

Town Council Meeting Minutes April 5, 2017

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm.

Roll Call

Councilors Farber, Kitchel, McBrady and Svedlow were present and answering roll call. Councilor Ferrante arrived late. Councilors King and Hemphill were absent.

Item 1 Presentation and Discussion of the Fiscal Year 2018 Proposed Budget.

The School Department, through its finance committee chair Danielle Tracy, presented the School budget.

The Town, through its finance committee chair Ned Kitchel and Town Manager Nathan Poore, presented the municipal budget.

Item 2 Public Hearing to seek public input and inquiries relative to the Fiscal Year 2017 Proposed Budget.

Chair Farber opened the public hearing.

John Winslow of Gray Road had some questions and observations regarding the budgets for both the Town and School. He asked how much of the \$5 million approved by voter referendum remains to be spent on Open Space; why the Town needs another dispatcher; if Public Works should consider contract plowing to reduce the budget; and why the Town's workers comp increased. He thought the Town needs to do a better job negotiating union contracts and should look into using professional negotiators. Regarding the school budget, he asked why the school budget increased from \$23.5 million in 2011 to \$36 million in 2018 to educate roughly the same number of students. He said school union negotiations need to improve and the school should also look into using professional negotiators. He was opposed to AP programming; colleges are reluctant to take those credits and students could go to any of the local colleges to obtain college credits that would be more readily accepted by colleges. He felt the school needs to make better use of existing resources and that the greenhouse was an unnecessary expense. He felt students could go elsewhere to learn those skills.

Town Manager Nathan Poore responded to Mr. Winslow's questions about the Town Budget:

The Town has spent roughly ½ of the \$5 million of voter-approved open space spending. The Town requires an additional Dispatcher to free up the Dispatch Supervisor to manage the group and reduce reliance on part-time Dispatchers. Public Works already contracts out quite a bit of work in both the spring and summer, as well as the winter. The department workload has increased due to the additional of several miles of roads and sidewalks over the years that must be maintained. The Town does use professional negotiators and legal professionals in negotiating union contracts. Workers Comp has increased due to the Town's experience rating increasing from 59% to 75%. An experience rating of 59% is exceptional and 75% is considered very good as 100% is the average rating.

Dan O'Shea, Director of Finance & Operations of the School Department, responded to Mr. Winslow's questions about the School budget. A large part of the increase in school costs is due to large school construction projects and the purchase of wood boilers for the school campus. These were financed by bond issuances resulting in large annual principal and interest payments. The School Department uses legal counsel in its union negotiations. The School Department also has worked with the health insurance provider to base the health insurance rates on only Falmouth experience which has produced significant savings. He said AP

classes are extremely popular with students and while colleges may not transfer the credits they do play an important role in a student being accepted to attend college.

The greenhouse was built utilizing a \$45K grant and has been a great tool for student learning in many areas.

School Board member Dee Conroy-Vella then spoke about the importance of AP classes in student admission; they are one of the reasons that Falmouth students are better prepared for college. Falmouth students rarely need additional semesters to catch up on basic courses they did not take in high school. Falmouth has been recognized by the College Board as one of the top school districts in the nation for student participation in AP courses.

School Superintendent Geoff Bruno said AP courses are an investment in preparing for what is next and plays a large part in providing the academic rigor necessary to succeed. Mr. Bruno also mentioned that over 90% of the education cost increases since 2007 have been borne by property taxes because State funding as a percentage of the total budget has shrunk.

School Board Chair Lucy Tucker spoke about how the one campus concept has enabled the Falmouth Schools to keep administrative costs down and enabled projects like the wood boiler that save over \$400K per year in heating costs.

Councilor Svedlow thanked the School Board and Administration for doing a great job with the Budget and commented how Falmouth produced great results with a comparatively low budget compared to schools in other states.

Councilor Farber said if the State funding presented in Governor LePage's budget proposal were to increase, both the Town Council and School Board agreed that those funds would go directly to reduce the mil rate.

Councilor Kitchel commented on the good work of Town and School staff at all levels in providing a high level of excellence in Town services. He said the school system does a great job preparing students for college. He thanked Mr. Winslow for his questions.

Chair Farber closed the public hearing.

Adjourn

Councilor Kitchel moved to adjourn; Councilor Ferrante seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Meeting adjourned at 8:37 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter McHugh
Finance Director