

TOWN OF STONINGTON
BOARD OF FINANCE SPECIAL MEETING
Virtual Meeting/Stonington Police Dept Meeting Room
Tuesday, March 9, 2021
7:00 PM

The Stonington Board of Finance held a virtual/hybrid meeting on this date at 7:00 p.m. The meeting was also streamed on Facebook live and was available via audio on a conference line. Chairman Tim O'Brien, Mr. Glen Frishman and Mr. David Motherway were present at the Police Department Meeting Room, Mr. Michael Fauerbach, Ms. Lynn Young, Mr. Bob Statchen, and Ms. Deb Norman were remotely present.

Finance Director Jim Sullivan was present remotely. Chairman O'Brien called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

New Business:

Budget Presentations:

Board of Education:

In attendance from the Board of Ed were Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent, and members Mr. Jack Morehouse and Mr. Gordon Lord.

Mr. Gordon Lord introduced himself to the members of the Board and read a letter to the Board of Finance from Board of Ed Chairman Frank Todisco who was unable to attend. Mr. Todisco's letter stated the Board of Ed has presented a responsible package to the Board of Finance with a 2.5% increase over current year. The \$934,495 increase reflects a \$470,000 contractual salary increase, a \$155,000 increase in health insurance and a \$260,000 increase in outside tuition expenses. Noting that the budget reflects a staffing reduction of over \$500,000 including para and other classified reductions, Mr. Todisco writes that he respectfully asks that the budget go to referendum as presented for the public to vote.

Mr. Jack Morehouse expressed his appreciation to the Board of Finance and stated that at a recent Board of Ed retreat, he and his colleagues discussed the importance of making more of an effort to share with the Board of Finance and the community the achievements as a school district. Mr. Lord outlined many of the achievements of the school system over the last several years.

Dr. Van Riley addressed the Board, welcoming comments from the Board members as he presented the fiscal year budget. Mr. Frishman inquired about the newly created Learning Center, operating in the former Pawcatuck Middle School. The Learning Center was designed to bring back to the district students who were tuitioned elsewhere. Dr. Riley stated the program is doing really well, with six or seven students saving \$30,000 to \$100,000 in outplacement costs per year. The increase of 3.37% in Line #117, Paraprofessional and Behavior Tech Salary, is due to the need of Behavior Tech Specialists, which is a new position for the district and encompasses assisting all students, not only students in the new

Learning Center, and a greater need for one-on-one assistance provided by Paraprofessionals. Mr. Fauerbach inquired what then was driving the 8.69% (\$260,958) increase in Tuition costs. Dr. Riley stated that these expenses are individuals that can not be provided services in the Learning Center and provided Tuition elsewhere and outside special needs placements.

Ms. Young asked how did the health insurance costs go down so much from the original budget. Mr. Riley stated that Mr. Shettle is in contact with Brown & Brown throughout the year and the figure is based on the review by the consultant. Mr. Gary Shettle, Finance Director for Stonington Public Schools, weighed in stating that when he looked at the percentage of the health reserve account, they were able to reduce the line item as they were still around 30% of excess costs in there, and they were around 37%, so in line with the MOU, they were down to about 30% and reserves.

Mr. Frishman inquired about the 29.06% (\$132,968) increase in Line #319 Professional/Tech Services. Director Shettle noted that the bulk of the increase (\$65 - \$70,000) is from moving many of the Tech Services (printer/copier lease and equipment) to this line item. IT Director Chris Williston listed new software and anti-virus upgrades for the district. Mr. Pete Anderson added the EMCOR contract was slightly increased due to the remainder of West Vine coming on line and the new contract with Allerton which monitors all the controls for 3 of the 4 schools is also in that figure.

Mr. Statchen also questioned the reductions on the revised budget and asked for clarification that the first reduction had to do with CARES Act funding and the shifting of \$800,000 of expenses that would be eligible under the CARES funding. Mr. Statchen asked where those expenses are listed and Dr. Riley stated that those figures are outside of the budget and not part of this operating budget. The final CARES figures are not finalized yet. Dr. Riley states all of the summer school, additional math specialists, and anything that was related to COVID were pulled out of the budget. Mr. Statchen asked Dr. Riley how confident he was the funds would come in. Dr. Riley replied he was very confident; they have been approved and they will be used to pay expenses to help students catch up and recover from the losses this year due to the pandemic.

Chairman Tim O'Brien took the opportunity to mention that going forward, the Board of Finance liaison to the Board of Ed and all involved would benefit from a degree of cooperation and cohesion together. Chairman O'Brien suggested that after the Board of Ed has done their due diligence on the budget that a constant dialogue would be beneficial to the Board of Finance and the community as a whole.

