Finance Committee

MEETING MINUTES

April 14, 2021

Virtually

Paul Flaherty, Rick McGuire, Stephen Bern, Shawn Craig, Nick Ensko, Kelly McElreath, Derek Brindisi, Brett Simas, Deb Teta, Sandra Hakala

The meeting was opened at 7:10 pm virtually.

Paul Flaherty explained School Committee did not reduce the budget as anticipated at the last meeting.

Brett Simas, Chair of BOS, discussed the reasoning of BOS to make the changes to the warrant. At their previous meeting, BOS voted to finalize the warrant without the override. It was determined to fund the MURSD budget assessment with initial budget estimate, withdraw the funds for the roads article to add to the budget and amend the article for monies to stabilization to use those funds for the assessment. Brett Simas highlighted the following:

- This is not the situation the Town expected to be in when budget was created
- Town's responsibility to pay the assessment voted by MURSD
- Anticipation of federal tax dollars gives the Town the opportunity to make a short-term decision until more is known.
- It is hopeful to use fed dollars to assist with the roads repair
- It is to be made clear to the public this is a one year stop gap measure. The Town should anticipate the town will need an override next year to pay the FY23 assessment.
- MURSD will have a year to prepare for the override since it has been made clear the road and stabilization money will not be available
- Saving the taxpayers monies for the year by putting this off

Paul Flaherty added BOS support community center. Brett discussed community center is important to him personally and he has been transparent about this. Brett clarified this decision was made to avoid the override due to the federal monies' clarification needed and focus the community on strategic investments.

Paul Flaherty recognized this is not the best option and against the grain of financial policies. There is still an unknown as to what Mendon is going to do as well. Brett clarifies if we include capital stabilization account, the Town if very close to the 10% hence the reason to put it off for a year.

Committee members made the following comments:

Steve Bern comments included

- Goes against protocol
- One-year attempted relief and need to ensure we are transparent
- Avoids double whammy of the override and the debt exclusion
- We are kicking it down the road
- Need to communicate town is and are committed to roads and stabilization but also show commitment to the schools.
- Override is necessary next year

It was noted DPW director was hopeful after this year a new road plan would be completed to bring the yearly appropriation down.

Shawn Craig:

- Schools wanted override last year so this is not a surprise
- Doesn't have faith schools will be prepared next year and cuts will need to be made
- Optics where voters may see this as pushing the community center
- Expending monies and not putting the money into stabilization and concern about the rating agencies
- Funding expansion of services and not really know what the voters want
- No guidance on the ARP funds

Nick Ensko:

- Agrees with Shawn
- Budget has been level funded for past 3 months
- Now 2 weeks before meeting, we are making these changes
- Concerns about the optics
- School Committee is a want budget and Town is digging a hole especially with trash services

Rick McGuire:

- Recommended the road funds as a contingent for funding for the schools
- Has same concerns as Nick and Shawn
- Discussed the wants of the School Committee and does not feel there has been good faith in their budget
- Would like to see an override presented to the voters

Steve Bern noted Finance Committee members are on the same page but how do we move forward since BOS did not vote for an override. He noted MURSD will be hiring someone for one year possibly. What will be the starting point next year?

Paul Flaherty states the deficit is the free cash to stabilization. Plan is to remove the 'stabilization' and 'road' money from MURSD budget for next year. Derek Brindisi agrees with what members are stating and what is being said in the community. Paul Flaherty noted if Upton approves an amount, Mendon doesn't and MURSD has a decision to be made.

It was decided not to delay the Town Meeting. Brett Simas isn't confident there would be more clarity in federal funds or what Mendon is doing so people many not trust the process. Voters are going to skeptical of whatever we did. Upton has enough of a plan to fund the schools within the levy

It was noted this is the Finance Committee budget that goes to Town Meeting. BOS controls the warrant. Thus, should there be a discussion to have Finance Committee recommend a lower amount to MURSD? Derek Brindisi stated the town is obligated to fund the assessment. If FinCom puts in a lower amount, it will need to be funded with another special town election and/or override if MURSD certifies the same amount. Discussion followed among all members on what is best for Upton on what to fund and not to fund in regards to MURSD

Upon motion of Nick Ensko, seconded by Rick McGuire, it was moved to fund MURSD line-item budget of $1,050,642 by using funds from road article. It was reiterated the starting amount for FY23 for MURSD would be the $13,274,050. Unanimously approved by roll-call vote.

Article 7 was amended to be a supplemental budget to MURSD in the amount of $426,497 from free cash. Upon motion of Nick Ensko, seconded by Shawn Craig, it was voted unfavorable action on Article 7. Unanimously approved by roll-call vote

Upon motion of Nick Ensko, seconded by Steve Bern, it was motioned favorable action on article 12F for $2100 CPC. Unanimously approved by roll-call vote.

It was noted article 2A was removed from warrant (override vote).

Upon motion of Paul Flaherty, seconded by Nick Ensko, it was motioned favorable action on article 2B in the amount of $25,352,659. Unanimously approved by roll-call vote.

Adjourn at 7:48 pm

Respectfully submitted,
Kelly A. McElreath