



Town of Thompson  
Board of Finance  
815 Riverside Drive  
North Grosvenordale, CT 06255

RECEIVED  
2019 SEPT 17 A 9:00  
Linda Paradise  
ASST Town Clerk

**Minutes – Board of Finance Special Meeting**  
**Monday August 27, 2019**  
**Time: 6:00 PM**  
**Room 2, Thompson Library**

1. Call to Order & Roll Call:

**Chairman Aaron McGarry called the meeting to order at 7:08pm.**

**Present:** Chair Aaron McGarry, Vice-Chair Larry Groh Jr., Susanne Witkowski, Rhonda Rooney, Jim Bellavance and Rob Mann.

**Absent:** None

2. Citizen's Comments:

- Danielle Carlson, 33 Rachel Dr – her kids have experienced first-hand budget cuts to the school in the past; this year will lose more Teachers, Para's, Behavioralist, possibly after-school programs and MS sports; When is enough enough? We expect our children to succeed without giving them the tools they need; Teachers are spending their own money for supplies for their classrooms; BOE budget increases are contractual so budget cuts come from the standards the students need and deserve; some Town officials stand to receive significant raises but student needs are being cut; Towns problem also not just the schools, when is one budget more important than the other? Is there a way of maintaining the standards the students have and need without losing anymore?
- Shawn Brissette, Whitmore Ave – last year was the first time privatizing busses; Towns people have already forgot the busing cost is in the BOE budget now and not in the Town budget; Town saving \$150K for 2 busses per year and is now receiving \$24 K a year for rent to park the buses and the taxes on the buses; privatizing busses was in the best interest of the Thompson tax payer, not the school; challenged anyone to find inefficiencies in the BOE budget; hopes everyone understands it's about funding education properly not just making people happy in the community
- Wayne O'Brien, 108 Fabyan Rd – for the budget, time to pass it and move on; upset on way school buses went down; its tax payer's money and BOE needs to be honest and forth coming with people and give real answers and numbers, people are upset with school; is HS viable? Should we be looking at educating K-8?
- Steven White, 376 Chase Rd – confused on what the vision is for Thompson; seems we've lost sight of what brings revenue to town; losing out of more revenue because of C- rating for our schools; issue with after-school program last year due to underfunding; seriously putting school and town in jeopardy by underfunding schools.

3. Budget Workshop:

Chair McGarry explained how they start putting a budget together in the spring with estimates of previous years for some revenue line items and later in the year they get the real numbers; per Tax Collector and Finance Director, there are 3 revenue line items

that are higher than estimated; the Finance Director explained which line items and amounts.

Revenue Budget				
Line Item/Description	Current Proposed	Suggested Change	Increase Of	Reason
440341 – Investment	\$35,000	Increase to \$80,000	\$45,000	New estimate for FY2020
440348 – MPS & Justice Resource Pilot	\$54,000	Increase to \$78,000	\$24,000	Double Justice Resource because they increased size
440349 – Fuel Reimbursement	\$65,000	Increase to \$90,000	\$25,000	Price change in Fuel

A short discussion ensued regarding the pay rate increase for the First Selectman position; when it will start and if those funds could be put back into budget.

**Aaron McGarry moved and Rob Mann seconded the motion to increase line items:**

- 440341 to \$80,000.00**
- 440358 to \$78,000.00**
- 440349 to \$90,000.00**

A roll call vote was taken:

**Aaron McGarry - Yes      Larry Groh Jr. - Yes      Rhonda Rooney – Yes      Susanne Witkowski - Yes      Jim Bellavance – Yes      Rob Mann – Yes**

**The motion carried unanimously 6-0**

FY2020 Budget Revenue assumption just increased by \$94,000.00.

Chair McGarry explained if they can find a cost savings of \$83,157.00 more somewhere, then the new proposed budget will have NO Mil Rate increase from last year's budget, FY2019, which means they can put this out to the voters with a 0 tax increase.

The Town Budget has passed and the BOE Budget has failed in the past 4 referendums; the Board is unsure as to why the voters are voting down the BOE Budget but if they don't cut money from the BOE Budget again, the fear is it won't pass in the next (5th) referendum also; if the Board doesn't address the concerns of the voters who are voting no on the BOE Budget, then they will continue to vote no. In the 4th referendum, the Board compromised and reduced both budgets and the feedback was the voters were upset because the Town Budget was reduced.

Public had a few questions:

- When does compromise jeopardize the Town's future and economic growth?
- What is a rational compromise?
- Last time he heard people confused on why someone told them to vote a certain way and they ran around the Town Hall asking. Social Media is a great way of getting the facts out but not all are on it. BOF should have a summary of the changes and why readily available on vote day for the voters.

Responses:

- The proposed budgets are on Towns Website for all to see.

