

TOWN OF BOZRAH
SPECIAL MEETING
BOARD OF FINANCE
ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE
May 11, 2020

Item 1: Chairman Mike O'Connor called the Special Meeting of the Bozrah Board of Finance(BOF) to order via Zoom on May 11, 2020 at 7:01p.m.

Members Present: Chairman Mike O'Connor, Raymond Barber, Michel Leask, Phil Lavallee, Ann Chambers and Evan Gilman.

Others Present: First Selectman Carl Zorn, Selectman Bill Ballinger, Selectman Glenn Pianka, Town Treasurer Diana Santo, Town Clerk Lynne Skinner, Tax Collector Nancy Renshaw, BOE Jeanne Goular, Financial Manager Sue Lyon, BOE Ruth Levy, Specialized Director Eileen Hargreaves and 24 members of the public.

Item 2: Public Comment

Jack Santo commented on the Board of Education budget, noting that more cuts could be made.

Item 3: Review of comments sent for budgets presented

M. O'Connor noted comments regarding pay-to-play sports at the school. The Board of Education did not put pay-to-play sports in the budget being presented. M. Leask noted comments concerned with the regular education students following the special education increase.

Item 4: Approval of budgets presented or changes needed

Board of Education:

J. Goulart presented the Board of Education budget. The BOE is requesting \$6,327,013 showing a reduction of \$149,901 from the previously requested budget. J. Goulart noted increases to the budget. Regular education tuition for NFA and Lyman has increased as well as highschool enrollment. J. Goulart also noted an increase in special education tuition and transportation costs. The BOE cut all raises, keeping all salaries the same as last year's budget. J. Goulart noted many maintenance items have been taken out of the budget such as painting the parking lot and the floors in the multipurpose room, no landscaping, and no purchasing new books for the library. J. Goulart noted the custodial staff and administrative staff hours have been cut by a ½ hour each day. The superintendent secretary hours have been cut to 4 days a week.

Dr. Ruth Levy noted math scores for the school are low. R. Levy proposed to add a new math position to the BOE budget. The math position would be a ½ time position for this year and perhaps a full time position in the year after that. If the BOE chooses to put this on the budget for this fiscal year it will affect the savings by \$28,690.

P. Lavalley questioned the \$40,000 budgeted for supplies and computers. J. Goulart noted they will purchase new books for the new math program. J. Goulart noted the computers need to be updated and maintained, many computers have been sent home with students for distance learning.

R. Barber noted the budget should be looked at again and reduced so the taxes in town can stay low while many citizens are unemployed. R. Barber noted his concern that the town won't receive the money from the state that they are expecting. R. Barber requested a 0% increase from last year's budget.

M. Leask acknowledged the time spent on both boards to try and reduce their budgets. M. Leask noted that because of the increase in tuition and special education costs the BOE budget can not be at a 0% increase from last year. She noted her concern for the regular education students at Fields Memorial School that would be affected by that much of a cut.

M. O'Connor noted many items in the BOE budget have stayed the same or have been reduced. He noted the large changes in the budget:

- \$81,000 increase for regular education

- \$22,000 increase for transportation for special education

- \$200,000 increase for special education tuition

- \$132,000 increase for regular education tuition

M. O'Connor noted some public comments regarding the low math scores for the town and they will have to consider the proposed new math position.

Board of Selectmen:

C. Zorn presented the Board of Selectmen budget. The BOS are requesting \$829,346 for capital, \$1,758,456 for the general government. The total budget request is \$2,587,802 showing a \$2,500 reduction from last year's budget. C. Zorn noted both selectmen have chosen to get rid of their salaries, showing a reduction of \$2,000. C. Zorn noted they put the Town Clerk hours back to 4 days a week after it was challenged, showing an increase of \$7,971 from the last budget presented. C. Zorn noted some changes in the capital budget. Fire Department Capital Equipment was reduced from \$40,000 to \$25,000. C. Zorn noted they took out transfer site repairs, the DPW pole barn and the UST project from the budget for this fiscal year, with hope of bringing them back into the next year's budget.

