

**TOWN OF SPRINGFIELD
SELECTBOARD HALL – 96 MAIN STREET – THIRD FLOOR
BUDGET WORKSHOP MEETING
MONDAY, January 16, 2023**

APPROVED MINUTES

A. CALL MEETING TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND ROLL CALL

Chair, Kristi Morris, called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm. Pledge of Allegiance was recited, and Roll Call was taken.

Selectboard Members: Chair Kristi Morris, Vice Chair Michael Martin, Everett Hammond, Walter Martone, and Crissy Webster were present in-person.

Administration: Town Manager Jeff Mobus, Public Works Director Jeff Strong, and Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill were present in-person. Town Clerk Barbara Courchesne, Water/Wastewater Superintendent Rick Chambers, and Road Foreman Donny Tuner joined via Zoom. Fire Chief Paul Stagner and Library Director Sue Dowdell arrived late via Zoom.

School Board Liaison: Steve Karaffa was not in attendance

Budget Advisory Committee: Chair Jim Fog, Doug Johnston, Scott Richardson, and Corky Bond were present in-person. Tre Ayer joined late via Zoom.

B. Requested Additions to the Agenda

No requested additions to the agenda at the time of the meeting.

C. Budget Advisory Committee Report to Selectboard

Chair Kristi Morris noted that the Budget Advisory Committee Report was included in the meeting packet.

Budget Advisory Committee Chair Jim Fog discussed that they had to balance this year, the rising cost of doing everything due to inflation with the demand for increased services or at least keeping services more or less level with what they have been. BAC Chair Jim Fog added there is also a lot of deteriorating infrastructure that the Town needs to address, noting it's not a question of if we should do it or not, but it's a question of how much and what the timetable is. BAC Chair Jim Fog further added in a lot of cases the longer you wait the more it's going to cost, and, in some cases, there is the possibility of having something collapse and then you have to pay to get it done right away then it goes up even more. BAC Chair Jim Fog further discussed throughout this report they have tried to bear in mind that there is tough fiscal situation for the Town and at the same time the taxpayers don't want to be charged too much but at the same time they don't want to see their services go down dramatically either.

BAC Chair Jim Fog discussed that before they had really even had a chance to delve into the preproposal, the Town Manager approached the various department heads and sought for them to find further economies because the projected budget increase was an unacceptable level. BAC Chair Jim Fog added that the department heads each dug deep and found cuts that they could make and then they were invited to look at this new proposal that was just under 5% increase in the Town budget. BAC Chair Jim Fog further added they have examined that, done various site visits, and they met with the department heads and sought their input, and they (the BAC) recommended a few economies here and there and have also recommended a couple of increases. BAC Chair Jim Fog described the most notable increase being in the paving article, adding that having been here for the discussion amongst the Selectboard previously about the paving article they felt they needed to find a position as it is their job to make recommendations. BAC Chair Jim Fog further discussed they

felt that to raise it \$100,000 was the only way to keep up with the rising costs of inflation combined with the fact that those specific types of expenditures have gone up more than the rate of inflation and so in order to keep pace with the paving that has been going on they felt that \$100,000 more is needed in the article. BAC Chair Jim Fogg further noted that if you put that before the voters, they have the choice to say yay or nay on that, and if they say nay, then you come back at them with a special election on the original amount and then they have a chance to vote on that, its transparent and its democratic.

BAC Chair Jim Fog discussed that the budget was pretty close to the bone the second time they looked at it after the department heads made cuts, and apart from what they said in their report they don't think there are a lot of remaining savings to find that won't bite into the expectations that the taxpayers have for their services.

Walter Martone noted regarding Park Street School gym in the past they heard from Chris Merrill that what's available is not enough to meet the needs of the programs and that they (Parks and Rec) do need an external gym. Walter Martone added in the BAC report was the first time that he was hearing there was a possibility of getting use of free gyms at other school facilities and he inquired if he (Chris Merrill) has already explored that. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill responded that Elm Hill and Union Street both have gyms, adding he has spoken with Rich Saypack the Athletic Director of Springfield High School, and he (Rich Saypack) has spoken with Mr. Pembroke from the School District, and it has come out that if we needed those gyms, they would be available to us for younger age groups like K-2nd grade and 3rd-4th grades. Walter Martone asked to confirm that they would absolutely need another gym if they did not have Park Street School with what they are currently doing at the Community Center and that those gyms are adequate.

Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill described there would be some equipment needs for example Elm Hill doesn't have any basketball hoops, but they can get some portable basketball hoops to use there, and Union Street School has hoops from his understanding but it's a little bit smaller than the Community Center, noting these facilities would only be used as practices same as Park Street school. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill added Park Street School with some change of use and access, does offer an overall better opportunity for growth within the department and within their programs, noting that Elm Hill and Union Street School would keep it at what it is right now which is not really using it much other than practices for basketball season. Walter Martone inquired if the more ideal situation for them would be having Park Street School. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill responded it is overall because it is one facility, and he has spoken with Mr. Mobus and Bob Flint about access. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill added the biggest things that holds back their programs at Park Street is the shared access points and restrooms with the (Springfield) School District, noting there are a lot of other minor issues, but these are repetitive and the more they use it the more they arise. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill further added that he was talking with them about having their own access into the gym and getting some of the locker rooms fixed, noting that with that we could potentially hold games there and could have adult programs running at night. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill noted right now for him to run an adult program there he must give them access to the School District through their security code, a key, and access through their area to get to our gym. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill restated that Park Street School offers a potential better opportunity and Union Street and Elm Hill would break even with where they are at right now.

