

Town of Lakeville
Joint Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee
Tuesday, March 10, 2015
7:00 PM – Council on Aging

On March 10, 2015, the Board of Selectmen held a meeting at 7:00 PM at the Council on Aging in Lakeville. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Powderly at 7:05 PM. Members present were: Selectman Powderly, Selectman Hollenbeck and Selectman Burke. Also present was Rita Garbitt, Town Administrator. LakeCAM was recording the meeting.

The Finance Committee was also present and Chairman Petruzzo called them to order at 7:05 PM. Members present were: Michael Petruzzo, George Vlahopolous, and Maureen Candito.

Meet with Freetown Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee and Lakeville Finance Committee to discuss Regional School related issues; FY16 Regional School budget; participation in negotiations; and 2012 Technology Upgrade Project for Regional Schools

Present for the discussion were Lee Baumgartner, Paul Sadeck, and Lisa Pacheco, Freetown Board of Selectmen and Robert Alderson, Bradford Paiva, Kent Wilkins and Paul Denault of the Freetown Finance Committee. Also present were John Healey, Town Administrator and Alexandra Golz, Administrative Secretary. The Freetown Board of Selectmen and Freetown Finance Committee called their meetings to order at 7:05 PM.

Ms. Pacheco stated that the Freetown Board voted 2-1 for the minimum Net School Spending (NSS) to be provided to the Schools. It was to send a message from this Board that we are not playing games this year. We don't mind funding the education of the students and paying our fair share, but the budget is becoming very unsustainable. As we move forward, we need to send that tone to the School Committee that we are serious and will not keep giving you "x" amount of dollars over NSS and allow our other Town Departments to fall by the wayside.

Chairman Powderly stated that Selectman Hollenbeck and George Vlahopoulos are our representatives to the Regional Finance Committee. They do provide good feedback to the Selectmen and Finance Committee. We have all seen Rick Medeiros' presentation. You have taken a public stand as we have. It is not really a 1.4% increase prior to raises, since they are using offsets that maybe we would or would not recommend. So we can send the message, and attempt to get people of like mind onto the School Committee. If we are not sending the message, then we are not planning forward. The School Department continues to present a number that is not palatable for any of us. We only get \$484,000 for a 2.5% increase, and the Schools would like to take all of that and Town services suffer. They didn't take into consideration their offsets to their 2.5%. Chairman Powderly said the Selectmen have an obligation to the entire Town. He does not believe the Schools deserve twice as much as the rest of the Town. He believes what they are showing is unsustainable, and he didn't think they have the message.

Selectman Burke stated that he had had a meeting with Mr. Medeiros and he had an opportunity to talk to him about the budget and ask questions. He said not to be hung up on the budget as much as the assessment to the Town. We have a tendency to dig in and play the role

of School Committee in trying to determine what the money should be spent on, and that is not our job. We only have so much time to meet and discuss stuff. The more time we spend talking about the School Budget, the less time we have for our Towns. If we are like minded and say here is the money, then they choose how to spend it. We need to be fair to all Departments and needs of the entire Town. That is how he would like to see this proceed. It puts the responsibility on the School Committee, and if they screw up, hopefully enough voters will then run for their seats.

Selectman Hollenbeck stated that she has been looking into the ability of the School Committee/Department to take out a Bond Anticipated Note (BAN) for their capital projects that they are throwing into our capital budget. They have \$400,000 in projects that are easily identifiable. If they split that out over five (5) years and take an \$80,000 hit a year as opposed to a \$400,000 hit, it certainly would make the increase in the Schools more palatable for all of us. We will discuss that more with the Regional Finance Subcommittee and dig into that more on the capital projects. We are starting the budget process in Lakeville, and the Schools are more than half of the Town budget. Our townspeople have voted for certain things at Town Meeting, and we are trying to address class sizes and technology. Ms. Candito stated that she struggles with the fact that we cannot get a lot of transparency. They can spend as they see fit, but the technology line is still out there and it has been three (3) years for a two (2) year project, and all the funding is not spent. She would like to know if the project went in a different direction. A shell game is a bad thing for the Town. She does not understand why we cannot have them show us where they are spending money and what their priorities are. She understood that it has been musical chairs with Superintendents, but there must be some accountability. She has not seen that at all from Administrators or the School Committee, which tends to be a sore spot for everyone

Chairman Powderly stated that Mr. Medeiros has stated that all but \$7,000 of the technology money has been spent. Elections are coming up, and there will be two (2) new members on the School Committee from Lakeville's side and Freetown has two (2) openings. He had suggested previously that since there are four (4) new people going onto the School Committee, the contracts not be put to rest until after the elections, since the new people will say or use the excuse that it was not my contract. Selectman Burke added that the current two (2) people negotiating the contract will not be there after elections. Chairman Powderly asked to send them the message directly to the Chairman of the School Committee.

