

**THOMPSON BOARD OF EDUCATION
THOMPSON BOARD OF FINANCE
THOMPSON BOARD OF SELECTMEN**

Joint Meeting

**Ryscavage Auditorium
Tourtellotte Memorial High School
Thursday, December 5, 2013**

RECEIVED
TOWN OF THOMPSON, CT.
2013 DEC 12 P 5:25
Cheryl T. Dery
TOWN CLERK

MINUTES

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chairman William Witkowski began the meeting at 7:01 p.m.

Mr. Witkowski introduced the Board of Education members in attendance.

Members present:

William Witkowski
Joseph Lindley
Kathleen Herbert
Thomas Angelo
Robert Bentley
Donna Lynch

Mr. Faucher introduced the Board of Finance members in attendance.

Members present:

Raymond Faucher, Jr.
Larry Groh
Suzanne Witkowski
Paul Dery
Aaron McGarry

Mr. Lenky introduced the Board of Selectmen members in attendance.

Paul Lenky
Kerstin Forrester

Also present was:

Dr. Jolin, Gary Wilcox, Ron Springer, Penny Hebert, members of the public, employees of the Board of Education, employees of the Town of Thompson, members of the press.

II. Citizens Comments

Paul Baer asked that the Board of Education and the Board of Finance eliminate waste and to utilize funds appropriately when entering into budget season

III. Discussion of 2013-2104 Budget

Dr. Jolin provided a handout of the basic structural cost increases for the education budget. The average bargaining union salary increases are in the 1.5% to 2% range. The major drive in the education budget in the 2014-2015 year is the cost of healthcare as there could be an 18% increase. The Board of Education will also have increased federal and state mandates. The Board will also need to work on the security grant that they received. The Board of Education received a \$246,000 security grant from the state but has to come up with a match of approximately \$75,000, finding ways to conserve in this school year budget to help match the funds, and also to look at the possibility of conclusion of funds in the 2014-2015 budget.

Paul Lenky mentioned that he talked to department heads and asked them to come up with their budgets for the coming year and to be very conservative. He asked if they do not have any other expenditures or don't see an increase to stay in the budget that they have.

Kathleen Herbert questioned the Health Savings Account insurance program. During teacher contract negotiations the Board of Education required teachers to join the Health Savings Account. Some teachers may choose to go back to Anthem next year and some may choose to stay on the HSA.

Dr. Jolin met with the teachers union and as of right now as much as 1/3rd of the teachers wanted to go back to the basic insurance. The teachers union will be meeting after the holidays to try to pin down a vote of how many teachers want to go back.

Dr. Jolin gave a brief explanation of the HSA account. He mentioned that intensive negotiations were held with the teachers union trying to lower healthcare costs as well as each of the unions. HSA is a way of trying to lower healthcare costs by having an account. The Board contributes an amount and the employee contributes an amount and they use that account as a payment for any services that they receive. An element of the HSA is that if you don't spend the money this year it is able to be carried over to the next year. This is a good incentive for employees to utilize, but the downside of it is that they do not like the idea of having to put their own money into the account because it is a match, and for the lower income staff, having to come up with \$1,000 or \$2,500 may be a burden. This was negotiated into the teachers' contract that it was mandatory for the first year of the contract. The Board of Education saved about \$120,000 in the first year.

During the negotiations with the secretaries and the custodians, the Board of Education was able to get those unions to agree to go back to negotiations before June 30, 2014 to look at the HSA again.

Robert Bentley stated that during the course of the contract they would continue to fund the HSA if the teachers continued to stay on the HSA. If they stay healthy they save money and if they buy into this program the Board of Education saves money. But it is important for the Board of Education do their best to make them stay on the HSA.

Joe Lindley stated that one thing to consider this budget season is that the oil tanks have to be replaced this year in the school. The cost of that is believed to be over \$100,000. Dr. Jolin stated that there could be a 72% match from the state because it is a capital expenditure.

Joe Lindley asked if there is a way to do a study on what property values are in town, the total incomes, and what is the ratio of property owners and rentals because there is a high population of renters in the town who do not pay property taxes. Dr. Jolin stated that the best way is to look at the school department reimbursement rate, which is a rough measure of the town's ability to pay. Donna Lynch stated that some of that information could be on the schools strategic school profiles.

Ray Faucher stated that he does not feel optimistic about putting a big budget through. The unemployment rate in Windham County is at 8.8%. Current taxes for this year are running behind at about .3% so that means taxpayers are having a tough for time paying their taxes on time. The State representative from Woodstock is looking at a \$1 billion deficit and the State takes that money from the cities and towns, employees and other entities from within so the ability to pay is very challenging. The main job for the Board of Finance is to pass a budget that is

best for the town and it becomes a question as far as short-term and long-term goals. Some long-term concerns have been neglected but they need to pass a budget as best as they can.

Joe Lindley stated that one of the items lacking in discussions over the years is that while there is talk about developing upcoming budgets, there is no talk about income development. He thought it would be a good part of the budget cycle to have some type of presentation as of how to increase the economy, how do we attract business and look at how to keep the businesses in town.