Walter Martone commented he was surprised they were not explored in the past, adding that he thought the BAC recognized in the recommendations that we have a commitment to Park Street School and to the development of that facility. Walter Martone added that he was not sure what we have to gain by trying to move the money into a different category called economic development, as opposed to keeping it where it is and actually having available to us the facilities for which our Parks and Rec department need and inquired if there was a real advantage or a reason to do that. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added that he has meet a few times now with Bob Flint about these concerns and he (Bob Flint) has assured him the Parks and Rec programming at Park Street is a priority and we do need to work these situations out regarding the access and the shared restrooms. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added they are committed to working that out and he (Bob Flint) also brought up a point that doesn't come out in black and white is that it's important to the

development of 60 Park Street that the Town and School District actually participate there and not simply give them a check.

Town Manager Jeff Mobus commented in reading the report, it's not like as long as we move the \$20,000 over somewhere else it doesn't matter, adding it does matter whether or not the Town is using that space at Park Street whether it be SRDC or BRIC, they are reaching out for outside funding and the fact that the School District has offices and the Town does use the gym does help them go out after money in a way that just writing a check doesn't. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added that he feels very strongly to keep things the way they are for one year and see if we can maximize the use of the gym because what Chris (Merrill) has said previously is we do want to look at increasing some of our adult offerings volleyball, pickleball, etc. and as they heard Elm Hill and Union Street would be for kids that doesn't help in those situations.

Town Manager Jeff Mobs further added he thinks we can get more use out of Park Street, and he believes the fact that we are using Park Street is worth something more than the simple dollar values as they look for outside funding to fully develop 60 Park Street. Town Manager Jeff Mobus continued the other side, and this predates his time as Manager, is there have been discussions on the future of Park Street and the future of the Community Center. Town Manager Jeff Mobus continued he thinks in the next 6-8 months we should really have some serious strategic planning on what we want to do with our Senior Center and our Parks and Rec program, if it should be housed down here do we want to put \$2.5 million down in the Community Center or are we better off trying to create a community hub at 60 Park Street with newer facilities. Town Manager Jeff Mobus restated his recommendation would be to leave things the way they are for one year and buy us time to try and max out the gym and make sure SRDC follows through on their commitment to make it more user friendly for the Town so we can maximize our offerings and do some strategic planning on where do we go from here.

Town Manager Jeff Mobus commented that doesn't mean we shouldn't deal with the boiler down at the Community Center, he thinks that's the more immediate need of the fiscal issues down there. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added he would reduce the retaining walls by \$10,000 because that's a building up into a fund so when we need the \$400,000 for the retaining wall by Eaton Avenue, we have the funds available, adding we can reduce that amount a little bit for one year and still have the funds available for the following year to hit the \$400,000 mark. Town Manager Jeff Mobus further added that is a situation of, is the boiler down there a more immediate need because if that boiler goes and its cold down there, pipes could freeze and in Vermont you need to have heat it's just a fact of life. Town Manager Jeff Mobus further described that it's just the easiest place to get something, noting it does create \$10,000 less that we have in the retaining wall fund two years from now and down the road however in the capital plan that was submitted the fund never got below \$23,000. Town Manager Jeff Mobus noted that he had spoken with Mr. Martin about possibly using some of it left to create additional funds for paving, but the boiler is an immediate need, adding that Chris (Merrill) has to check it every day and reset it, it's not a simple let's tune it up and get another 5 years from it.

Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill added what happened when the boiler came up in the process of the whole budget was during that rain around Christmas, it flooded our fuel tank and the guys that came to work on it were saying that they said this needed to be replaced three years ago. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill added it has been shutting off at least once a day every day since and he added a security system from the Riverside Maintenance garage as they had an extra camera which he added to the Community Center in their office so he could check the temperature. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill restated it's been every single day since, that it keeps shutting down and they (the heating technicians) have been back one time already and he doesn't know what else they can really do. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added that honestly that project may not even wait until the next budget year frankly and he may have to find money this year.

Chair Kristi Morris commented he may be incorrectly assuming, but he didn't think you can do much to a boiler for \$10,000, noting you aren't talking a replacement, so you are talking a patch. Further discussion ensued regarding where the \$10,000 came from and that it was not likely to cover the cost of replacement of the boiler.

Michael Martin commented when he saw the report and the suggested \$10,000 to take care of the boiler, you couldn't possibly replace the boiler for that building, however the reliability issues you are talking about are more related to the electronics and the controls, so you could easily replace burners and controls as long as the underlying iron is in good condition, noting it seemed that is the biggest concern is the reliability. Michael Martin further added looking at the building fund for the capital equipment at the Parks and Rec and for the 2022-2023 year we are in right now, there is a \$60,000 balance when we started with a \$36,000 contribution. Michael Martin inquired about the \$60,000 worth of expenditures if we had made commitments in all of these areas at this point, noting the ADA ramp has not been done, the tennis court rebuild has not been done, Freedom Park pavilion has not been done, and the pool house plumbing has not been done, so is there any latitude within these expenditures right here to take care of the boiler. Michael Martin noted he doesn't know what was planned for the Freedom Park pavilion but building a new structure vs taking care of an existing structure that could have serious repercussions if that building were to freeze up when we could reallocate those funds to take care of that immediate repair and not have to affect next year's budget for that purpose or move those funds into next year's budget and do one of these other projects later. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added that's where he would go get money if I needed to this year.

Michael Martin inquired if the programs that are being run at the Park Street School are just youth programs and they do not play games there. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill confirmed. Michael Martin then inquired if the idea of using the schools we would just take those programs and move them to a school and without loss of any programs that we are currently doing we could do that, but Chris Merrill's concern is that he can't expand their programs at the schools and that they would have the opportunity to do that at Park Street. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill confirmed. Michael Martin commented in the report the committee thought the gym was underutilized and was not being properly or fully utilized. Chair Kristi Morris noted this was on page three. Michael Martin further inquired how much are we utilizing that gym. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill responded we use it right now through the entirety of basketball season, so the beginning of December through the end of wrestling season in about April, adding when basketball season is taking place, we use it 5-6 days a week but from April – December it pretty much sits dormant, and we only use it at nights as well mostly.