Mr. Vlahopoulos stated that he does get to see a lot of the workings and has heard that there is more transparency now than with previous administrations. With the new Superintendent and a stable timeframe, it is hoped to really understand the plan for the next few years and break up their capital projects over several years. It has been hard with different Superintendents. Maybe now we can have long term stability and find out what we are really looking to do. Right now the School budget is not sustainable, and the townspeople will not want to keep footing the bill. We need a long term strategy of what we are doing and where we are going. Chairman Petruzzo stated that he has been coming to these meetings for seven (7) years, and it never seems to change. He would like to come to some agreement on NSS and send that message and let them live with it.

Mr. Sadeck stated that he sits on the Regional Finance Subcommittee and there is a meeting tomorrow night. The Subcommittee should not be involved in second guessing how the Schools will be run. He does not know how many kids in a classroom is good for a child. We pay Administration a good amount of money to know that. My concern is that looking at State numbers, we dropped students in Lakeville and we are gaining two (2) in Freetown. The budget does not reflect costs going down. How do you have less students to teach and have to pay more. He has spoken with Fred Baker, since he is trying to come back with a starting point on the budget and we could not come up with the numbers. Mr. Baker said the 1.4% is after they reduced the original starting point with offsets. So they are working backwards. \$34,810,275 is a 2.5% increase over last year. They have revenue from School Choice, Excess & Deficiency (E&D) and the circuit breaker. He used last year's figures to determine local receipts, since this years are not available yet. Our reimbursement for transportation is going down significantly, and this will impact both Towns. Freetown's 2.5% increase is \$422,000, so we are \$60,000 in the hole just with the School budget. The Town also has to negotiate all their contracts, and we don't have the money to do it. We have buildings in deplorable conditions. In 1974, we were going to build a new Town Hall. It is 2015, and we are still in the same old place. The Police Station, Town Hall, Senior Center, and Fire Station are all falling apart. The Library in Assonet does not even have a bathroom. We are just trying to get the heat to run in the Library in East Freetown. When you factor all that in, he agrees that no negotiations should be settled until new people are on board the School Committee, but then next year it will be the same, another and another increase. We cannot get a bill year after year and they walk away once they get the money. Meanwhile the Town side just sits and falls apart.

Mr. Baumgartner stated that when he ran for election he knocked on hundreds of doors and the message was the same from everyone: get the School Budget under control. The former Superintendent Jessica Huizenga said it is not a spending problem, it is a taxing problem, and the Towns need to tax more. We said if we give you \$900,000 for the technology project, previous Finance Director Mike Ward said that that would cover it all. He thinks the money is gone, and the Town didn't get squat. Mr. Healey and he will put together a letter on where the money went. His allegiance is to the taxpayers, and he agrees with Mr. Sadeck and Selectman Burke. He just wants them to know we are going to control the budget. The Town of Freetown has to spend money on its infrastructure. We have 365 less students, yet they still want more money. Then they pat themselves on the back, since they have smaller amounts of students in classrooms. If this was a business, you would have less people working for you, and yet this does not seem to be the case with the Schools. He doesn't think they get it, or even care, that we need to address items in Town.

Mr. Healey commented the hardware has been bought for the technology project and installed. They need the implementation to carry it forward. Initially the concept was bringing your own device. He doesn't know if that is still the concept with the new administration. They are in the phase now of trying to train existing staff. The 3% budget summary shows the addition of a Technology Integration Specialist at a cost of \$46,971, but the budget shows two (2) Technology Coaches and two (2) Technicians being added to the tune of \$184,000. When something is not well defined and carried out, and all that was around at the time the project was built, we believed in it, but he doesn't know what they intend to put forward now. He has spoken with Craig Machamer and he is committed to carry the project forward, but it will take a

lot of training of the existing staff to make it work and some additional staff. Ms. Candito stated that the first step was the infrastructure, since they could not even email between classes, then licensing and fees. Mr. Healey commented that the \$903,000 was that. Ms. Candito stated that she also heard about a two (2) year project, so that means additional charges, since we are going beyond where/when this project was to be completed, and now there are items not covered. Mr. Healey stated that he believes that they are a couple years behind in terms of the rollout of technology. There had been no real budget for the rollout back then. Mr. Sadeck stated that when he asked the question at Town Meeting if that money would be enough, he was told that it would cover absolutely everything. That is the frustrating part. Then we encourage the townspeople to vote on it, and it turns out not to be correct.

Mr. Bradford stated that every year since he has been involved, the School Department told us one thing and then did another. He wants to see where that technology money went. My personal opinion is to give only the NSS since their percentage is not sustainable. We have to get the message across to them that this is the money you have and that is it. He agreed with Selectman Burke that we cannot micromanage the School Department, so we present them with an amount and have them manage it.

