- is any potential for a budget referendum? Yes. If the Order is lifted by May 20, it is possible, but the procedures would have to be put in place very quickly to meet the deadlines.

6. School District Update-Superintendent of Schools Melinda Smith: enrollment in the District is steady at 972, down by one year to date. The Special Education budget deficit has dropped to \$350,821 as staff are working to keep more students in-house. * Even with the schools closure, the District will not see much if any reduction in costs, as the Governor has mandated that vendors continue to be paid (including bus services). * The schools are proud: on March 13 the schools were closed and the following week distance –learning was already launched. * Four free-meal sites (breakfast and lunch) have been established, available to any student (about 250 are being served at each mealtime). Fridays, bagged meals are available for the weekends. Question, S. Herbert: any known virus in the schools? Yes, relatives of staff members, and parents. Question, R. Werge: asks about possible negotiation with vendors. R. Mann: asks if payment is required even if the vendor has laid off staff. Both are unknown. R. Rooney: praised the quick set-up of distance learning and the provision of meals to our students. M. Smith thanks the collective schools staff, noting they continue to refine what is taking place.

8. Financial Report- Finance Director Orla McKiernan-Rafty: was emailed only today. Suggests tabling to the next meeting. The BOF agreed. The Bond Commission today released Road Aid (\$253K), LoCIP \$88K), and Municipal (\$77K) for a total of \$418,500. S. Herbert asked Finance Director to confirm the lowest level of cash on hand over the past 12 months.

9. Tourtellotte Fund update: no report; scheduled meeting was cancelled

10. Board of Finance Member Comments: S. Herbert- noted that Citizens' Comments appearing nearer the end of the BOF agenda may be more important than ever, given the current opportunity for interaction; Chair A. McGarry advocates for getting through the budget, as there is a timeline, before turning the agenda to debate of this matter. R. Werge- the concept of level-funding is complex; the re-valuation has produced unexpected results, with each property impacted individually. Members of the BOF added evidence that the revaluation has so resulted. A. McGarry reviewed the data supplied by Tax Collector Rene Morin, stating that the



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impacts will fluctuate, with some properties seeing a tax increase and others not. R. Mann confirms that a flat budget would necessitate a 23.97 mill rate.

11. Budget Workshop: Chair A. McGarry called for any further discussion of the Transfer Station Roll-off truck, beyond the last meeting. Some BOF members cited support for a purchase from current assets, while others noted the current low interest rates should the equipment be financed for 5 years, this freeing up assets for other uses. R. Benoit reviewed the history of DPW debt service on equipment purchases, noting that the amount will drop in June when one truck is paid off. He advocates from wide experience to always plan for the unexpected. A. McGarry requested data about the possible financing of the equipment over 5 years, given the current interest rates, as compared to an outright purchase, in order to make an informed decision. R. Rooney confirmed that the \$43K in the proposed budget would be for one year of financing the equipment. Discussion points included a possible shortfall in the schools budget this year; any overage in the salt/sand line item due to the mild winter would roll into the Fund Balance if unused. A. St Onge asked if interest rates are projected to go even lower; the Finance Director will look for data.

Chair A. McGarry asked if there are further discussion of the Salt Shed proposal, beyond the last meeting- clarification was requested of the dollar amounts being discussed: the BOS moved \$50K in the proposed budget for the engineering and permitting process, to get the project started. The raw estimate is for \$300-400K, with that amount covering the structure itself but not the finish-out such as electrical. Discussion of the urgency of the project included a March, 2020 memo from Connecticut Water citing ground water data that is worrisome; R. Benoit: being ecologically responsible is the primary target. The current structures cannot prevent leakage around the perimeters, despite berming. R. Werge asked for a risk assessment regarding water pollution, requesting an estimate for an appropriate timeline. R. Benoit reminded the BOF that in Woodstock, the town garage badly polluted the adjacent farm land and that remediation was costly. He will ask the Wetlands Agent for assistance, seeking informed sources that could assist with decisions.. S. Witkowski noted that the Town Planner has looked into grant funding or reimbursement programs, unsuccessfully.

Bull Hill Project: L. Munshower noted that the site has drainage concerns making it unstable; she agrees with the BOS decision to delete any funding for the Soccer Fields/Trails upgrade at this time. She will look for UCONN Engineering students or others who can provide information about projected costs to handle before moving ahead with upgrading the spaces.

Chair A. McGarry noted the completion of discussion of proposed Transfers. Capital Items is the next discussion.

S. Herbert requested discussion of the BOE budget line item for Capital Improvements, and the recent proposal of the possible move of those costs to the Town, given that the schools are town-owned structures, such as are the Library and TEEG Building. This would be a



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departure from past practice. One aspect of Capital projects in the Schools annual budget is that those dollar amounts become part of the MBR (Minimum Budget Requirement) in subsequent years; this was confirmed by both M. Smith and B. Gentes. K. Herbert observed for the BOF that major Capital Projects go to the Building Committee for research and recommendations; then become a collaborative effort by the BOS/BOF and BOE.

Chair A. McGarry concluded the meeting with the reminder that the Governor, through Executive Order, has extended the budget review/creation process by 30 days.

12. Motion R. Mann seconded by J. Bellavance to adjourn carried unanimously.

Chair A. McGarry adjourned the Public Hearing/Budget workshop at 9:03 PM.

See/hear the meeting on Zoom. Copy and paste to your Search bar:

https://zoom.us/rec/share/18cqlLvQ2T1lfrOSsm6BYaMPF5zEX6a8hiEfr_UMxBxpJYeDFx8zTh7jkc14f713

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Respectfully submitted by Dorothy Durst, Recording Secretary Dorothy Durst

These minutes have not yet been approved by the Board of Finance. Please refer to next month's meeting minutes for approval of and/or amendments to these minutes.