Meeting Minutes, January 3rd, 2024

Attendees: Sean Mamone via Zoom, Leslie Formby, John Arico, Frank Weber, Bill McKinney, Joan Cleary, Tim Berry, Sheila Sturm, Howard Brown, Kim Roberge, Lorri Hayes, George Torres via Zoom

Jack Esposito was a community attendee. Bonnie Angulus attended remotely to discuss the Library Budget.

Meeting called to order at: 6:30 pm

Agenda: (items may be moved ahead if a previous item finishes early)

6:30 - 6:40: Opening public comments- Public comments from Bonnie Angelus representing the library. Statement read from the Town Moderator. Statement below:

6:40 – 6:45: Approval of minutes from December 13th, TB makes a motion and SS seconds, Sean Mamone- Abstain, Kim Roberge, yes, Minutes are accepted.

6:45 – 7:45: Discussion of Library budget- Bonnie we had 3 questions, one question is no longer in our jurisdiction, KR says she made a statement last week that said just what the minutes said. In the past 3 years, the library budget has gone up by 70%, the highest one up in the salary base than any other department, without any change of hours, and Joan concurred that you know it was based on increase of hours of employees and salary. SM says Yes, I asked the question under Number 3 How many hours is the library open? How many hours do they work? How many hours do they work without opening the library? BA says Joanne and Bonnie are budgeted for 35 hours per week, 1 part-timer works 19 hours, 1 part-timer works 18 hours, 1 teen part-timer works 6 hours, all work those hours every week. 43 hours of part timers and 70 hours of full timers each week. The library is open to the public 37 hours per week. The library trustees require the library is double staffed every day. In evaluating my hours the allotted hours for me should take into consideration all of the extra evening meetings. I have professional develop meetings. So, in this evening I've been working since 10 0'clock this morning, and I will be here until at least 9 0'clock tonight, due to the number of meetings, so they couldn't not pay me, you know. Ask me to be at meetings, but then not pay me for meetings. So, between meetings and night evening programs. That's where my extra hours are. And for Joanne it's getting paid for off-site meetings. She does outreach over at the village school. So, all of that was unpaid work before last year she was doing the work, but she wasn't getting paid for the programming that she was providing. So, we had a significant increase to programming this year after her hours were paid for. So, we went from 205 programs to almost 250 programs this year. So, I think it's, you know, money well spent. Again, we must always have 2 people in the building. So, it's 37 hours per week. That's 5 days a week. We're open 10 to 8, 3 of those days, and then, if there was demand for more hours like, let's say, people wanted us to open on Friday all day and Saturday all day we could potentially roll some of those programs review into those days, so I wouldn't see a significant increase in staffing if more hours were demanded. So again, that takes a vote of the community to open the library more at least a presentation by the trustees to do that. KR says a vote by the community for increasing library hours? I thought that was all based on the trustees. And can you elaborate a little bit more on Joanne’s work at the school because the school does have a librarian, and they do have teachers programs up there. So, I'm not sure why that is included in the library budget, whereas that would be in the school budget. BA says she’s not performing librarian duties of a school library; she was asked by the principal. We're trying to create a connection when they moved kindergarten to full day. The kindergartners no longer were coming over here, whereas before they were doing that like a half day program here, running over to the school for half day kindergarten. So, they wanted to keep that strong connection between the library and the school and ask the kindergarten teachers if they could bring Joanne in. She goes once a week for outreach to keep that connection because we kind of lost our connection to the kindergarten. We used to do story time with the kindergartners, and so it was a matter of kind of outreach to keep them coming here. They're very familiar with Joanne, but then they lose that connection. So, there's a big disconnect. In fourth, fifth, and sixth grade. They kind of stop coming over here except for Book club. So, we're fostering the love of their town library. We do a bunch of things with them. We try. And do you know the summer reading program? We try and get them to come over here to visit before it starts. We have really, high attendance because of that. And I think we have high attendance at the summer reading program also, because Joanne has such a unique connection with the kindergartners. You know the first graders know her so well because they spent that time with her. So, the trustees think that's time well spent for her to go over on Mondays, and that's part of her 35 hours, even though the library is not open on Mondays. That's what she does on Mondays. I work on Mondays in office. I have in office hours, because not only am I required to drop off the timecards by 10 0'clock on Monday morning, even though we're closed. I also have a program. On Monday morning. The Morning Book Discussion Group is on Monday mornings. The friends of the library meet on Monday. So, there's a lot of things that were happening on Mondays that require the director to be here, either to open or like. I said, the timecards that's not negotiable. They don't care that we're not open on Mondays. They want timecards on Mondays, because the rest of the, you know, buildings are open with staff. So that's how those hours are accounted for. KR says I am still a little concerned. Monday. Your hours, Bonnie, seem very self-explanatory, based on the hours of the office hours, and you had explained that to us previously. I'm concerned about your comments that the taxpayers get to vote on something such as that of a change of hours, and I'm even more concerned that the taxpayers are paying a salary of somebody that's doing something at the school that should be in the school budget and not in the taxpayers’ budget. BA says well, I would love it if the school would pay Joanne to do the job of the librarian over there. But that's not what she's doing. She's not doing the librarian’s job. She is simply spreading, you know, love of library. Not every child over there is a visitor to the library, and so we want to make sure that they understand the library, library cards, etc. It's outreach. All libraries are doing it. They're trying to foster community. I just went to a workshop about how to foster a better relationship with your school library and your