A. Chambers questioned who challenged the Town Clerk salary. C. Zorn noted it was a personnel matter and he was concerned about the legality of it. He noted that salaries can change when someone is elected in or when it is part of a budget change.

P. Lavallee asked what capital equipment the fire department was going to get this year. C. Zorn noted the fire department requested for money to be budgeted for turnout gear and for SCBA replacement parts. P. Lavallee noted that with the Town Clerk hours being extended perhaps the Town Clerk Assistant line could be reduced. C. Zorn noted the BOS will look at the Town Clerk Assistant line closer. C. Zorn noted, new this year, they added in the Tax Collector Assistant line with the same amount budgeted as the Town Clerk Assistant.

R. Barber noted the Tax Collector Assistant is a new position and should not be added into this year's budget. C. Zorn noted the Tax Collector Assistant is not a new position, but the BOS will look into the amount that they budgeted for that position. R. Barber questioned the \$12,500 budgeted for each enforcement officer under Inland/Wetlands and Planning/Zoning and suggested that members of each commission could fill the spots. C. Zorn noted they hired CHA, an engineering firm, to provide 4 hours a week of professional engineering to provide zoning and inland/wetland enforcement. R. Barber also noted DPW overtime could be reduced for this year's budget. C. Zorn noted he did not change the DPW overtime from last year, usually the overtime is used for snow plowing and if it is not spent then it will be returned. R. Barber also noted some towns are taking their bonds and financing them for a lower interest rate.

E. Gilman questioned how long the capital projects, such as the oil tank and DPW pole barn, can be cut out of the budget before problems arise. C. Zorn noted delaying the pole barn project for a year should not be a problem. The oil tank at the school does need to be replaced by the time it is 30 years old. E. Gilman questioned if any other general projects cut may cause issues for public safety. C. Zorn noted they are continuing to pave the roads to improve the road conditions and they continue to work on the drainage projects and tree trimming.

M. Leask questioned why the legal fees line increased. C. Zorn noted they overspent that line item this fiscal year.

M. O'Connor noted the town should get the money budgeted for oil tank replacement at the school within the next few years and should look into grants. M. O'Connor presented the board with an overview of budget drafting. (Attachment)

A. Chambers noted it costs about \$22,000 per student, which is comparable to Norwich Public Schools but is double the state average. A. Chambers noted her concern for local businesses at this time and the unemployed people in town. She noted the mil rate should be lowered and not kept the same.

P. Lavallee noted he would like to see the mil rate at 27.

M. Leask noted that a mil rate of 25 is too low. M. Leask noted the town is required to educate the students although students do not make up most of the town's population. She noted they may be able to work with a mil rate of 27 mil.

R. Barber noted they should worry about the population of the whole town. R. Barber also noted he believes the state will not give the town as much money as they are expecting. He believes a mil rate of 25 is acceptable and a mil rate of 27 is too high.

E. Gilman noted to get to 25 mils the boards will have to cut around \$600,000. He noted that was not possible, there are special education requirements that have to be abided. E. Gilman noted a mil rate of 27 is acceptable and they should find a reserve that is responsible.

M. O' Connor recognized the work done by both boards to lower the budgets. M O'Connor noted the money from the state may not come in as expected and this is something that should be considered. M. O'Connor noted there will be people who will struggle to pay taxes this year and there can be arrangements made with the tax collector to assist with that.

MOTION 1: R. Barber made a motion to send the budgets back to the boards for further adjustments and meet back on May 27, 2020 with the new budgets. P. Lavalley seconded the motion.

Vote Unanimous - **MOTION CARRIED**

Item 5: Public Comments

G. Pianka noted the Board of Selectmen and Board of Education are required to consider public safety and noted his concern with pushing back the DPW pole barn, transfer station repairs and the open culverts.

Jack Santo commented on the mandates for special education, noting the special education costs should be managed.

Item 6: Adjourn

MOTION 2: R. Barber made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 p.m. A. Chambers seconded the motion.

Vote unanimous - **MOTION CARRIED**

Respectfully submitted for the board,

Heather Barber
Recording Secretary