Kerstin Forrester had met with Town Planner, Mary Ann Chinatti, about some thoughts and ideas on how to attract businesses in Thompson and what the differences are between Thompson and the surrounding towns that are able to attract businesses.

Paul Lenky also met with Ms. Chinatti at the last Selectman's meeting. They met with the Solar Committee where they discussed that there are a lot of areas in town where you could put solar panels to benefit the capital budget.

Robert Bentley stated that there is no long-term plan. Every year the Board sits down and discusses what they can afford now. He used the athletic track as an example. There is no plan from the community to tackle the situation and to get it redone. He suggests looking beyond our one year budget and to think about what the town really needs.

Dr. Jolin mentioned that Board of Education have agreed on a five year plan for curriculum, technology, and facilities maintenance. The track has been on the capital budget for many years and need to think about longer-term and what the town really needs. It will be a hard sell out but the important thing for the community to realize is that they are going to need this.

Bill Witkowski believes that the town and all departments need to work together if anything is going to change.

Kerstin Forrester mentioned that there is a 10 year plan for the town of Thompson which was developed about 3 years ago. The book has some very good ideas and it should be looked at and updated every year.

Joe Lindley stated that the turnout from the 2013 budget vote was 11.9% of voters, 22.3% in 2012, 14.4% in 2011 and 15.10% in 2010. Of the 5,300 registered voters, less than 600 turned out to vote for the 2013-2014 budget. People are not getting involved and the town cannot have 11% of voters turning out for these critical issues.

Kathleen Herbert stated that there is no need to go to referendum if the budget increase is less than 2%. The budget can be voted on at the town meeting. She feels that the town is spending thousands of dollars for 600 people to vote on a budget and it is a waste of the town's money.

Larry Groh commented that if the budget is voted on at a town meeting, expect only about 50 to 100 people to vote opposed to the 600 or so that choose to go out and vote.

Joseph Lindley stated that if the laws are outdated in the way in which the town processes the budget, they could change the ordinance on how a referendum is handled. It is difficult for the Boards to determine how much percentage of the population is going to vote.

IV. Citizens Comments

Sean Brissette commented on the healthcare issue and thought it would be better to let teachers decided to switch insurance at a later time because they are still figuring out if they like the HSA insurance and might not be sure if they want to switch back to Anthem.

Kevin Walsh thanked all the Boards for getting together. Mr. Walsh expressed concern with the lack of businesses Thompson.

Robert Bentley expressed how the Board of Education does what they can to get the budget passed.

Kathleen Herbert mentioned that in January the Board of Education starts their budget workshops. All parents and the community are welcome to those workshops to watch them develop the school budget. The meetings are posted on the school website, but there should be a better way to get the meetings communicated.

Joseph Lindley stated that one of the best ways to promote meetings is through social media. He questioned if the Town should hire a consultant to see what forms of communication are best to promote meetings.

Thomas Angelo asked if the Board of Education can have a Facebook page and if it would be helpful if all they did was post meetings.

Dr. Jolin stated that there will be a policy meeting after the holidays regarding what they can and what they should put out in social media.

Dr. Jolin stated that everyone needs to know that they cannot utilize public dollars to promote advocacy for the budget. There is a new state law which states that the Board of Education cannot use the One-Call-Now calling system to advertise the date of the budget vote.

Suzanne Witkowski mentioned that the only way someone will get information about the school is through Facebook. If something is not on Facebook they are not going to read it as that is another form of education and it can be very beneficial if it is controlled.

Christine Campbell was concerned with the One-Call-Now not being used to mention the budget dates because the Parent Teacher Organization funds the system. Dr. Jolin mentioned that the law is that the superintendent or the principal cannot use the system, but the PTO can. Dr. Jolin will further check on the regulations.

Tomas Angelo mentioned that most other towns has a Town Manager which is a consistent position that looks at the long-term goals of the town and Thompson should start looking for a position of a Manager or Administrator.

Robert Bentley stated that he appreciates the opportunity to meet with all of the Boards as it is critically important for everyone to sit down at least once a year and understand how the finances are, and to try to get a general idea as to what the next budget season may be like.

V. Adjournment

The meeting ended at 8:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Danielle Pederson
Recording Secretary

Lynn Landry

From: Danielle Pederson <dpederson@thompsonpublicschools.org>
Sent: Thursday, December 12, 2013 4:00 PM
To: llandry@thompsonct.org
Subject: Fwd: BOE BOF BOS JOINT MEETING, 12.5.13.docx
Attachments: BOE BOF BOS JOINT MEETING, 12.5.13.docx; ATT00001.htm

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Danielle Pederson <dpederson@thompsonpublicschools.org<<mailto:dpederson@thompsonpublicschools.org>>>
Date: December 12, 2013 at 2:55:59 PM EST
To: Paula White <paulawhite@mindspring.com<<mailto:paulawhite@mindspring.com>>>, "Jeff Barske (jbarske@yahoo.com<<mailto:jbarske@yahoo.com>>)" <jbarske@yahoo.com<<mailto:jbarske@yahoo.com>>>, "darling308@aol.com<<mailto:darling308@aol.com>>" <darling308@aol.com<<mailto:darling308@aol.com>>>
Subject: BOE BOF BOS JOINT MEETING, 12.5.13.docx

Please post these minutes.