town library. We should be working in conjunction. So that was approved by the trustees for her to go over and do that. The town has some power in controlling the hours because the trustees would have to request town approval. We did one increase in hours over my period. Here, at least, we used to close at 5:30 Tuesday, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. But quite frankly, people were not getting out of work, getting out of after school, you know, sports to get here, so I asked if we could increase hours to 8 0'clock, so we could capture the workers coming back from Boston again. This was Pre-Covid. When everybody was driving to their jobs, and it was approved by the trustees. But of course, the taxpayer has the power at town meeting to say, Yeah, no, we don't want to increase the salaries to cover those extra hours, and had someone reduced it, it would have gone right back to what it was before, and if you look at the history of the library, there has been changes of, you know, 32 Hours per week, to 35 Hour per week. It increased and decreased over time based on need. So, the taxpayer has the power to say that you know, through either reducing the hours or just getting up and saying they don't want library services after 5 0’clock, or whatever it is, they don't want to open the library till noon, and I was looking for consistent hours. People complain. The feedback was, you never know when the library is open because they have some crazy hours. So, if you're only open Friday from 2 to 6, and you're open Saturday, 10 to one, and we are trying to make it a little more consistent. And we did see an increase in use in the evening and that allowed me to have programs in the evening and have it staffed and get paid. So that's how that worked. TB asked how many hours Joanne spends at the school. BA says It varies. She must be there at 8 in the morning. But we must work around the schedule of the school and their, you know, hours. So, I believe she's there at least from 8 to 10 or 10: 30 and that is because she's visiting both kindergarten classes. It is weekly. Yeah. So, her preparation time her, you know, whatever it takes to get in and out of the building, right? We're not talking about a lot of time here, which is the point I'm trying to make. She's at the school for 2 hours per week. TB says that he is trying to make a point that it is a limited time. LF asks if part of the library outreach to the village school is to increase literacy, is that part of the purpose. BA says of course. And again, it's to create this connection. We have a great relationship with the principal and the teachers, and they have great respect for what we do here to help their scores go up, you know, like it's hand in hand. So, our 4 juvenile book clubs are full. So, in our first and second graders, we're here tonight, there were 15 of them. That's pretty good, for you know, 4 classes and each one of our book clubs are like that. KR says and I appreciate that, Leslie. I'm looking at it from a budgetary standpoint. And I'm looking at the 21 budget. Compared to the upcoming budget, there's a 70% increase on the bottom line in 3 years that's as it went from $138,000 to $235,000. It's substantial, and so I think the outreach has always been there through the programs to do that. And maybe there wasn't compensation. But that's substantial. And as the Budget Committee, that's my job to look at the numbers, and so, without there being any more hours opened, I'm having a hard time stomaching that there's that much more than there was 3 years ago, and that's my opinion. BA says Kim. I understand the increase because I see it myself, because I'm the creator of the budget. The salary study that was done showed, you know, where the wages were much lower than other communities. We kind of went over that. So that's where some of the increases are. And then you're compensating your library director as a department head and your children's program director who, you know she has incredible statistics to show the work she is doing between the number of programs and her attendance. So, the tax, the most bang for the buck. I doubt you could replace either one of us for this amount of money. So, I understand the increase. But it's because you, significantly, you know, changed the children's program director’s salary. She was grossly under compensated for her work. So, we were just trying to get her paid for the work that she's doing. She's producing awesome work. KR says Bonnie, I hear what you're saying. I'm just saying that those salary changes went into place when I was a selectman, and I've been out of the selectman's office for more than 3 years now, so they were done before the 3 years. I'm not even looking back that far, it's perfectly fine. BA says we can explain the change. But it is still 5 employees running a full library for $153,000 a year. KR says $153,000 is not actually an accurate statement. You must add retirement, health insurance, Medicare, FICA, I mean, it is costly. BA says is that any different than any other compensation of a full-time employee in town? I am all these lines together for exactly what the compensation is told to me. I did not pick the retirement number. I did not pick a health insurance number. I did not negotiate the health insurance number, nor did I put the amount in Medicare together. Those numbers are just a reflection of the wages. Okay, I don't control the benefits. George Torres /MVVS School Board Member (GT): while I did hear, there was significant increase in that budgetary line item, my question was, if benefits were rolling into that line item, and it appears that it is. I will say, you know. for truth be told, I'm the CFO of Pennichuck Water Works so I'm very familiar with the salaries and the benefits that we've been seeing the last couple of years. We are not immune to it. You know, one of the things that really has been driving some of these costs are the wages, you know. There just aren't enough people. You cannot get people to work. What you think? You'd like to pay them. It's really a very competitive environment on top of that the healthcare costs the last 4 years have been astronomical. What we've been seeing, and unfortunately, because we're in the State of New Hampshire. There are not many providers in the State of New Hampshire. I believe there's a lot of it has been through consolidation over the last couple of years. So, they've been trying to try to minimize their costs on their end. But there's only so much you can do unless you're willing to change the plans that these individuals are on to more low cost plans the only other option is, unfortunately, is to reduce headcount. That's the only way you're going to mitigate some of these costs. We are beholden to a lot of these entities. The Harvard