



**TOWN of THOMPSON**  
**Board of Finance**  
**North Grosvenordale, CT 06255**

**THOMPSON Board of Finance Special Meeting/Budget Workshop**

**Monday, April 27, 2020 - via Zoom**

**MINUTES**

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1. The call to order by Chair Aaron McGarry was at 7:02 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 (Board of Education Chair), Melinda Smith (Superintendent of Schools). Bob Gentes (Schools Finance Director). Many Board and Commission members/town staff, Student and Parents, and Members of the public. Recording Secretary Dotti Durst

2. Correspondence: none

3. Citizens' comments:

- Jessica Bolte, 1081 Riverside Dr via email: advocates for a second Citizens' Comments on the BOF agenda. The need for school projects was presented at the Public Hearing, BOE page 54; asks the BOF to be more pro-active. Believes the town cannot move ahead with a flat budget.

- Geoffrey Bolte, 1081 Riverside Dr: cautions against non-pdf BOF documents on the website

- Brittany Charboneau, 56 Juliette Ave: status of Citizens' Comments at the end of the Agenda

- Shawn Brisette, Whittemore Ave (BOE Vice Chair): is a live budget vote is possible in the language of the Governor's Proclamation; noted that there is an additional 60 days for approval

- Justin Yong, 12 Fairway Dr: if a zero increase, no need to vote, but otherwise it is important

- Cole Coderre, 368 Chase Rd: the schools leadership team put forward a budget which he heard is threatened with a \$1.2 million cut; he advocates for music and associated leadership development and is concerned about constant threats to education in Thompson

- Jackie Hefferman, 11 Quaddick Rd: children have lost enough; asks that this be considered

- Brittany Charboneau, 56 Juliette Ave: the town should support the arts, build children's future

- K. Herbert (BOE Chair): thanked the students and the many others in attendance electronically; believes the schools must keep vibrant despite an aging demographic, attracting new families to town and growing the business community. She advocates no BOE budget cut.

- Danielle Carlson, 3 Rachel Dr: schools are the heartbeat, asks for town and schools support

- praise of Cole Carlson's comments: John Embair/37 Buckley Hill, B. Charboneau, D. Carlson

- A. St Onge: commended the 83 in attendance. Rumors are incorrect about the BOF planning major cuts to the BOE budget; she attended every BOF meeting- no such statement was made. The BOF determined that their process would be the review all of the budget proposals before making decisions. She thanked the BOF for the process to date, in considering all stakeholders.

- A. St Onge: responding to an earlier inquiry- hopes to take the budget to referendum, and will wait until the last minute to move ahead without a town meeting/referendum.

- Jessica Bolte, 1081 Riverside Dr: the origin of discussion of anticipated major cuts to the BOE came from comments from the BOF members saying "they are working toward a flat budget"



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4. Budget Workshop:

Chair A. McGarry resumed the budget discussion: at the last meeting the Education budget proposal was under review; he asked for any further BOF follow-up questions/comments.

-J. Bellavance: health insurance increases have a huge impact for the whole town budget. The business world has asked employees to assume a little more M. Smith: the completed contract and those 3 underway will examine this possibility

-M. Smith: three major impacts are contractual (wages including all associated costs), insurances (with an unexpectedly high number of insurance claims, pushing the costs higher) and a higher number of Special Education out-of-district students all contributed to the Education budget being presented at a 6.02% increase (\$1,125,079).

-B. Gentes: reviewed data. Of the increase, 3.8% is personnel, confirming that there is only a few non-union staff but they usually do follow the payroll pattern.

– R. Mann asked about mediation for the contracts. M. Smith: if mediation is unsuccessful, it goes to binding mediation, in which a third party makes all final decisions. Negotiation, which is handled locally, is definitely the best way to proceed.

– S. Herbert attended most of the Schools budget workshops. The proposal includes no new programs, the same staffing level; he observed significant effort to reduce/control costs and obtain grants. Much work was done to help the Schools as much as possible to remain reasonable while responsible. He supports the budget as presented.