Michael Martin commented there were concerns about the access to the building and some interruption of service related to unauthorized roaming of the halls by some of the participants and we were denied access to the bathrooms at some point for some reason and inquired that was true. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill responded that last year when he first came on in February as the Assistant Director, there was a time where they (the School District) had closed off the hallway to one bathroom last year, adding that they regularly get complaints about the cleanliness of the bathroom due to a single square of toilet paper or urine left in the toilet. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill continued there was a practice that took place this season that a parent had an older child that was not within the program that went and ventured through the school and based on that we were no longer able to use the Allen key to unlock the door so kids could come into practice. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill added that a coach had to stand out there to let the kids in and noted they've had three or four occasions that kids were 5-10 minutes late and then stood out there for another 10 minutes trying to get the attention of somebody while the School District's janitor walked by looked at them and kept walking so these are some of the access problems we have been dealing with. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill described that last week the lock for the one key they have for the building, broke and the School District In their contract has to maintain that door. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill continued they (School District) ordered that part, but it was going to be a week to fix it and they were not going to give them a key to the padlock they were applying to the door, so they had to go through SRDC to get access. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill noted that SRDC ended up fixing the door that day so there was no loss of service, but these are the repetitive issues during their usage and increased usage is only going to increase these issues.

Michael Martin commented that our lease arrangement is with SRDC not with the School District and this is one of the concerns that he addressed with Town Manager is SRDC should be able to remedy our concerns about access and use of bathroom facilities without having to inconvenience the School District. Michael Martin continued that we are a small

Town, and we all cooperate, but it is not the School District's responsibility to maintain a facility that SRDC is leasing the Town, so if we continued this arraignment, he would like to see them remedy the access, so we don't inconvenience the School District and the participants in the Parks and Recs programs. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill noted we do have the numbers for adult programs to expand into Park Street currently but what's stopping us is access issues.

Everett Hammond commented regarding the Community Center he was not sure how much the boiler would cost to replace but he would hate to see us put \$10,000 into it that's going to be thrown away a year from now if we are talking \$30,000 to replace the whole thing, noting its worth looking into before we put too much money into it. Everett Hammond inquired regarding Park Street if it was easy to add another door or if once you get past that other door it opens up and you need a bunch of other doors. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill responded there are currently two doors that access the gym directly, one is directly in front of the building but it would need step repair of stone and concrete work and another door on the side on the building, adding that the other entrances into the gym lead directly into the School District areas but if we use those for emergency use only with signage and possibly even a different type of door, then we could not be using those areas, we have two locker rooms but no usable facilities in them currently. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added that when he spoke with Mr. Flint, he said the issue with that front door is the steps as they are worried about someone tripping on the broken step so the step would have to be repaired and then they would be comfortable with people using it.

Michael Martin pointed out that the reason we are in the situation with the access and the bathrooms is previously we did lease the space from the School District, and it wasn't until SRDC purchased the building that the arraignment changed where we were paying the SRDC. Michael Martin added that we never paid the School District for the use of the building but we started using the building while the school still had ownership of the building so that's why they never addressed the access or bathroom issues, and he believed the previous director had a relationship with the school that they used some of the Rec Center space for one of their programs so it was a wash. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill noted it was The Space that used the Community Center facilities. Michael Martin further added when the building changed ownership that's when we started paying the lease payments and at that point the relationship with the School District changed and SRDC should have done something to provide us with better access and bathroom facilities and not inconvenience one of their tenants.

Scott Richardson inquired when the contract is up or if we do a yearly contract with SRDC. Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded it is a yearly contract for each fiscal year, so it ends June 30. Scott Richardson then inquired if there is something we can do before we sign the new contract to make sure that Parks and Rec has access and bathroom facilities are figured out or that the locker rooms are accessible. BAC Chair Jim Fog asked to confirm that Parks and Rec has access to the locker rooms. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill responded we have access to the locker rooms. Town Manager Jeff Mobus noted that the water is off in the locker rooms. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill added we have access to what used to be the offices but both of them are 50% or more full of old School District equipment and stuff and he is waiting to find an answer on what they are allowed to do with it whether they can dispose of it, use it, or move it out into the hallway. BAC Chair Jim Fog inquired if it impedes their access. Parks and Rec Director Chris Merrill responded it does impede how they can store things there and all that kind of stuff and he has talked to Mr. Mobus and Mr. Flint about that, as well.

Scott Richardson commented that he believes this is the stuff that needs to be worked out before we sign another lease, and he has no problem signing a lease but it's the transparency part that he wants to work on. Scott Richardson noted that its great and he knows some of their funding works on how it's used so if it's the Town actually using the gym that works on BRIC's ability to get more grants that's absolutely fine but that should be brought out and be part of the general knowledge.

