

May 12, 2020

The Stonington Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance held a special joint virtual meeting on this date at 4:00 p.m. This meeting was also streamed on Facebook live and was available via audio on a conference line. First Selectman Danielle Chesebrough, Selectwoman June Strunk and Selectwoman Debbie Motycka Downie were in attendance from the Board of Selectmen. Chairman Tim O'Brien, Mr. Glenn Frishman, Ms. Lynn Young, Mr. Mike Fauerbach, Mr. Bob Statchen, Ms. Deb Norman and Mr. David Motherway were in attendance from the Board of Finance.

No public or press were present in the room. Public and press were able to view via Facebook live as well as audio through a conference line.

(1) Call to Order

Ms. Chesebrough called the Board of Selectmen meeting to order at 4:01 p.m.

Mr. O'Brien called the Board of Finance meeting to order at 4:01 p.m.

Ms. Chesebrough read the following statement:

We knew going into this budget cycle that we were going to have to be fiscally prudent. We would no longer be able to use as much as we have in the past from our reserve fund to help offset expenses. We also understood that the infrastructure needs for our sewer treatment plants were escalating at a faster pace than expected, and that the State of CT had limited ability to provide Stonington with financial support. These were all the known challenges.

Today, there is much uncertainty about how COVID-19 will impact our community in the short and longer term. The budget established for 2020-2021 is our best attempt to meet both the known and unknown needs of our community.

The budget that was first shared during the virtual public hearing represented what most of us at the time thought was the most balanced budget we could offer tax payers, while still providing the services we have all come to expect. There were already difficult cuts, ranging from investments aimed to improve the local economy to long awaited infrastructure improvements. It became clear, even those cuts were not enough.

During the Board of Finance's final deliberation on the budget, the Governor's office released a report showing that from March 13- April 15 2020, the Department of Labor received more than 350,000 unemployment applications; nearly the same amount that it typically receives over a two-year period. This number did not include anyone who was self-employed, as they were still not ready to receive those unemployment applications.

The decision by the Board of Finance in that meeting to reduce the Education budget by an additional \$500,000 has been received with understandable questions and concern by some. I wanted to briefly share my own perspective on this matter, as both a former member of the Board of Finance and parent to three children who either are or will be going to Stonington Public Schools.

As a community Stonington has and will continue to support our schools. Last year education spending, not including past bonding or CIP, represented 51% of our total budget and this year- even with the cuts- it represents 52%. Last year we completed the renovation of our two elementary schools, which

residents supported via a \$68 million dollar bond approval in 2015. We have an excellent school system and will do everything in our power to protect it.

It may seem contrary, but I believe the reduction put forward by the Board of Finance is an important step towards protecting our students and the staff that make up our school system what it is. The economic uncertainty for our town and state will undoubtedly cause many challenges; however, being prepared to proactively address these challenges is one of our best forms of defense. If the economic impact is not as bad as predicted, I trust and have gotten assurances that the Board of Finance will return the funds from the escrow account to the school account. If it is as bad, or worse, we will be in a better place for having started our planning ahead of time. Accepting the spirit and intent of the escrow requires mutual trust. Demonstrating good faith actions by all parties will go a long way to build this trust. We are still working on building that trust for everyone's benefit, which I hope and expect to achieve.

We often hear that people want fiscally prudent governments; however, when faced with the reality of what cuts will need to take place it can be extremely challenging. This is understandable, as we are passionate and advocate for what we believe in. It can be very challenging to accept budget reductions. Worthwhile projects are not funded, useful infrastructure is not replaced, even investments in education have to be curtailed. Yet, today –more than ever before in our recent history- we have to face the challenges put before us as a community.

The budget being put forward tonight was made possible thanks to the diligent work of various boards, commission, non-profits and staff. It was extremely challenging, and natural tensions arose. Yet, the collaboration, dedication and compassion displayed by so many throughout the entire budget process was also inspiring.

We are a resilient and creative community, and we will get through this time stronger, together. In closing, I would like to thank all of our current and former community volunteers, staff and elected officials for their dedicated service to the community.

(2) Adoption of FY 2020-2021 Budget and Mil Rate

In accordance with Governor Ned Lamont's Executive Order 7B, 7I and 7HH which states that all municipalities are required to deem the budget-making authority to adopt a budget for the July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021 fiscal year and to set a mill rate as well as suspending any requirement for a vote on such budgets or mill rates by residents, electors, or property owners, including, but not limited to, any vote by annual town meeting or referendum.

A motion was made by Ms. Downie, seconded by Ms. Strunk and voted unanimously to authorize the Board of Finance in accordance with the Governors executive orders to adopt FY 20-21 budget of and mil rate.

A motion was made by Mr. Statchen, seconded by Ms. Norman and voted unanimously to adopted FY 20-21 budget and mil rate as follows:

OFFICE OF THE SELECTMAN	\$	1,066,140
DEPT. OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES	\$	4,496,615
DEPT. OF ASSESSMENT	\$	356,181
DEPT. OF FINANCE	\$	2,226,315
DEBT SERVICE	\$	8,082,815
DEPT. OF PLANNING & LAND USE	\$	486,626
DEPT. OF PUBLIC WORKS	\$	7,079,442
DEPT. OF POLICE SERVICES	\$	6,321,819
DEPT. OF HUMAN SERVICES	\$	1,592,611
BOARD OF EDUCATION	\$	37,401,100
SCHEDULE C:		
LAND, BLDGS, IMPROVEMENTS & EQUIPMENT	\$	<u>2,438,631</u>
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	<u>71,548,295</u>

The recommended budget for Fiscal Year 2020-2021 carries a 23.36 mil rate. Of the above budget, the amount to be raised by taxes is \$65,073,237.

(3) Adjourn

There being no further business to come before the Boards, the meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.



Stacey Haskell
Recording Secretary



Jill Senior
Recording Secretary