Mr. Wilkins stated that that is the same thing that he has seen. Accountability needs to take place; otherwise we will not have transparency. There are too many shell games going on, and we don't have time to keep up with it. We need to come up with a figure and give it to them, and how they spend it is on them. One of their budget lines today is different than it is next year. You cannot trace/track anything from one year to the next. We need to say what we can afford and give it to them and tell them that is it. We have other responsibilities with our Towns. We have been nickel and diming our Town Departments, and this is millions of dollars that we don't even know where it goes. We have people working in buildings that the School Staff would never dream of even having a break room in.

Robert Alderson stated that he hears the frustration. This has been going on for 16 years. He has watched their budget go from \$9 million to \$34 million. If the two (2) Towns get together and tell them the number, then the School's desired number is a fantasy. We need to say what we need to support the Town, and if there is anything leftover, that is what we can afford for the Schools. We need to pinch off their funding to see how efficient they can be. There is no amount that we can give the Schools that will solve it. Mr. McCarthy said after all his presentations that the 3.5% is unsustainable, then he is out and another Superintendent is in. A 3.5% increase this year is a big difference from a 3.5% increase three (3) years ago. Personally he felt there should be a 1% increase for four (4) years, then watch the efficiencies that take place.

Ms. Pacheco stated that she has spent eight (8) years on the School Committee and nine (9) years as Selectman, so she has seen both sides. She delved into the numbers like Selectman Hollenbeck is doing. At the end of the day, it does not matter what the School Committee votes; it matters what this room votes. It needs to be a realistic number that we can sustain from one year to the next.

Mr. Sadeck stated that when he was on the Regional Finance Subcommittee, Jessica Huizenga said it was her job to get an override for the Schools. Those members of the School Committee that pushed for the override are not running for the School Committee this year. We had a discussion about full day kindergarten at the last School Committee Meeting. If they need it, then that is up to them. He asked them where they were going to get the money, since they need two (2) teachers, but no one said anything. Yesterday when he was speaking with Fred Baker, Finance Director, he said that there will be no cost to the parents for full day kindergarten, since it had already been built into the budget. There was no talk about it when we met that Saturday morning, and they presented the budget. The first he heard about it was at the Subcommittee meeting. Then he found out that the School Committee passed it and it is already in the budget.

Chairman Powderly stated that when the Selectmen attend these meetings with the Superintendent, whomever it is, we are seeing that. He would encourage us all to get a School Committee elected with similar mindsets as we have here. It is a sad state that the School Committee is not of like mind as this group. Their salaries, benefits, steps and levels are on their side. If things do not change, then we are a broke Town anyway. If we vote and say the increase is only 2.5%, and if they give 2.5% to the teachers, then we are blamed about not fixing a leaky truck, leaky roof, etc. We have to give them a number that they have to live within that covers everything. We know we are dealing with declining school enrollments, and we have the same number of teachers and are hiring more! They tell us that they will look into it, but we never hear back. He is hearing from this discussion that we should give a number to the Schools that the Towns are willing to go to. Then we need to send a letter to the Superintendent and the Chair of the School Committee and encourage them to watch this meeting. There is a great amount of frustration. With the rest of the Town we do a maximum increase of 2.5%, which includes steps, levels, longevity, etc. If that is good for the Town, it is good for the Schools. He doesn't want to hear that Schools have been out of control, so just give them 1%. We need to give them a number and let them know it is all encompassing.

Selectman Hollenbeck stated that the Board breaks out the operating budget, capital, excluded debt and transportation. Our 2.5% is \$484,000, so half of that is for the Schools. Selectman Hollenbeck noted that \$277,000 is what has been built into the budget right now. Mr. Sadeck stated that he cannot believe that they did not say anything about the full day kindergarten when they already knew it, and it was built into their budget.

Ms. Pacheco and Selectman Hollenbeck will get together tomorrow night to find out the 2.5% over what number from last year. Chairman Powderly stated that the only variable right now is transportation. Mr. Baumgartner stated that Lakeville is at 2.5% and Freetown is not. Let's get the media involved to tell them what is going on and see if it draws more interest from the people. Selectman Burke noted that then the parents will show up in support of the budget. Mr. Baumgartner stated that the parents are taxpayers also. You need to be decisive and respond to the taxpayers. He will not be comfortable with the 2.5% increase, since that is not what he is hearing from my constituents. Chairman Powderly stated that if the Board loses at Town Meeting and it goes to the Schools, then the backlash is that we have to go back to our budgets and make cuts from the Town side, and then we have to deal with that. It could back fire, so it's important that we agree upon a number.

Chairman Powderly asked when both Boards want to get back together. Ms. Pacheco stated that her Board will discuss this on Monday, then possibly set up to meet again either Tuesday or Thursday. A March 19th date was suggested if it works for everyone.

Adjournment

Upon a motion made by Selectman Burke; seconded by Selectman Hollenbeck it was:

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting at 8:35 PM.
Unanimous in favor.

Upon a motion made by Ms. Candito; seconded by Mr. Vlahopoulos it was:

VOTED: To adjourn the Finance Committee at 8:35 PM.
Unanimous in favor.