Chair Kristi Morris discussed when the building was transferred to SRDC and more specifically the BRIC or CORI program that became the Black River Innovative Campus came into existence, they were looking for philanthropic donations or grants that might be available for repurposing the school into using it for advanced technologies purposes and taking advantage of the VTel's fiberoptic internet speed so with that the school ended up negotiating their portion of it to

maintain their presence there and the Town agreed that we would have a presence there for the investment side of it and that is attractive to the philanthropic or the other grant suppliers or people that would invest in something like this. Chair Kristi Morris continued they want to know there is commitment from the Town to see this project move forward, noting they actually would like more of a commitment from the Town. Chair Kristi Morris added they wanted us to put up hundreds of thousands of dollars and we would redo the gym to what we wanted to do, noting that's not how it caned up. Chair Kristi Morris added the building is in transitional mode as far as construction and they are still appropriating funds, grants, and investment groups with a target goal to the tune of millions of dollars to repurpose this building and redevelop it. Chair Kristi Morris noted you can go online and see through SRDC what the building is supposed to look like if you envision what the original engineers' and designers' concept that they had for this building including the development of the old marsh lot down below the old school and below that so that people would have easy access walking up a set of stairs or a rampway to get from downtown up to the school rather than from Park Street. Chair Kristi Morris further noted there is a lot of that design that has been there, so when we talk about transparency this was all brought out under the time under the former Town Manager in agreement SRDC was here they went through the presentation and there was agreement to put the \$20,000 into the Town budget for purposes of our footprint and that would get us access to this gym so that is how we got there.

Chair Kristi Morris further discussed there was transparency through the process and at their meetings and what they were trying to do as well as what we needed at the time with the former Parks and Rec Director for an additional gym, noting our buy in of that \$20,000 was going to give us access to the gym. Chair Kristi Morris added we just don't say that every year it's not necessarily repeated and maybe it should be, but you can go on to the SRDC website and see the development of that building where the steps to get from what it was a defunct vacant school.

Doug Johnston commented when we had open gym at Riverside he believed it was on Sunday for the adults or whatever, they used to have a gate that blocked the stairway going into the rest of the building, noting he doesn't know what the configuration is at Park Street but maybe something like that which can be removed during the daytime and placed where it is secure so nobody could go beyond a certain point would be something to consider

Chair Kristi Morris commented those questions need to be asked to players that are not here and that what he is understanding is the Town Manager will have conversations with Bob Flint the SRDC director to see what can be done and hopefully Chris Merrill will be able to be part of that discussion, noting we have the boots on the ground and the people that we need to talk to so we can determine what it's going to take to get us there and we can't tell them what to do and we need that cooperation and discussion so that we will know going forward so that all parties are satisfied and we have access but we are protecting their areas and the kids or teams have access to a bathroom.

Corky Bond noted that she was responsible for the \$10,000 towards the furnace and that it wasn't meant to be that exactly, but they talked about saving \$20,000 and that saving \$10,000 for the girls' room would leave \$10,000 for the furnace. Corky Bond commented regarding the gym at Park Street she questioned what the long-range plan was, and do we put money into fixing up what we have there, or do we have plan b to go someplace else, noting that she feels that at some point SRDC is going to use the gym for something else and we are going to be out of there anyway. Chair Kristi Morris responded that was not his understanding.

Michael Martin reiterated what Chair Kristi Morris said about transparency, regarding the \$20,000 has been budgeted for several years and they have this discussion every year at this time of year, and they go through line by line and as far as transparency goes that's been an open fact for a long time that the commitment to the school or SRDC was a twofold one. Michael Martin continued as Chair Kristi Morris said we get the use of the gym, and we make a commitment to BRIC for their economic viability for their funding packages and also the community participation was an important part of that, so he thought it was a win for all of us. Michael Martin added he wasn't aware at this level of the difficulties we are having with access and bathrooms and that kind of stuff, and he was sorry for that. Michael Martin further added as for the long-range question when SRDC was doing the planning for this building he recalled a number of \$28 million as the number they were looking at for doing this project and they were trying to figure out how they were going to do that and fund it

and pay for it and one of the options was for us to abandon the Community Center on Main Street and lease a large portion of the gymnasium, lower level, and perhaps the auditorium. Michael Martin noted it was a substantial amount of money per year and he believed at the end of the day we would spend something like \$2.5 million to be a tenant in a building that would end up being a condo and we would own a portion after 20 years, they would give us a title to a portion of the building but they wear going through one of the machinations and this is not where they are now, noting this was just one of the preliminary discussions.

Michael Martin discussed the options around the question regarding the boiler brought up by Mr. Hammond and spending \$10,000 to fix a boiler that has to be replaced for \$100,000 when we talk about the rest of the issues the Community Center has, or do we want to spend \$2.5 million for a new Community Center, or when we are having the discussions with SRDC about making a long-term commitment for a much expanded use of that facility were we willing to do that. Michael Martin commented his question was and remains if the community is willing to spend \$2.5 million for a new community center and his answer then and likely still is probably not, noting he doesn't think the community has the will or want to do that. Michael Martin added for \$20,000 we get access to a gym that we badly need to expand our youth programs and he thinks that is a bargain compared to the alternatives.

Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded to Corky Bond and their long-term ideal plan is exactly what they have been talking about, it is that we abandon the Community Center and move the Senior Center and Community Center all up there, noting if you go into Bob's (Flint) office right now it's still the active plan that they would like to see that become a community hub and so people of all ages go up there and we use the auditorium and the gymnasium, that is their plan and he is not as worried about that. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added that when he mentioned that we need to go into a one-year agreement and do strategic planning about what we are going to do and those are exactly the questions we need to determine, what we are going to do with the Community Center do we want to stay there or do we want to go up to Park Street and we have to decide what we want to do and see if it works for them.

