

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
February 25, 2016**

Present: First Selectman Melissa M. Mack, Tim Reynolds, Joanne Sullivan, Krystal Holmes and Mel Chafetz.

Public Works Director John Cloonan was also in attendance. First Selectman Mack called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

First Selectman Mack welcomed all to the February 25, 2016 Special Meeting of the Board of Selectmen with an agenda item to discuss the 2016-17 Fiscal Year Budget. She noted she just received the Information Technology budget today and had not had a chance to review it so there may be changes. The budget is preliminary at this point. First Selectman Mack will present the budget to Board of Finance on Monday and wanted to give the Board of Selectmen an overview of where they have found places to cut and where they have added. Her goal is to save another \$250,000 and looking for Board of Selectmen feedback for suggestions.

Debbie Cerrato, Director of Finance and First Selectman Mack looked at budgets line by line using three to five years of history to get an idea of what to spend on certain items. State funding is uncertain at this time so may require further tightening of budgets.

First Selectman Mack explained that the \$250,000 in additional cuts would result in a 2.54% increase overall which is First Selectman Mack's goal, showing the Board of Finance a good faith effort to control spending.

First Selectman Reynolds asked if one option might be for every department to cut by a pro rata amount of their budgets to get to the \$250,000. First Selectman Mack said that is one option to be considered by the Board of Selectmen.

First Selectman Mack shared the following facts related to the budget and areas discovered that need further action:

- Public Works budget affected by additional \$14,175 per year (ongoing) needed for **library monitoring** including \$10,000/year required by DEP for environmental testing
- First Selectman's budgets streamlined in the area of **legal fees and use of legal counsel**. First Selectman Mack to set "Rules of Engagement" with her as clearinghouse before matters brought to lawyers and hourly fee incurred. This policy would apply to all employees and commissioners. Selectman Chafetz asked what has been past practice. First Selectman Mack said town employees and commissioners have freely called counsel. First Selectman Mack would also be requesting that legal bills be itemized by matter so that we are better able to

track expenditures on specific issues.

- **Use of town facilities** requires a uniform policy so that we understand the extent to which for profit and other agencies organizations are using town facilities. How do we charge for space/rent? First Selectman Chafetz mentioned that the schools have a good policy and First Selectman Mack noted she would look to them for guidance. First Selectman Mack wants to look at how we're doing it across the board, is it consistent, who has priority and what are best practices. Selectman Holmes noted the Park & Recreation Commission has looked at other towns as well. Selectman Holmes thinks Suffield business owner/taxpayer should be able to use facilities for free. Selectman Chafetz wondered if we are losing money by not doing charging. First Selectman Mack said most likely yes. Additional expenses are incurred as well with electricity, maintenance, custodial, etc.
- **Central Purchasing Agent** needed for centralizing and negotiating best pricing for contracted services, supplies, etc. with position under Finance Department (Assistant to Finance Director). Selectman Sullivan wondered if we could combine with schools. Selectman Chafetz suggested speaking with School Business Manager Bill Hoff. First Selectman Mack said she would do so but didn't believe we could group purchase with the schools. We currently pay an insurance brokerage firm approximately \$20,000 per year to perform some administrative functions. First Selectman Mack plans to discuss this with CIRMA because she believes the new central purchasing agent position could assume that function going forward.
- **Streamlining expenses with schools include hiring Human Resources Director that would serve both town and schools.** Human Resources Director would be hired for this year on the town side and then expanded next year to include schools. A Human Resources Search Committee would be formed with town and education human resources experience as well as expertise in labor relations. The combined Human Resources role would save costs as many of issues to date have been human resources related with costs incurred. Selectman Chafetz suggested the committee be ad hoc. Selectman Holmes asked if other towns use this structure. First Selectman Mack said yes including Waterford, Naugatuck and West Hartford. Selectman Chafetz offered looking at Blum Shapiro report which recommended human resources employee for school system. Human Resources Director Katherine Christopher has resigned but offered to work one day a week for Suffield to help provide Suffield time to identify a qualified candidate. First Selectman Mack hired new labor counsel, Lisa Lazarek, who has previous experience with the Town of Suffield.
- **Collaborate with schools on technology.** Technology Committee tasked with formulating a strategic plan for the technological needs and optimal staffing for the Town and Board of Education. First Selectman Mack has asked that

department heads present their technology needs to the Technology Committee to ensure we get the best prices and are making decisions that are optimal and compatible with our existing systems.