Mr. Fauerbach stated he understood why the CARES expenses were pulled out and inquired to Finance Director Jim Sullivan how it was being handled in terms of the budget bill. Mr. Fauerbach asked if he was adding an additional \$800,000 in expenses then offsetting that with the assumed revenue from the State. Director Sullivan stated he had not been involved in this. Dr. Riley states that the covid related expenses were pulled out of the budget as a very general estimate and the specifics have not been finalized.

Mary Anne Butler, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Assessment addressed the Board noting that if you're not involved in the CARES funds to the extent they are, it can be very confusing. The Board of Ed had just received the application last week and they have started the application process which Ms. Butler states is similar to a grant application process. Over the next month they will be working on submitting the application to the State. Ms. Butler added even though the CARES allocations have been made, they will not have the funds until after the application and an explanation of how those funds are going to be expended is delivered to the State Department of Education.

Mr. Fauerbach expressed concern that proper accounting of the projected revenue and the anticipated expenses would take place. Director Shettle noted the CARES funds will be handled like a grant account and accounted for accordingly. Mr. Fauerbach pointed out the Board of Ed is expecting \$1.15 million in CARES funding and have allocated roughly \$800,000 in expenses which would leave \$350,000 in surplus. Ms. Butler stated the \$350,000 would be part of an epidemic recovery plan which they are working on now. When Mr. Fauerback asked if it was the Board of Ed's intention to spend the additional \$350,000, Ms. Butler stated that would be correct.

Mr. Motherway questioned whether the Education Department expected the CARES funding to be a one-time funding amount. Dr. Riley stated that the present CARES funding is a one-time disbursement that can be spent over two years, but anticipate that the new 1.9 trillion-dollar funding that will be approved federally on Wednesday may be able to be spent over two, three or perhaps four years. Mr. Motherway hoped the Board of Ed would exercise due diligence when setting aside funding to pay for programs for a number of years when these accounts weren't represented within the budget and easily tracked.

Chairman O'Brien added that these federal dollars generally have to be diligently accounted for and he would expect that the Board of Ed would share this accountability with the Board of Finance.

Concluding the discussion on the operating portion of the Board of Ed budget, Mr. Statchen thanked Mr. Morehouse for his thorough recitation of the accomplishments of the School Department and suggested that those accomplishments would be included in a section of the narrative at the beginning of the budget book for people who aren't able to view the meeting. Also, Mr. Statchen noted that in the original January budget draft the commentary section "Looking Towards the Future" had only two sentences and it was Mr. Statchen's opinion that a more in depth narrative of new initiatives, goals, and continual improvements should be noted.

Mr. Gordon Lord responded to Mr. Statchen's suggestion adding that he and Mary Anne Butler have discussed promoting all the good things going on in the school district, and it is a goal of the administration to be prouder and louder of what the department is doing very well.

Capital Improvement Requests:

Line Item #132 - Install Security System & Cameras - District Wide \$75,000

IT Director Chris Williston spoke to the Board, stating that the cameras are for district office as well as additional cameras for the other schools. Mr. Williston adds that there is currently \$24,000 in an old computer CIP account for camera installation that if the Board approved, could be used for this project. With that offset, the newly requested funds total would be \$51,000. Finance Director Jim Sullivan stated that the funds are in the same account and therefore would not need the Board of Finance approval. The line item request was reduced to \$51,000.

Line Item #131 - District Phone System \$1.00

Mr. Williston confirms the request was reduced to \$1.00 based on the Finance Board's approval of the Avaya contract which was implemented.

Line Item #130 - Distric Computers One to One \$195,000

Mr. Williston states that the department is now One to One with Chromebooks in Grades 6 through 12. The Elementary schools are still classroom assigned Chromebooks, but they are populating those classrooms to be one to one.

Mr. Motherway thanked Mr. Williston for answering the Boards questions this evening and asked Mr. Williston to recall last year when he had asked for accountability of the FIFO inventory of the Chromebooks. Mr. Motherway stated if Mr. Williston had the opportunity, he would like to see a detail of the Chromebook inventory and the replacement status overview. Mr. Williston stated he could provide that information, and noted that the current Chromebook license is valid for five years, where after that Google will stop releasing security patches for those devices. The School District has started implementing some education for the students on caring for the devices to help extend the life of the computer, and will be offering a Chromebook insurance policy for the district to help reduce repair costs. Mr. Williston states the budgetary figure is a staggered upgrade, where every year one school has its Chromebooks upgraded. On the fifth year the Chromebook would become a spare or loaner.