Walter Martone recalled in parallel with looking at Park Street School, they were at the same time doing some analysis on a brand new Community Center and his understanding is the price tag was even more than the \$2.5 million and was more like \$4.5 million to actually do a whole new Community Center, so they shelved that idea for a while and shelved the possibility of moving to Park Street School and went with just having some kind of a relationship with Park Street so we can have access and at the same time maybe do some upgrades to the Community Center. Walter Martone commented regarding the SRDC website there is actually an animated walkthrough of the new Park Street School, and it is quite impressive, and it talks about the long-term use and the plan in that the long-term use it still envisions the gymnasium as being an improved gymnasium that has its own bathrooms, and the balcony is functional, and access is improved. Walter Martone noted in the plan it still retains its integrity as a gymnasium that we could use and maybe that there would be some expanded public use of it. Walter Martone added that the major thing that is going to be changed is the auditorium which would be changed into a multiuse type of facility and greatly improved as far as its utility. Walter Martone reiterated that us getting kicked out has not been mentioned at all in anybody's long-term plans.

BAC Chair Jim Fog pointed out the Budget Committee wasn't really invited to consider these kinds of strategic plans or briefed up on those, so when they had their site visit with the Parks and Rec Department, they were made aware of the deficiencies, noting like mentioned during the meeting tonight we are leasing the space, we are paying, and the provision of services is not adequate. BAC Chair Jim Fog added they fully support it and that's why they suggested shifting the allocation to another line item as they were not aware that it was so strategically important to SRDC and BRIC that the money be allocated through the means that you have selected to do, noting it was in the interest in trying to show directly where the money goes in a transparent way. BAC Chair Jim Fog further added with the understanding that it would be tedious, but to make that clear at every budget session as it seems like each year someone is taking a new interest in the process who wants to have it explained to them why this works the way it does and what the benefit is to the community. Town Manager Jeff Mobus commented to clarify what Mr. Fog said it's not just which bucket of money that comes out of,

it is also that we are actively using the facility and that needs to happen. Chair Kristi Morris added we are using it under the guise of Parks and Rec program.

Everett Hammond inquired if regarding the \$100,000 in paving if that is put in there and it's voted in, are we still at 5% or less. Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded that right now and last year there are three appropriations that are special appropriations. Town Manager Jeff Mobus described them as being there is \$700,000 for paving and 5% of that is \$35,000, there was \$100,000 for sidewalks and 5% of that is \$5,000, and \$208,000 special appropriation and roughly 5% of that is \$10,000, noting there is \$50,000 there and your overall net you would still be at the 5% and if you go up to \$100,000 then we will go over the 5%. Michael Martin commented if we did everything the same and our town budget went up 4.9%, the overall tax impact would go up less than 4.9% because the sidewalk and the paving amounts would be level funded so the total amount would be diluted by that \$900,000. Michael Martin added it would drop from 4.99% increase to the taxpayers down to something like 4.74% or something like that, but if we raise the paving from \$700,000 to \$800,000 then that extra \$100,000 raises the overall tax increase to something like 5.17% or 5.24% something like that. Further discussion ensued that they were discussing the same thing with two different approaches.

Town Manager Jeff Mobus discussed that he spoke with Mr. Martin and he was diligently looking for alternatives and his first suggestion was to reduce the amount of money to the retaining walls by \$25,000 and then you could add \$50,000 to the paving total and you would be at \$1,075,000 but your overall would still come in just a whisker under 5%, noting that he doesn't know where he could find another \$25,000. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added if he did need that for a boiler that is a different issue, but he doesn't think he does as they pointed out there is other capital items in the Parks and Rec that we could shift around needs and still deal with it. Everett Hammond commented there is no question the paving is needed, and he commented that it was a great report they (BAC) did and was well thought out and he liked their stance to see what the voters say.

Michael Martin commented found his numbers and 4.99% would be diluted to 4.56% increase because the paving sidewalks and special appropriations add \$1,008,000 and that the extra \$100,000 would raise the overall rate increase to 5.4%, noting that Mr. Mobus had told him he thought he could find \$25,000. Further discussion ensued regarding the question being political if the Town's voters had the willingness to make the increase and that it is one of the most popularly voted items on the Town's budget as it is something concrete that the voters get to see the results of.

Town Manager Jeff Mobus discussed if the goal was to stay at 5% his recommendation is \$750,000 but if they are willing to go a little over then he would agree the need is there, noting the price for the premade is going up so we need to address it now as it's not expected to get cheaper down the road and well get the improvements done. Public Works Director Jeff Strong commented the current price was \$102.50 per ton and the RSMS was based on about \$80 per ton. Everett Hammond commented \$80-\$90 depends on where you are and it's all about production so if you go out to rural country like Brockway Mills Road or Seavers Brook Road you will get a better price per ton.

Walter Martone inquired if we know how we compare with another jurisdiction, for example he kept hearing that Hartford has about the same number of miles of roads or possibly even more than us, noting they have been much flusher with money and so therefore maybe they have kept up with things. Walter Martone added that he tried to go online and look at their budget and they seemed to be significantly lower than us.

Everett Hammond commented at one point they were up there, and they have crept down and are losing ground now lately, noting he wasn't sure if it was affecting their roads. Everett Hammond added that he found out Rockingham is half the miles, noting they have 45 miles paved vs our 92 and they at \$750,000 or \$850,000 in the next year. Everett Hammond further added he put together a plan for them and they are following it and it is making a difference and its starting to make a difference here Springfield also, noting to keep in mind \$750,000 or \$850,000 is half so theoretically they would be at \$1.5 million to \$1.7 million if they are the same amount of road.

Chair Kristi Morris commented he believed it was important to consider that some residents do not vote for the increases that have passed by majorities as there are people out there that believe they are on a fixed income or perhaps are not

into the moderate- or high-income levels and they do struggle. Chair Kristi Morris added that there is a component of the voters that does not support the budget each year, does not support the school system budget, and does not support all the appropriations to the extent that we have been fortunate. Chair Kristi Morris further added he doesn't want to underrepresent the people out there that look at this differently and don't vote for it because they think taxes are too high, so these are the reasons when he puts together his opinion regarding support or not support for the budget and its finality that he takes into consideration. Chair Kristi Morris discussed we are not just representing the people that vote for us because it passes, that's not entirely who we represent so he thinks we should have a difference of opinion at and if we can advocate for all of our citizens and show the intent there by supporting some that don't.