- **Suffield's share for two social services budgets** have been calculated on a per capita basis including over 2,000 inmates at McDougal Walker. First Selectman Mack is re-negotiating to have those population figures excluded from the totals to more accurately reflect Suffield's usage/share.
- **New Directions** provides social services for addiction counseling, anger management, etc. They do not provide direct or specific contracted services to Suffield. Suffield has been donating \$21,000/year in charitable contributions to them for many years. Other towns have donated approximately \$12,000 to \$15,000 per year. First Selectman Mack questioned if it is appropriate for a municipality to make charitable contributions to tax-exempt organizations without contracting with them to provide specific services to the Town. First Selectman Mack's inclination would be for the money donated to New Directions to be spent on the Police Department's request for a new narcotics investigator to participate in a multi-town narcotics task force that will have a social services component but welcomes Board of Selectmen input. Selectman Chafetz cautioned about hiring a police officer for enforcement versus providing social services. First Selectman Mack asked the Suffield Emergency Aid Association, the Youth Services Director and the Police Department if they refer to New Directions and none of them make such referrals to New Directors. First Selectman Mack said she would rather see the task force or other departments contract for specific services when they are identified as needed. Karen Berasi, Superintendent of Schools, is checking to see if New Directions is utilized by the schools.

Selectman Holmes asked if we donate to other non-profits. First Selectman Mack said not typically. Selectman Reynolds noted Friends of Farm at Hilltop as having received a grant. First Selectman said it was an indirect donation because it is grant money, but one can make the argument the residents of Suffield are benefiting from FOFAH because they manage some of Suffield's preserved open space. First Selectman Mack failed to see the benefit of the Town making a charitable contribution to New Directions and would prefer to contract for specific services as needed.

- **Medical insurance claims are conservative with excellent claim history** so we should see some savings here. We do not have final quotes yet so the savings cannot be quantified at this point.
- **Change in Emergency Management Office** with reduction from \$36,000 to \$17,000 including \$8,000 grant.

- **Reorganized minibus under Senior Center** will result in liability protection for the Town, overhead savings and better management of employee overtime.
- **Recommended Town positions** include Assistant Finance Director; Narcotics Officer; additional Police Sergeant position (with only three there are not enough for a supervisor on each shift); Police Records Clerk.
- **Additional Paid Firefighter** – Fire Department asking for additional paid firefighter (not a unanimous vote from Fire Commission). First Selectman Mack recommends forgoing this request in the 2016/2017 budget, but favors applying for a SAFER grant, which will fund a firefighter for two years. The grant does not require that we retain the position after the two years. At that point, the Fire Department would have the burden of proving that public and firefighter safety improved with the additional position, that the Town's volunteer base did not decrease with the additional paid position and that towns of similar demographics to Suffield have a comparable mix of paid and volunteer firefighters.

Selectman Chafetz asked about bigger increases shown on budgets overall. Following areas noted by First Selectman Mack:

- Registrar of Voters due to presidential elections
- Historic District Commission adding secretary for better FOIA compliance
- Conservation and park maintenance for trails, open space, parks, etc.
- Public Works in large part due to Kent Memorial Library maintenance and DEEP required environmental testing for the life of the building
- Parks & Recreation due to desire to open Babbs Beach for public use (initial start-up costs including life guard stands, training life guards, maintenance, preparing parking lots, etc.).

With respect to compensation, First Selectman Mack noted that some salaries are low, some are high and some are on par with our peer towns. Many employees received 1.7% standard of living increases. Others received higher increases to start to align the positions with what our peer group of Towns is paying for comparable positions.

Public Comment

Dave Gauthier, Phelps Road was happy to see how the budget was being approached as well as the direction taken. He would suggest looking at street lights and how many are needed. They need to be upgraded. Town should also be looking at solar. First Selectman Mack has both items on agenda moving forward and in the works already.

Selectman Sullivan moved to adjourn and by unanimous vote the meeting was adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

The next regular Board of Selectmen Meeting will be Wednesday, March 2, 2016 at

7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kim Worthington
Recording Secretary