pilgrims. The Aetna's. There's not many of them to go around. And when you look a lot of these plans, it's not the premiums of the plans that drive in these costs. It's a lot of that has to do with prescriptions. Prescriptions are driving probably about 60 to 70% of these premiums increases the last couple of years. So, although you know, I do understand, and I can sympathize with the angst, we're hearing about some of these increases. But the fact of the reality is unless you're willing to reduce headcount which I'm not sure. That's what we're advocating for. You know, I don't know what else we can do. But again, just to provide a little bit background, I'm not trying to inflame anything, you know, any issues here. But that's really the reality. And what I've been seeing the last couple of years from my perspective. So, thank you. BA says, I just very quickly. I just wanted for the record. That we only have 2 full time employees that receive benefits. I waive the medical benefits don't receive the benefit for that. And Joanne, because of her insurance situation with her husband, had to take the insurance. She couldn't wave it. So that's why that line looks like it does because you've got 1 full-time employees receiving medical benefits this year. That was not what was happening last year. So, there's nothing I can do to control that line. I did what I could do to control that line by waiving the medical insurance. KR says Bonnie, I'm not arguing or even pointing anything or saying that it's not accurate. The only thing I was saying is from 2021 until this coming year that it has gone up 70%. And so, my concern is looking at the budgetary numbers is all. I don't know how to shave it down. I don't know whether that the town should be doing something different for its employees based on that. I'm just saying that looking at that. There hasn't been any change in the library hours themselves, that, but that there in the overall salary it's been a 70% increase and don't get me wrong. On another topic, January to December 23. The library cleaning was budgeted at $2,600, but only $1,600 was paid out. So why is it still $2,600? BA says I could not control the cleaning person coming or not coming. She took off Mother's Day. She took off Father's Day. She took off Christmas. She took off Thanksgiving. She took off New Year's like. I can't control her. She's not my employee. She's an employee of the town and when she calls in sick, she doesn't get paid when she decides she's not coming for Mother's Day, because it's Mother's day. She does clean on Sundays. I can't make her, and then guess who cleans- me for free. I don't bill the town for cleaning the library. So that's another savings to the town. So, if she was my employee, then I could control her and say, if you miss work another time then we must let you go, or we would arrange for her to clean on a different day or something. She's not my employee. She's the town's employee, and when she doesn't show up, she doesn't get paid. So that's a reflection of her, choosing not to work. There's no discipline. If she doesn't show up for work. If she doesn't want to clean, she doesn't have to clean. That's a contract, and then that is 100 reimbursed by the Daland Trust. So, then the Daland Trust benefits from her refusing to work. But somebody still must clean the building, and that's me on the town for my hourly wage Monday morning when I show up and find out that she didn't clean. And I've talked to Joan about this, and I've talked to Selectman about it, but they've retained her services because it's good enough for them. They're not in a public building that has 50 to 75 people a day walking through it as well. TB says What we've always done in in this town is carried 100% of the employees’ health insurance. We're talking about health insurance, and it does add to the overall cost of the labor to run any department in the town and George spoke to how difficult it is to get help and retain help and the fact that the costs are going up. And you heard what he said, the only way to reduce the cost is to trim staff. To maintain equilibrium with the cost of the health insurance and the wages is to not have as many employees. So, we're not of the mind to do that, and for the first time in years the DPW is fully staffed because we have had, even with the fact that we paid a 100% of those employee’s health insurance. We had a hard time retaining employees there. So, it just speaks to our reasoning behind doing what we do, and Kim knows this, and Howard knows this. But some of you probably don't know that we pay 100% of the health insurance. And we've added, we've had discussions here in this room over the years about it, and there is a good reason why we choose as a town to pay a hundred percent of our employees’ health insurance. More and more towns are doing that for the exact same reason that we do. It is to be able to retain your experience staff and not have this turnover just turn over costs’ money when we, when we don't have a full crew on the DPW Garage. We end up spending more money in overtime. LH says that I would like to see the research that has been done to support the fact that towns are moving to paying health insurance at a 100%, or that towns, multiple towns pay health insurance at 100%. I think I've asked previously for there to be a copy of the wage report done by NHMA. Yes. I've asked for that several times, and I've also asked for the breakdown of the hourly pay for staff and the amount that health insurance is paid for them. This has nothing to do with me approving or not approving the budget. But it's just information I would like to have. It would be helpful if we knew for sure if other communities are increasing the amount, they pay for health insurance. JA asks do we have any more questions for Bonnie? GT asks if there has been a wage study. BA says yes, last year. She also says that the library trustees have agreed to study wages every three years. KR questioned the validity of the study completed last year. BA made it clear the survey was valid. BA discussed the fact that there are open positions that the library director and the children’s director could apply for where there would be less work and the positions are not far from Mont Vernon. BA said that the library trustees evaluated these positions and made decisions regarding the wages based on a variety of factors including that the wages for positions in surrounding libraries. BA said the library trustees provided an increase to retain good staff at a fair wage. TB said that he views it like the plow drivers in Amherst that are paid the same as the plow drivers in Mont Vernon. TB says there is no difference in the plow truck nor the library. JA said he would ask the library to return when they present their warrant article.