Chair Kristi Morris discussed he has a tough time supporting all these increases and he has been on the board 15 years now and has supported getting our capital contributions, our equipment contribution, and our paving contributions inline. Chair Kristi Morris added that he has been an advocate of that because when he was first on the board his first term, you could only save money in two places capitals and paving. Chair Kristi Morris further added we cut a truck for \$80,000 out of paving and we only had \$300,000 in paving, adding that it was a fight to try and meet the needs of our citizens with the capital we had and the paving projects that we wanted to do as it was significantly underfunded and had been for decades.

BAC Chair Jim Fog discussed that was something that they grappled with when they were putting this budget together and he for one doesn't have to imagine the plight of people on fixed income as both his parents are retired and receiving Social Security and Veteran's benefits and those cost-of-living allowances don't go up as much as the rate of inflation. BAC Chair Jim Fog added he had that in the back of his mind particularly with this appropriation (paving) that with people with aging cars and we have a deteriorating roads, that they are more likely to have problems with their vehicles. BAC Chair Jim Fog further added he believes as Mr. Martin said, they notice something like paving so if you guys can work some kind of compromise of \$50,000 or \$75,000 that's great, noting that the committee (BAC) had to vote on a specific motion and they voted on \$50,000 or \$100,000 and the majority went with \$100,000 based on the inflationary numbers coupled with what Mr. strong said about how these costs are rising faster than those inflation numbers.

Michael Martin commented that he reworked his figures and if we take Mr. Mobus' suggestion and find \$25,000 in the existing budget and divert it to paving and add \$50,000 to the special appropriation, the net increase to tax payers overall including the paving, sidewalks, and special appropriations comes back coincidentally at 4.99% which is exactly the budget that Mr. Mobus has presented for his operating budget, noting it is actually 4.98542% so it is a little less than 4.99%. Michael Martin added it brings us back to a less than 5% increase if we add \$50,000 to the \$700,000 and move the other \$25,000, we would be \$1.75 million which he thinks is doable.

Chair Kristi Morris asked to clarify where that \$25,000 is coming from. Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded they would take it from retaining wall fund. Chair Kristi Morris then inquired if it was not the same pot of money that we are going to use to fix the boiler at the Community Center. Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded that is not the same pot they would use to fix the boiler.

Walter Martone discussed regarding the different constituencies he believes there is also a third group of people that are not actually a constituency but a potential constituency and that's the people we are trying to attract to come to Springfield and he believes we have to keep that in mind too now that a big tax rate would be a factor. Walter Martone added the thing that comes to mind for him was during Covid we saw big increases in real estate sales, but Springfield did not see the big bump that all the other neighboring communities saw like Chester, Weathersfield, and Hartford all went way up. Walter Martone further added we saw a sizable bump but we didn't see the same bump and we should have had a much bigger bump because we are a better value as we are a full service Town and our prices are much lower than other places. Walter Martone noted he believes that is something we need to consider if we are trying to grow our community and bring in more middle-income people that can afford to support all the services that we have.

Michael Martin commented he noticed two other items in the report from the committee and they are related to the Police Department, there is a \$500 reduction in social expense and \$1,500 reduction in the travel expense so that's a total

of \$2,000, he inquired if management had any comments about that. Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded they did not, he spoke with Chief Burnham and explained them, and he thinks there was good rationale behind these, and we should just accept these. Michael Martin further inquired that management has no objection to making these cuts. Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded they do not.

Michael Martin commented that they discussed the Park Street gym, and the only other thing is the additional \$20,000 to the Rec Department capital budgets and inquired if management feels as though these are important considerations and if we can convert existing capital expenditures for those things or do we need to add something to our capital budgets for next year bearing in mind we will go over that 4.99%. Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded at a certain point you have to say this is what we can afford and if we have some longer term needs that we are reserving money for and we have more immediate needs, then we deal with the immediate needs added that he thinks we would take that out of the capital.

Michael Martin commented that he noticed too that the committee was very helpful in making some management suggestions in the report and this is one of them, adding that he believes if we have capital expenditures this year for some other items that we feel as though we can divert for these other two purposes, he suggests we do that. Michael Martin added that he (Town Manager) doesn't need Board approval for this, if we need boiler repairs and we don't want our Parks and Rec Director up all night watching a video of this boiler wondering if its running or not. Michael Martin further added he wasn't aware of the bathroom situation down there and thanked the committee for bringing that to their attention, noting that is something we should address. BAC Chair Jim Fog commented he wanted to thank Ms. Bond and Tara Chase their secretary, for conducting that visit and he believes that addressing that particular issue is long overdue just in the interest on all the female members of town that may want to access it.

Town Manager Jeff Mobus announced that next week on the 23rd starting at 6 pm we will have the Public Hearing on the budget so people have one more shot at this, noting he is going to go through and make these small changes and prepare for next week but if there are any other items the Board wants us to change or have more questions on he is happy to try and address them.

Chair Kristi Morris commented next week we have to come up with a number because we will be in a Public Hearing, and we will have a public hearing to present the budget we have right now with the minor adjustments that we are talking about and then have a Selectboard meeting to adopt the budget. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added and to move all the other warrant articles to the warrant. Chair Kristi Morris noted so that the ballot can go off to be printed at the end. Town Manager Jeff Mobus further added that's why he needs to know the paving number right now and he is going to assume that we are doing \$750,000 and changing \$25,000 from the retaining wall to paving in the operating budget for what he brings to them next week.