Mr. Fauerbach inquired about pricing, Mr. Williston stated the current per Chromebook price is \$259 each. These are the educational edition, a bit more

Line Item #128 - Computer Systems Infrastructure \$400,000

Mr. Williston stated the funds are required to maintain the IT infrastructure necessary to support approximately 2,600 staff and students in the district. The project is to fund the improvements through replacement and upgrade of systems

such as networking, data storage, backup equipment, servers, firewalls and other vital equipment. The replacement and upgrades of these systems will be staggered to allow for level funding and a 5 year cycle of most equipment.

Mr. Fauerbach noted that there were many individual items in this one request for funding and if there was a way Mr. Williston could break it down into components or groupings that would help the Board of Finance understand priority and cost. Mr. Williston stated that the access points, switches, power supply and servers are critical. The computer upgrading would be a second tier priority. Chairman O'Brien asked Mr. Williston if he would email a priority list he could share with the members.

Line Item #129 - Staff Laptops \$20,000

The funds would support the replacement of staff laptops district wide. All staff Mac Air laptops have been replaced with financing terms of \$49,936.58 annually at 0% interest through 2022. The remainder of the funds will be used to replace the Windows computers for the business office, nurses, kitchen, facilities and other departments over the years.

Line Item #167 - Audio/Video Systems \$120,000

Mr. Williston stated that \$80,000 of the request is contingent upon being awarded a grant. The grant which has not yet been applied for is with the Bureau of upgrade the PA and emergency monitoring systems throughout the middle and high schools. If the grant was not awarded, the \$80,000 would be returned to the Town. The remaining \$40,000 would fund upgrading the A/V system in the High School Commons, auditorium projectors, an A/V setup in the district office, and classroom interactive panels at the middle and high schools. Finance Director Jim Sullivan suggested the \$80,000 be noted as an offset on the budget and if the grant did not come through the funds would not be available. Chairman O'Brien concurred.

Line Item #147 - Phase II AC Upgrade for D.O & Classrooms \$229,000

Director of Operations and Facilities, Mr. Peter Anderson told the Board that the Phase II upgrades include air conditioning in district office, learning annex and Town community areas currently not air conditioned. The building is now occupied all year long with staff and students.

Line #134 - Roof Ladders and Cables -SHS \$107,800

Mr. Anderson stated that the roof ladders and cabling must be installed prior to any contractor doing maintenance or repairs on any of the units located on the pitched section of the high school. There are exhaust units and fans that have not been serviced in 15 years. When asked if Mr. Anderson considered this a priority request, Mr. Anderson stated that what they are dealing with is systems are hitting their end of life and becoming critically in need of repair and the requests reflect the urgency.

Line Item #162 - High School Rooftop Unit Rebuild \$266,000

Director Anderson informed the Board that four (4) of the rooftop units were replaced 2 years ago. The remainder of them can be rebuilt. The coils are disintegrating due to corrosion from the salt air. This is rendering all the coils seriously inefficient. Mr. Anderson states at best the units are running at 50% and some running at 30% efficiency. This wasting a huge amount of energy and is putting unnecessary strain on the compressors, the fans, and the entire system trying to cool the building.

Line Item #146 - Upgraded Building Mgmt System \$157,700

Director Anderson states this is a necessary upgrade to the aging building management system. Currently parts are failing on the BMS and those parts are no longer available. The system is also the only system running on Windows XP. Director Anderson stated earlier this year he was not alerted of a heating system failure at the building as he would have from other buildings and the internal building temperature got to 50 degrees.

Line #153 - Flooring Repair - District \$20,000

Director Anderson informed the Board that the majority of the money is targeted towards the library, where the rug is very badly torn, split lengthwise down the entire width of the library and repaired with duct tape. It is a tripping concern. The rug is over 15 years old.

Line Item #160 - High School Generator Upgrade \$45,000

Director Anderson stated the funds would be utilized to increase the generator capacity at the Stonington High School. Currently the generator is only being used at 12% capacity. The generator is a 500kw generator and can run the entire high school. The problem is the panel is only 600 amps which allows only operations in the commons area, running the boilers and circulator pumps. It will not support running of any fans to transfer heat or air conditioning beyond the commons and cafeteria area. Director Anderson noted that although listed as a cooling and emergency center, they would only be able to house 900 people in that area. Director Anderson is proposing to add more ability to use the power of the generator to utilize it as it is designed to do.

Line Item #161 - High School Gym Upgrade \$96,500

Director Anderson notes the funds would be used to refinish the gym floors, replace scoreboards, paint and replace gym divider curtains and pads. Director Anderson notes the gym is a frequently used focal point of the Town with many events taking place and the funds would ensure the gym would look like a proper facility for such events.