– R. Werge: asked for details about the proposed increase; B. Gentes gave detailed breakdowns, stating that 2/3 of the increase falls into payroll/benefits, plus the Special Education increase and the capital expenses, totaling a \$1,125,079 increase over FY 19-20. The BOF confirmed: capital expenses, even if moved to the town budget, impact the total budget.

– J. Bellavance called for the visual representation of the increases and their impacts. R. Rooney agreed, asking for a comparison of a zero increase compared to the budget as presented.

– The Finance Director had prepared comparison scenarios and put them on the projector.

A zero increase keeping the mill rate at 23.97 calls for a reduction in the proposed budget of \$1,815, 748  
An increase of .25 mills (to 24.22) calls for a reduction in the proposed budget of \$1,638,750.  
An increase of .50 mills (to 24.77) calls for a reduction in the proposed budget of \$1,461,752

-A. McGarry noted that he has not in previous years seen as large of a proposed budget increase (of 2.56 mills); he cited Forbes projection of unemployment reaching 16% which is unheard of since the 1930s, and holding at 10% even after resumption of work, continuing into 2021. Even in the Great Recession following 2007, unemployment reached 10% or about 2/3 of what is being projected for this year. He reviewed the impacts of the three budget scenarios.

–R. Werge has suggested a list of all proposed increases, including fixed, so priorities can be determined and the BOF can come as close as possible to one of the three scenarios. BOF members agreed the scenarios are helpful for planning.

–A. McGarry: given the impact on the economy and the projected unemployment figures, his conscience calls upon him to hold to an increase over last year of not more than ½ mill (.5 mills)

-R. Rooney noted that in the BOE budget presentation (page 56) it was stated that a percentage



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of students live below the poverty level; when we consider an increase of even what seems a small amount, such as \$14 per week, many families will feel that. She reviewed the impact of revaluation (a 16% increase in the grand list) on property owners' taxes even before a tax rate increase, as well as Forbes data that 78% of American families live paycheck-to-paycheck.

- R. Werge: the impact of revaluation varies by household; some will remain constant.

The Finance Director displayed a list on the projector of proposed budget increases, sorted by dollar amount and by the percentage of increase, flagging fixed expenses. Discussion followed.

- R. Rooney: tough choices will have to be made by the BOS/BOF and whichever items have to be reduced, people will be disappointed. Maybe the town and schools should be asked how they would propose the cuts, perhaps apportioning them somehow. She agrees that she is not comfortable with any increase beyond .5 mills, especially given the possibility of no town vote.

-R. Werge: we will put out a reasonable budget, referendum or not. Maybe we should re-examine the proposed items and build from the bottom up rather than trying to subtract to reach a certain dollar reduction. He calls upon all parties to talk to neighbors and others to get a feel for what is wanted by the town.

- S. Herbert: it is probably not best to start with an arbitrary budget amount or increase, but rather build a reasonable, appropriate budget.

-R. Werge: collectively we will decide what we do want to do, by talking meaningfully about the proposals, since it can't be everything. Some items will have to wait until next year.

-A. McGarry suggested starting with the list of budget items prepared by the Finance Director, showing proposed increases/decreases by dollar amount and percentages

-R. Mann expects to present a budget that would pass at referendum, if one could take place

-A. McGarry asked about funds remaining in the current years' budget, which do not show in the budget proposal. They can be encumbered this year for a specific use, be used to pay down debt or can be rolled into the General Fund/surplus then this be available for use in FY 20-21.

-the Finance Director compiled a list of the debt service list, with interest rate on each item..

**5.Motion R. Mann seconded by SJ. Bellavance to adjourn carried unanimously.**

Chair A. McGarry adjourned at 9:03 PM.

To hear the meeting via Zoom- Click or Copy/paste the link into your Search bar:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/\\_V4Laz760lIBZXE0VmOcJMKOoX0T6a8gydI\\_KdemU5RPRHgHhzwq5y-nm1s1po](https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/_V4Laz760lIBZXE0VmOcJMKOoX0T6a8gydI_KdemU5RPRHgHhzwq5y-nm1s1po)

If asked for a Password: 2k+Y98KY

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.*