

Committee on Appropriations

March 31, 2015

In attendance: Peter Clifford, Geoff Grove, Peter Dennehy, Melissa Horne, Chad Mollica

Also present: TR Rimoshytus, Alex Robertson, Kevin Ryan, and Jeffrey Lewis of turf field group.

Also, Ed McKinley, Kate Brody (School Committee)

Meeting called to order at 7:05

Minutes: Peter D. moved to approve March 10, 2015, minutes. Peter C. seconded Chad clarified that the \$46,00 increase was due to the ACA. The minutes were approved unanimously with change. Melissa abstained.

Peter D. moved, Peter C. seconded making minor change to last sentence clarifying that Town Manager Peter DeAngelis made comment and minutes approved unanimously with change. Melissa abstained.

Turf Field: Alex Robertson explained the artificial turf proposal for Victory Field. Cost of project would be close to \$2.5 million based on estimate by Gale Associates, a copy of which was distributed prior to meeting to members of COA.

The group pointed out examples of schools which had recently installed artificial turf including Portsmouth. They said that thirteen local high schools now have artificial turf. Robertson feels this is an urgent matter. Wishes to place a motion on docket for FTM. He questioned how HS Tennis BMS basketball courts were financed. Researched school committee minutes to see progress of these proposals through school committee. He saw no evidence that this was discussed before school committee. Says that artificial turf is a matter of safety and source of revenue. He went before TC and was asked to go back before School "Board".

Robertson said he spoke with June who said that he is "Not going to get this project approved through the typical channels."

Melissa Horne, who was once chair of the Parks and Rec Commission, explained the process for moving projects like this forward.

Kevin Ryan asked for corroboration regarding the \$2 million Rec bond that paid for the Barrington Middle School fields.

Geoff explained that the COA is responsible for reviewing the budgets of the Town and the School Department and that the Capital Budget This is not a place that we can put a bond in.

Peter C. reiterated what happened with the various bonds and financing of other rec projects.

Geoff said that when it was free it was an awesome idea. And even at a low cost it was a good idea. At \$1.5 million it's something that he could not support. He went on to explain other including the capping of landfill #3.

Robertson indicated that "the artificial turf should be right up there beside the landfill."

A discussion ensued as to what mechanisms exist to put this before the FTM.

Chad asked about the life of the field. Robertson said the average life of field is 15 years but Town will amortize over 20.

Kevin Ryan said less than 27 events including lacrosse, football, field hockey used the field last year. BHS will have first dibs. Chad asked about scheduling. Ryan said that "they don't have authority."

Ed McKinley commented that the initial project is \$2.5 million. He said this is corroborated by his conversations with Moses Brown. Northeastern ran an analysis of maintenance program over ten years both on natural turf and artificial turf and the maintenance costs were exactly the same. "The top is generally called "The rug" - they will be practicing every sport and playing every game on that field. Practice is going to take as much out of it as a game." East Greenwich put an artificial turf field in - it rained and they had a swimming pool. Old Saybrook voted for an artificial turf field and it's been two years and they still don't a field.

Kate Brody reiterated that the school committee has the duty to look at the budget in terms of what is most important to the schools.

The item will be tabled until the COA is otherwise notified that the item has been placed on the FTM agenda.

The COA moved on to a discussion of the 2016 Budget, which comes in (overall) at \$65,962,428, a 2.04% increase over 2015. Peter C. presented an alternative budget that proposes a 1.13% increase by reducing the School Budget by \$400,000 and the Capital Budget by \$188,000. Peter D. and Melissa Horne asked about the rationale behind the percentages - is it arbitrary? Chad explained that the change in the state aid (schools) was for property tax relief and the spirit of that funding should be respected. Peter C. also reviewed teacher student ratios and noted that student population has been going down and is expected to continue doing so. Even with state aid, we are not getting our fair share. They don't use the actual appraisal base but manipulate the property values to show that Barrington is "rich." Over the past few years, the municipal budget has been flat.

Chad said that school spending has actually been fairly flat and the increases have been driven by contract obligations.

Peter D. commented that it must be difficult to run schools with all constraints. In the whole business of cutting down staff you have to look at lag time. He added that he thought Peter C.'s earlier point about staffing levels and student population was well put.

Geoff said that reducing school budget by \$400k along with Capital would increase overall budget by only 1.13% from 2015. Playing Devil's Advocate – is the rationale that the number “feels better” than 2.04%? He added that because the school budget is a bottom line budget, the areas to cut were not identified though it's roughly equal to four full time staff.

Melissa commented that the capital budget looks like it has increased about 12.5% over the past few years.

Peter C. distributed an analysis of capital expenditures and how monies were actually spent. He said that excess monies in operating expenditures were put into the fund. He thinks they should go into capital.

Chad said that transparency is good and it breeds credibility and future support and the COA began this process last year when capital expenditures were pulled out of the school budget to make it transparent. But, he said, we're always fighting yesterday's war with regard to the 4%. The town has a AA rating and we should be working toward AAA – we need to get there because there is a big savings on interest.

Geoff called the group's attention to a communication from Ron Tarro that was an early go at the budget.

Melissa asked if there could be two capital budgets – one for school and one for municipal. The consensus was that this was possible.

Peter C. said that there is grant revenue that is awarded to schools that offsets outlays from capital. He questioned what happens to that difference – where is it reflected?

Geoff asked if there was any discussion on the Peter C. proposal. He also asked if the original 2.04% increase was reasonable.

Chad said that 1.13% sounds small but it isn't because it isn't the whole picture...we have a number of unfunded pension obligations. There is room for more efficiency without affecting the quality of life and this would be a good area for the town to focus on.

Peter D. said that rationale is important and that in fairness to the time spent by school and municipal administration to build the budget we have to have a rationale.

For Peter D. and Melissa's benefit, Geoff explained the review process. He said that by April 29 the COA must have the budget to Finance Director Kathy Raposa. He stressed that the process always works better when we (COA) do everything we can to work together.

Melissa said that she appreciated the time that Peter C. took to explain the rationale behind the 1.13% and was concerned about the unfunded obligations mentioned by Chad and asked how we fix that.

The consensus was that changes must be made.

Peter C. reviewed how the budget has increased over the past few years and briefly talked about the recent revaluation. He said that moderately-valued homes have increased in value by almost 10% and those taxpayers will feel a big hit next year and that the COA must be mindful of that.

A discussion ensued about pensions and contracts.

Peter C. pointed out that small budget increases compound over time.

Geoff said that pensions are a problem but trying to address this through this year's budget also creates problems.

Peter C. said he would like to have a budget number to present to school and municipal. Geoff said he'd like to mull it over. Chad agreed that it would be helpful to have a number. Geoff agreed to take a vote on Peter C.'s proposal. After a conversation about the merit of the proposal Chad moved to vote with Peter C. seconding as follows:

- A \$400,000 decrease in School Operating budget along with a \$188,000 reduction in the Capital budget.
- The Municipal Operating budget should remain as presented

All in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 9:19.

Respectfully Submitted: Ann Strong
Approved by: Geoff Grove