Line Item #135 - SMS AC Upgrade \$1,950,000

Director Anderson reports the SMS is the only school that does not have any air conditioning for it. There is a concern of mold and moisture build up in the building. The contractors (EMCOR) have designed a chilled beam system which would accommodate the lack of space for ductwork. Director Anderson states the chilled beam system works by chilling the water on the outside of the building then pumping it into the room where low speed fans push the cool air off the chilled beam, cooling the room.

Mr. Statchen inquired if any CARES funding would be available due to a possible connection between ventilation and the pandemic. Director Anderson stated they are looking into it but do not have any solid answers.

Line Item #155 - Two (2) Replacement Trucks w/Plows \$65,000

Director Anderson reports the department currently has four (4) trucks and plows in service at the school. Two are working fine and two are past their life. One of the trucks is 22 years old and any money put into the truck would be wasted and the other truck was handed down from the Fire Dept. As the Town currently plows all the blacktop surfaces at the school, the trucks would be used to plow the smaller entries into the school and provide the building maintainers to go do different schools to perform their maintenance chores safely and efficiently.

Line Item #164 - SMS Science Room Upgrade \$30,000

Director Anderson states the funds will be used to remove carpeting and replace with floor tile, add cabinets and racks for science equipment and add sink and safety wash stations.

Line Item #163 - Field Utility Vehicle \$12,000

Director Anderson reported that the gator utility vehicle would be utilized for all field events such as field arrangement, student injury as well as turf field maintenance. The gator would provide necessary damage free service to the fields.

Line Item #165 - Track Replacement Repair \$59,250

Director Anderson reports this is a forward looking item, that currently there are a few spots on the track that have started to deteriorate and need attention. Mr. Fauerbach inquired if this request was for those specific repairs. Director Anderson advised the track repair could approach \$100,000 and while some of the funding would be used to facilitate small repairs, it is time to build an account in anticipation of the larger repairs that will be needed.

Line Item #166 - High School Roof Repair \$25,000

Director Anderson notes that this section of roof requiring repair is the EPM (plastic) roofing section of the school. The section is damaged from frequent traffic on that section and the underlayment has lost its ability to bind itself down to the roof. Director Anderson states this is of concern as a high wind could actually blow that section off.

Line Item #157 - Classroom Furniture \$20,000

Director Anderson states the funds would be used for annual replacement of worn out or broken classroom furniture throughout the district.

Line Item #150 - Locks & Keys District \$20,000

Director Anderson states the funds would be used to replace older keys with new locksets providing increased security and consistency with keying.

With no further questions from the members, Chairman O'Brien thanked the Board of Ed and members of the School Administration for their time and presentations.

Discussion/Approval of motion to approve refunding of 2013 and 2014 General Obligation Bonds

Finance Director Jim Sullivan advised the Board that upon speaking with the Town Financial Advisors, they have identified two issuances that are ripe for refunding, the 2013 and 2014 General Obligation Bonds. Director Sullivan presented to the Board two scenarios, one where the savings is realized upfront, and the second where the savings would be realized over the remaining life of the bond. In scenario one, Director Sullivan reports a total savings of \$835,000, receiving \$677,000 in year one. In the second scenario, there would be a decrease of \$65,000 in that year and a similar decrease in the fall and the following 13 years. Director Sullivan did caveat that the analysis was performed 2 weeks ago with a refunding interest rate of 1.5%.

A decision was not required this evening and the Board will leave the issue open for further discussion.

Discussion of proposed contract for SPD body Cameras

Finance Director Jim Sullivan advised the Board that this will be thoroughly discussed in the upcoming meetings but did want to note the proposed contract provided by Axion would reflect a \$40,000 savings if contracted by March 31st. Mr. Sullivan noted supporting documentation provided by the Police Department that had been forwarded to the Board members for review.

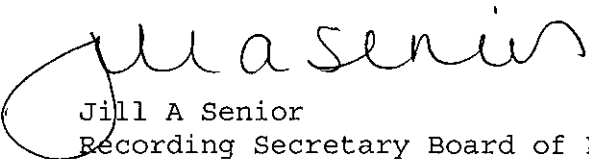
Chairman O'Brien noted the Board should make sure they've done their due diligence and had the Town Attorney review the contract and not overly rush the deal. The Chairman stated a special meeting would most likely take place and agrees with Director Sullivan that the upcoming meeting on Thursday will have much discussion on the subject and advised the other Board members to take a thorough look at the contract prior to Thursday to have a good conversation with Chief Stewart.

Discussion of BOF follow up questions from earlier Departmental budget presentations

The Board did not have questions for this evening, but will keep the item on future agendas for follow up questions or concerns.

With no further discussion, Mr. Frishman motioned to adjourn, Mr. Motherway seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 9:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jill A Senior". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Jill A Senior
Recording Secretary Board of Finance