Chair Kristi Morris inquired for informational purposes the retaining wall near the plaza was estimated to be \$400K. Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded our share was going to be \$400K and the best we can do is the \$200,000 structures grant unless the Regional Transportation Agency changes their rules on funding. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added it was estimated to be \$600,000 overall and it could be a little more now. Public Works Director Jeff Strong added it could be a little more, between \$600K-\$700K. Michael Martin inquired if we collected the property damage on that motorist's insurance. Public Works Director Jeff Strong responded they were uninsured. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added frankly that would not have impacted the need to replace the wall anyway. Chair Kristi Morris reminded people that the gentleman lost his life.

Doug Johnston discussed the Evidence Control Officer they felt was a very worthwhile thing because it kept the Certified Officers on the street and also when they get the Detective Division up and running will keep them out detecting and following up on investigations, so they highly encourage keeping that into the budget with those reasonings and that they would also recommend that whoever is in that position goes to training for up to date procedures on running the evidence control room. Chair Kristi Morris inquired if we were currently staffing that. Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded they aren't doing evidence control and all they are doing is transferring the data from one obsolete system to the other up to

date system. Chair Kristi Morris inquired that was the \$18,500 that's what is in there for Evidence Officer. Doug Johnston responded he thought it was \$20,000. Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded it was \$18,500.

Town Manager Jeff Mobus commented that he was speaking with the Town Manager in another town area, and he said they are looking at 10% increase, noting it's a challenging time for everyone. Chair Kristi Morris discussed if you want to look at other towns and Hartford was mentioned they have two to three times our grand list, that's where their money comes from and if you want to look at the department sizes, they have much more personnel than what we do. Chair Kristi Morris added if you are looking to equate Springfield and what we spend in our budget increases, we are understaffed in some departments, we are underfunded in some departments, but our grand list is also under what the Hartfords, Burlingtons, or Rutlands are so it puts it on the back of our property taxpayers. Chair Kristi Morris further added that's why he advocates for as small of an increase as we can, adding he thought we had done a pretty good job between the Town Manager and the department heads to come back with this list of reductions and they were not necessarily equal to what inflation was. Chair Kristi Morris continued we had the spots within this budget that the department heads advocated for extra funding, and we had to look at that and it did put us up to roughly 7% increase which is still under inflation but on the other hand is a significant increase, probably twice what we have seen in recent years.

BAC Chair Jim Fog commented he wanted to say on behalf of the whole Budget Committee that they were grateful to the cooperation that they received from all of the Department Heads and Mr. Mobus, and that all the site visits went smoothly and they especially appreciate the efforts that the department heads made to find these economies and work within the strictures that the Board and Mr. Mobus had set forth so that we didn't have to come up with a rabbit out of a hat of \$100,000 cut somewhere or a bunch of \$10,000 cuts everywhere, noting that he believes that kind of cooperation is really important to this process.

Scott Richardson commented this doesn't pertain to this budget here and inquired if we ever thought of continuing to look at the 1% retail tax for Springfield. Chair Kristi Morris commented it probably would not go well with or retailers in Town the same with other Towns also we would have to vote to do that. Scott Richardson commented he understands that but then there's no problem of pulling into Dunkin Donuts and spending 8% tax for your pumpkin latte so it one of those things and you spend \$100 retail here in Springfield it would be 6% to the State and it would be 1% to the Town of Springfield. Doug Johnston commented it doesn't help being right next to NH. Walter Martone commented that the time to really seriously look at this is when we have our first cannabis retail. Scott Richardson inquired if we have to have that in place before or after they open. Walter Martone responded before. Chair Kristi Morris added that cannabis cannot be considered different than other retail sales, so you have to have an overall sales & lodging 1% tax. Further discussion ensued to clarify that the timing did not matter, just that it had to apply to everyone and not just cannabis stores.

Corky Bond commented as a citizen, that whenever we keep the budget low the first thing that gets cut is always maintenance, but it shows, and she thinks that is unfortunate that things are really starting to look not very good and if we want to increase our grand list things need to look better. Chair Kristi Morris asked Corky Bond to explain what she meant with maintenance. Corky Bond responded that she was talking about everything from lawn care and leaky roofs, noting the retaining wall that's in this parking lot back here looks scary dangerous. Corky Bond added if you come to Springfield, you see that stuff.

Chair Kristi Morris responded that he believes the Board is going to take great pride in some of the successes we have had in past years to improve this Town, noting the movie theater, the park across the street from the coop, the Woolson Block, and Union Street area around the school there was three dilapidated, drug infested buildings that are now gone and we have worked extremely hard at finding funding and cooperation from agencies, Town Managers, and Schools, Housing Authority, etc. to do what we can. Chair Kristi Morris added that we do have a strategic plan and it is a 5-year plan that we have to address this stuff, but it always comes down to the capital and where are you going to get the money to do all these projects. Chair Kristi Morris further added the Jones and Lamson building is now down, noting we didn't have a huge financial contribution to that, but we did support that and those are required when SRDC who is the owner of that building was going after grants and politically you need the support of the Town. Chair Kristi Morris continued he likes to look at

the successes we have had and we are not done, there is a lot more to go but this is an operating budget and we certainly appreciate those comments and that's why he asked for a clarification on what maintenance is because we have adjusted our paving budget over the past half dozen to 8 years and our capital equipment and he believes they are appropriately funded now where before it was always cut.

Further discussion ensued to clarify that Corky Bond was talking about driving through town and this is what you see.

Chair Kristi Morris commented another example of maintenance is we put a \$100,000 roof on the Fire Station, and you would not see that as you drive into Town. Corky Bond commented some of the maintenance does show, noting we have a brand-new park and its beautiful adding that she agrees that we have done a lot of good things.