7:18 pm: New business- JC says the payables are in. JC says there was only one truck being requested by the Department of Public Works now, there was a budget change. KR questions if we have the updated budget. JC says no. JA will send the budget tonight. HB says we will only do have one new leased truck this year.

JA asks when we want to hold our next meeting- TB asks if we are prepared to form our opinion of the budget, JA says it is time to do that at our next meeting, we will meet Wednesday, January 10, 2024.

7:28: Meeting adjournment. SS, TB seconds

David Sturm Message:

Please add this to the minutes of the Town of Mont Vernon Advisory Budget Committee.

Members of the 2023-2024 Town of Mont Vernon ADVISORY Budget Committee:

I feel compelled to write this to you in my role as Moderator and the sole person who appoints its members. I would come in person except that I have a bad cold and do not want to spread it.

First, I’m dismayed by the personal attacks on members by other members. This is unfortunate, unprofessional, and wholly unnecessary. Surely you can disagree without being disagreeable. Please rein in your personal feelings.

Second, as an advisory budget committee very little of state law on budget committees applies. You are NOT an official budget committee. An official budget committee is a much more extensive committee which prepares the budget. You do not. That type of committee is ill-suited to our tiny town.

Third, only those items on the budget as presented to the Select Board by the Department Heads are within your jurisdiction. You do NOT have authority to examine or opine on any other budget. I understand that there has been a desire for some to examine the non-municipal budget of the Daland Memorial Library. That is not within your jurisdiction. Mont Vernon is unusual in that we have an endowed library, and that endowment pays the non-wage costs of the library. The Daland Trustees and the Daland Library Trustees are the keepers of that budget. Not the Town of Mont Vernon. You are not entitled to examine that budget as members of this committee.

Next, I understand that Sean Mamone has demanded that Sheila Sturm be removed from the committee alleging she got up from her seat and threatened him. I have reviewed the video of this alleged assault and I find that allegation wholly unsupported by the facts as shown in the video. There was a table and at least six feet between Sean and Sheila. Sheila remained seated and did not raise her voice.

Lastly, out of respect to other members of the volunteer committee, please be advised that continued disruptions, personal attacks, time wasting shenanigans and other behavior that does not serve your purpose may result in removal from the committee.

Everyone is a volunteer on this committee and going outside your purpose is a waste of time and energy.

**Duties of the Budget Committee:**

The budget committee in Mont Vernon is an advisory committee. They are charged with advising the Selectmen and the Town Residents on their perception of the merits of the proposed budget.

In the beginning of November they receive proposed budgets from the various department heads and Selectmen. They see the Department heads one-on-one in order to be familiarized with the budget, and understand why the Department Heads have asked for certain monies.

They then discuss and debate the merits of the budget as a whole, along with individual items.

In the end, they produce an opinion of the budget, state whether they are in favor or opposed to any items they feel strongly about and make it available to the public at the time that the Selectmen hold the public hearing to present the proposed budget.