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TOWN OF BROOKLINE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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2020 BudCom Study Committee Minutes Thursday, August 19, 2020

Meeting attendees via Zoom: Drew Kellner, Eric Pauer, Karen Jew, Gaylord Sledge, Matthew Mailloux

Eric opened the meeting at 6:31 p.m. Eric stated that we were meeting electronically under the Executive Order 2020-04, and the Emergency Meeting Orders #12 and #23 which allow for remote meetings. Eric asked each Board member to verify per the order where they are, why they are there, can they hear everyone, and if anyone is present with them. All members responded.

Discussion with Brentwood Municipal Budget Committee – (Keith Levitsky, Liz Faria, Michelle Siudut)

Keith has been the chairman for the last 3 years. He has been on the committee for 6 years. Liz has served on the budget committee for 3 years. Michelle has been the secretary of the committee for 5 years. The other members have served on the committee from 1 to 3 years. Most people run two terms on the committee. The interest has picked up over the recent cycles. A five person committee is recommended. Previous to the current committee, members served 9 to 12 year tenures.

Budget Committee

The municipal budget committee is made up of 5 elected members, as well as 1 person from the select board and 1 person from the school board. The municipal budget committee covers the town budget, and the school budget (pre-K through fifth grade). The budget committee has staggered three year terms. The initial setup of the committee would be one person for 1 year, two people for 2 years, and two people for 3 years either appointed by the selectman or voted on by the town. Subsequently, there are 3 year terms that are elected. There needs to be an odd number of members.

The municipal budget committee has teeth. During town or school district meetings, it is the municipal budget committee's budget that is on the ballot.

Vacancies vary from year to year. They usually have more than one candidate running.

Budget Process

The budget committee reviews the budget line by line, but only has authority over the bottom line for both the town and school budgets. The town and school have the ability to move money within the parameters of the total budget. The budget committee will weigh in on the operating budgets and any warrants that have money attached. The budget committee usually meets with the department heads after they meet with the select board. There are usually multiple sessions to come to an agreement.

The municipal budget committee has multiple ways to educate the town regarding the budget. All of the meetings with the select board and department heads are open to the public. They have public hearings where they explain to the towns people the budget and rationale. They also have a town newspaper. They plan to use social media to publicize meetings.

They had a court case a few years ago, between the budget committee and the school due to the 10% rule. In the case the budget committee significantly slashed the school budget. The chair maintained that some of the money would be made up by the 10% the town is allowed to add back. This however was illegal. As a budget committee, you have to provide an amount that is reasonable to run the school/town.

The budget committee chairman gets periodic updates of expenditures which is shared with the full committee via email, usually once or twice a season. However, there isn't much they can do to affect the expenditures. The committee meets regularly from October to March but does not meet outside of that time frame. They feel they can meet more often to review expenditures.

Relationship with Select Board/Town

The relationship with the town has varied depending on the issues. There have been years where people have wanted to get rid of the budget committee. The budget committee works hard to come in with the same budget as the select board. Several members of the select board have been on the budget committee. Usually the larger budgets are reviewed several times.

Miscellaneous

The problem with the overall town tax burden is the size of the Exeter Cooperative School district budget. They have six towns in their cooperative, covering grades 6-12, and the larger towns have more representation. The Brentwood budget committee has no authority over the cooperative budget. The cooperative operating school budget is \$63 million, compared to the combined school and town operating budget of \$10 million for Brentwood. They have an advisory committee for the cooperative.

You want a balance of parents and senior citizens on both your school board and your budget committee. Not having that balance in the past led to the lawsuit. The school board was made up of mostly parents and the budget committee was mostly seniors. Ninety to ninety-five percent of the town doesn't pay attention until the town and school district meetings, or when they get the tax bill.

Discussion with Fremont Budget Committee – (Mary Jo Holmes)

Mary Jo is the vice chairman of the budget committee. She served on the school board for 7 years. She was the budget committee representative when she was on the school board.

Budget Committee

The budget committee has 5 members at large, with a selectman representative and a school board representative. The budget committee members have 3 year staggered terms. There are normally two positions up for election each year. One person has been on the committee for 20 years. The average tenure is 5+ years. There isn't much turnover. The budget committee has a member that is also a state representative who brings issues from Concord. They do not have any problems filling open positions. The people of the town do their homework when it comes to electing members to the budget committee.

Budget Process

The process usually starts in May to organize, select the officers, and welcome new members. They do not meet again until October. Then the committee will meet every week from October to March. They have meetings on public television. They have a meeting room that allows for social distancing. The committee starts with the smaller budgets. The budgets are approved by the selectman and presented line by line to the budget committee by the town administrator. The budget committee has the authority to change lines as well as the bottom line. Then they move on to the larger budgets. They may meet on these more than once. The school budget is presented line by line also. At the end of each year the town/school is allowed to allocate monies to a trust fund before any money is returned to the taxpayers.

The 10% rule has not come into effect.

Relationship with Select Board/Town

They do not have a cooperative high school. They entered into a 20 year agreement with Sanborn Regional district, with current tuition of approximately \$20,000 per pupil annually. There are close to 210 pupils included in the regional district. The cost of the school tuition is the biggest issue. The last 3 years they have been in a surplus due to students moving from the district. This money has already been taxed. The budget process goes smoothly. They have a high school trust fund to allocate if more pupils move into town than appropriated. They also have a special education trust fund, maintenance trust fund, and technology trust fund. The budget committee receives notification as a courtesy, but does not have to be notified to spend any money from the trust funds. Budgeting the elementary and middle school budget is also difficult. They have a good working relationship with the schools. The selectman are very supportive as well.

Miscellaneous

Review and approve minutes

Drew made a motion to approve the minutes of August 6, 2020 as amended. Karen seconded. Roll call vote 4-0 to approve, one abstention (Matthew Mailloux).

Review actions assigned at last meeting

Discussion of Presentations/Report Assignments

Other business

Drew – We need to be very careful about expressing an opinion using the word “we” in terms of our relationship with the coop and viewpoints we have on budgets. We need to be very careful about introducing bias into the final report and how we respond to the participants.

Matt – based on the quantitative data, Brentwood and Fremont have the highest operating budget increases of the peer towns in relation to spending contrary to their statements.

Karen – what format will the final deliverable be in, narrative or power point?

Drew – his assumption is a written narrative for the select board and a power point presentation for the town, which we would submit for input. It could be a power point for both. We need to gather public input at some point. Preferably direct to the public.

Actions for next meeting

Matt – aggregate quantitative data into single data points for official budget committees, unofficial budget committees and Brookline. There would be a separate graph for peer towns and peer school districts. All with updated CPI information. Write an explanation of the data.

Eric – RSA information

Group – gather points on qualitative data to merge together at next meeting, especially for people that you brought forward for a Zoom meeting or interviewed individually.

Confirm next meeting date

The next meeting will be September 3, 2020 at 6:30 pm.

Adjourn

Meeting was adjourned at 8:22 pm.