Crissy Webster discussed that she has had conversations with the Town Manager previously about figuring out some sort of audit within the budget of all the different departments and how we can prioritize spending, where can you cut within some of those areas to be able to prioritize the projects that need to be done. Crissy Webster added to have somebody else from the outside come in to be able to do that, so that we can say this is a major priority or this needs to be done this year so we need to find the funds within this funding source to be able to do that. Crissy Webster further added off the top of her head the library roof repairs, if we need to cut back on some of the books and things like that to be able to afford the roof then that's what we have to do for a year and then be able to increase some of that the following year or do the same with public works.

Public Works Director Jeff Strong discussed he made a list of projects they have done this afternoon before coming here over the last seven years and there is a lot of things that you don't see because they are kind of underground. Public Works Director Jeff Strong read his list of some of the things they have done and couple of them they worked with Everett Hammond on being the Valley Street box culvert replacement, the Massey Road box culvert replacement, the Mineral Street box culvert replacement, the Giddings Street bridge repair for \$100,000, the Pleasant Valley slip line culvert project, the Giddings Street sidewalk, the Valley Street sidewalk, the South Street sidewalk, and stormwater projects on Meadow Drive, Mile Hill, Will Dean, Greeley Road, Recycling Facility, they rebuilt Spencer Hollow Road, are rebuilding Eureka Road, the Giddings Street bridge and waterline were done, the Community Center bridge, the Cider Mill culvert rehab and those are things that you don't see much of.

Corky Bond responded that she was not saying that we are not getting things done she was saying that if she doesn't see it somebody else driving through Springfield doesn't either. Public Works Director Jeff Strong commented we don't do a good job selling these things when they are done, and we probably should have done a big press release and brought people up to that Massey Road box culvert and showed them before and after pictures of how terrible that bridge was and what we did with grant money for that.

Michael Martin responded that he and Ms. Bond have had a conversation about this and there is no doubt we have budgetary constraints, and we are trying to maintain the infrastructure as best we can. Michael Martin added he believes we should stay vigilant as best we can to those outward facing visible maintenance issues that prevent us from attracting new business and new residents to the community, noting we complain about our taxbase and our inability to fund some of these projects because we don't have a robust taxbase and the only way we are going to get a better taxbase is if we get more investment in the community. Michael Martin further added we have to be aware of first impressions as you only get one chance to make a good first impression.

Doug Johnston commented he agrees with Mr. Strong that maybe it's the marketing that we are not doing enough of, noting it won't cost us anything to put it on the Town website or if Public Works has a website to put it on that.

Walter Martone discussed that if you ask any realtor, they will say curb appeal is the number one thing. Walter Martone added they will never ask you about foundation and stuff if there is no curb appeal, but once you have the curb appeal you can at least engage somebody in all the other good stuff that has been done. Everett Hammond added that every town has the same issues and it is the weeds that grow up that affect the curb appeal, noting you can only do so much in

the State with grass growing up through and there is only so much these guys can do without getting some kind of special permits to put something down to kill that stuff. Public Works Director Jeff Strong commented they have been talking about that. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added he has actually tried to talk to the guy at the State who could lead us through the permit process, but he has not gotten back to him.

Crissy Webster commented that every high school student needs 40 hours of community service to graduate and inquired if any of these projects are something that we can tap into community service hours for, noting she knows that it comes into an issue of supervision. Public Works Director Jeff Strong responded if you are not 18 you can't operate power tools so if they were coming to trim at the cemetery they would need to be 18. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added it has to do with insurance. BAC Chair Jim Fog added when he was the Trails Committee as Chair, he had to organize these events and he reached out and was only able to have a couple of seniors do the work needed because they were 18.

Chair Kristi Morris commented that he would like to invite people to walk up on the Hartness Park trails and see the new trails and kiosks, noting the weather right now might not be the best for walking.

Michael Martin commented he was under the impression tonight was going to be a public hearing but it was postponed, and inquired for their public hearing next week if they are presenting this \$11,143,741 for the budget presentation. Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded that's the net, noting that's the expenses minus the revenue which is effectively the number that we need less the couple thousand dollars in the police budget. Michael Martin inquired if they all agreed on \$750,000 for the paving warrant. Chair Kristi Morris responded that's what they are hearing and reminded that they are not in a voting hearing.

Michael Martin inquired if the special appropriations are not within their control. Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded he was correct. Michael Martin further inquired those are all by petition and Chair Kristi Morris responded they are in their control as far as the policy that they set.

Michael Martin discussed the policy was only for placement on the warrant and inquired if they are still going to go ahead with Contract I, the water bonding vote that is \$3.4 million with up to \$1 million in loan forgiveness and the rest of the balance over 40 years at 0%, and if that was the extent of the municipal warrants other than election. Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded that was correct. Everett Hammond inquired if regarding the warrant on that water bond if we can actually put that in there about the million forgiveness. Town Manager Jeff Mobus responded that we can't put that in the warrant and that's why we have to have the informational meeting. Chair Kristi Morris responded it's always the gross amount on the warrant. Town Manager Jeff Mobus added you have to sell the funding and the fact that we are doing a lot of lead remediation he believes is something that is really important to a lot of people also. Everett Hammond commented that is the same problem with the school budget, there is so much federal and state money coming down but they have to vote on the whole thing.

D. Review Complete Budget

Item moved to next meeting after the Public Hearing.

E. ADJOURN

MOTION: Crissy Webster moved to adjourn the meeting.

Seconded by: Michael Martin

Vote: 5-0, unanimous

The meeting adjourned at 7:36 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carrie M. Kellow, Recording Secretary