

Barrington Committee on Appropriations

Meeting Minutes

April 18, 2016

Opening

The regular meeting of the Barrington Committee on Appropriations was called to order at 7:18 p.m. on April 18, 2016 in the Meeting Room of the Barrington Library by Geoff Grove.

Present

Geoff Grove, Peter Dennehy, Melissa Horne, Chad Mollica and Ann Strong (Town Council Liaison).

Also attending: Tony Arico

Approval of Agenda

The agenda was unanimously approved as distributed.

Approval of Minutes

Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting was deferred to a future meeting.

Open Issues

Geoff Grove opened the meeting by stating that the Committee's obligation was to make a recommendation regarding the FY17 municipal, school and capital budgets by April 22, 2016 so that the Finance Director can send it to the state and then advertise it in advance of the Budget Meeting. That recommendation will be the basis of the budget presented at the Financial Town Meeting unless the Committee subsequently learns of circumstances warranting a change to the budget.

Mr. Grove advised that Richard Staples was not able to present at the meeting but that he had told Mr. Grove that although he was amenable to the budget as presented, he is hopeful that the School Department would come back with a larger reduction.

A discussion ensued regarding the budget. Mr. Grove stated that he agrees with Chad Mollica's suggestion that the Committee should recommend a 1% increase over the FY16 budget on both the school and municipal sides. On the municipal side, the Town Manager requested an increase of \$295,804 for a total budget of \$17,578,939. A 1% increase would result in an increase of \$175,579.

Melissa Horne stated that she would agree with recommending that the municipal budget be funded as proposed while cutting the school budget. Ms. Horne added that she was very disappointed that the School Department had reported no progress on its efforts to reduce its budget through improved transportation efficiencies. Chad Mollica agreed, adding that he doesn't feel the School Department demonstrates fiscal restraint in new hires. Geoff Grove observed that the problem is that the Appropriations Committee really has little control over the school budget because it is a bottom line budget. The School Department requested a 15.6%

increase for a total budget of \$47,168,789. A 1% increase would result in an increase of \$471,688.

The Committee proceeded to review the components of the School Department's budget increase. Geoff Grove observed that the School Department has requested a substantial increase and that the 1% increase proposed by Chad Mollica would decrease the proposed budget by approximately \$1.75 million. He suggested that although this ordinarily would be enough to motivate motions to increase the budget recommended by the Committee, there seems to be sufficient hostility about the increase attributable to transportation costs to permit the reduced budget to pass. He concluded that macro-economic factors do not support any increase but that he was willing to support a reasonable increase in order to maintain a sense of harmony at the Financial Town Meeting.

The Committee discussed various potential changes to the budgets proposed by the Town Manager and the School Committee and how they might be received by their proponents and the community. Melissa Horne inquired whether there was any real value to the taxpayers in deliberating about changes based on small percentages of the budget. Chad Mollica stated that he believes even small changes are important because the increases compound over time. Ms. Horne stated that she prefers to be able to assign specific, quantifiable justifications for revisions to the budget. She noted that this year, in particular, there is reason to cut the requested increase attributable to school transportation because there doesn't seem to have been a genuine effort to maximize efficiencies in the bus schedule.

After additional discussion, it was agreed that the school budget should be reduced by \$300,000 attributable to transportation. Chad Mollica provided numbers showing that there had been huge increases in the amounts requested for supplies and textbooks over the past ten years and suggested that the \$1,627,896 budgeted for these items last year should be sufficient again this year. As a result, he suggested that an additional \$589,609 or a 1.25% increase should be sufficient to cover potential salary increases. As a result, the Committee agreed unanimously that the School Department's educational initiatives for FY17 will be adequately supported by an increase of approximately 1.25% over the FY16 budget and therefore recommended an increase of \$589,609 over the FY16 budget. The Committee also unanimously agreed to recommend an increase of \$219,736 (or approximately 1.25%) over the municipal FY16 budget.

Turning their attention to the capital budget, it was noted that the capital budget recommended by the CIP subcommittee in FY16 was \$1,175,000. The same amount was recommended for FY17, with a reduction of \$30,000 from the \$275,000 requested by the School Department for technology expenditures. A discussion ensued regarding whether the costs of implementing the school technology initiatives are properly included in the capital budget. Geoff Grove stated that he agreed that the school budget should bear these costs, but noted that the Appropriations Committee had previously advocated that these types of items should be included in the capital budget to enhance the transparency accorded to such expenditures. He suggested that retaining the technology appropriation in the capital budget would set a precedent for transparency on future capital expenditures. He also noted that the School Department had previously agreed to

move the \$100,000 for playground compliance back into the school budget. Given that this agreement effectively reduces the capital budget to \$1,085,000, a recommendation to restore the \$30,000 requested for technology would result in a capital budget of \$1,115,000. Mr. Grove made a motion for the Committee to recommend that line item GF49 (PreK-5 Playground – Compliance) of the capital budget be reduced to zero and that line item GF48 (Capital Reserve – Technology) be increased by \$30,000 from \$245,000 to \$275,000, for a total capital budget of \$1,115,000. After a discussion focusing on the relatively new information regarding the ability of the School Department to cover the playground improvements through its budget, the Committee agreed that this new information justifies restoring the funding requested for the technology initiative and voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

The Committee continued its discussion of increasing the exemption applicable to the motor vehicle tax from \$2,000 to \$2,500. Geoff Grove stated that he was not in favor of recommending such a change because the Committee did not have any information regarding the impact such a change would have on revenues. The Committee members agreed, so there will be no change in the amount of the motor vehicle tax exemption.

After some discussion, the Committee also agreed to make no change in the stipends for Town Council and School Committee members, agreeing that increasing those stipends would make a bad impression given the current fiscal realities.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 8:59 p.m. by Geoff Grove. The next general meeting will be at 7:00 p.m. on April 26, 2016 in the Barrington Senior Center Activity Room.

Minutes submitted by: Melissa Horne