- They do recognized the school is suffering as a result of the taxpayers voting no on their budget and the students are suffering because of it, the Board listens to all the students & parents stating why not to cut the budget but ultimately it's not the Board's decision, they have already done their job, it's the voters who make the final decision.
- Getting accurate budget information out to all voters is their biggest challenge; the BOE is now video taping and streaming live all their meetings and thinks the BOF should do the same for at least their Budget Workshop Meetings. There is something wrong with the budget process to go 4 referendums.
- The budget book is very large, 122 pages, and is available on the website and in numerous offices in the Town Hall; they also have a summary that's only 5-6 pages and are in all the main offices in the Town Hall and at the Library and are willing to make copies of either as requested; the Finance Director, Tax Collector, First Selectman, School Superintendent and the Board of Ed Members are all available to answer any questions; the Board of Selectmen publish an ad before each referendum summarizing what people will be voting on. They are open to any other suggestions on how to get the message out.

Bill Witkowski, BOE Chairman – been on board 18 years and has never seen it so negative; always a struggle to pass budgets but doesn't feel the BOE is supported; wrong info on social media and no one corrects it; with current budget increase of \$163,000 the school cannot even meet their contractual obligations; doesn't envy any BOF Members but also doesn't believe they all support the school; when do we say enough is enough for a handful of voters? Understands more cuts to get budget passed to get the Town and school running but what about next year! We are one Town and need to stand together and support both budgets.

Chair McGarry stated we need to do something to get this budget passed; years ago the voting was done at Town Meeting where everybody was face to face and questions could be answered by the correct people. Need to do something on the education side again because it has failed all 4 times.

**Aaron McGarry moved and Rhonda Rooney seconded the motion to reduce the School Board Expenditures by \$50,000.00 and reduce Surplus by \$33,157.00.**

Discussion: Larry Groh, Jr. looks through the BOE Budget every year to suggest where they can cut but not this year, they have improved ten-fold in the information given in their budget. The Superintendent is doing a great job with great ideas but the community isn't giving her the tools she needs to do that job. He thinks the trouble passing the budget is from things that have happened previously and most of the people in town don't realize the changes the school has made for the better over the past couple of years. Jim Bellavance believes Melinda Smith has been very transparent and doing a great job; put out a great school budget; very stunned it was voted down and they had to reduce it; can't understand why the negativity has continued when the leadership at the school has improved significantly; they don't want to make more cuts, they don't have a choice. Rob Mann agrees they got a lot of information in this budget. Susanne Witkowski is winding down last of 6 years and has never seen a budget so hard to pass; keeps asking the question – why are the NO voters voting no? this is at a .88%; spent her life supporting education, can't agree with the \$50K cut and couldn't agree with any of the cuts; last time was first time every suggested cutting BOE budget but it was a compromise, \$30K from each budget and maybe the cut coming from her would send a message that this is a

good budget; where do we go from here? Doesn't think cutting the BOE budget is the answer, what if it doesn't pass again, where do they go from there; the school is the foundation of our education; she is not in favor of the cut. Rhonda Rooney reiterated, Melinda does an awesome job and is an awesome leader at the school. Melinda Smith said it is getting more challenging as the Board knows!

A roll call vote was taken:

**Larry Groh Jr. – No** because he doesn't agree with the \$50K cut.

**Jim Bellavance – Yes**

**Rhonda Rooney – Yes**

**Rob Mann – Yes**

**Susanne Witkowski – No** because of the education cut.

**Aaron McGarry - Yes**

**The motion carries 4-2**

This budget now has a Mill Rate of 27.75 which is a proposed Mill increase of 0.

**Aaron McGarry moved and Rob Mann seconded the motion to approve this**

<b>Board of Education Budget of</b>	<b>\$ 18,637,572.00</b>	<b>and</b>
<b>General Government Budget of</b>	<b>\$ <u>7,611,842.00</u></b>	<b>for a</b>
<b>Total budget of</b>	<b>\$ 26,249,414.00</b>	

**and to send it to the Board of Selectmen.**

Discussion: Because we are obligated to educate the children, the BOE can come back to the BOF if the fall short of money.

A roll call vote was taken:

**Larry Groh Jr. – Yes** Just to move it forward.

**Jim Bellavance – Yes**

**Rhonda Rooney – Yes**

**Rob Mann – Yes**

**Susanne Witkowski – Yes** Just to move it forward.

**Aaron McGarry - Yes**

**The motion carries 6-0**

6. Board of Finance Member's Comments: Jim Bellavance stated he is absolutely sick to his stomach they had to do this; doesn't believe anybody on this Board wants to do this. Chair McGarry stated, just speaking for himself, he can't imagine anyone would run for the BOF, BOE, BOS or Zoning Board of Appeals, for that matter, with the intent of doing something that they feel in their heart of hearts is inconsistent with the best interest of this town; this is one of those votes that when you go home you think we need to find a better way of doing this!

7. Adjourn

**Larry Groh Jr. moved and Susanne Witkowski seconded the motion to adjourn.**

**The motion carried unanimously 6-0**

**Chairman Aaron McGarry adjourned the meeting at 8:18 PM.**

Respectfully Submitted,

*Diane Minarik*

Diane Minarik

Recording Secretary

08-27-19 Minutes BOF Special Meeting