

MINUTES
Selectboard Budget Work Session
Monday, November 2, 2020, 5:00 p.m.

Members present: Jessica James, Jim Benoit, Chris Campbell, Clark Hinsdale, and Michael “Red” Muir.

Town Employees present: Deb Healey

Visitors present: Carol Allen, Daniel Hofman and Jim Breur

1. 5:01 pm – Jessica James opened the meeting.

2. Heard from Vergennes Fire Dept. Jessica stated that we have not received any new budget information to share. Daniel Hofman stated that the Vergennes Fire Department needs to replace the 20 SBEAs air tanks, and to make sure that the equipment is all compatible, at the amount of \$150,000. Jim Breur stated that he was not looking for that this year, that he would be going before the city council with an increase of about 50,000 for the fire department for over the total budget, for a couple reasons, the intention is to be able to purchase these things going forward and not all at once. Hofman stated that they stopped spending when COVID hit, and they have \$50,000 now in the fund balance, and then the fire department could ask for the \$50,000 for next year. Hofman said they could use the \$50,000 and ask for the \$50,000 and finance the remaining \$50,000 or use the water tower fund that collects revenue and funds are normally used to match grants, and loan the fire department the \$100,000, rather than to take out a loan from a bank which would have interest payments. Hofman stated that they could then pay back the water tower fund \$20,000 per year for the next 5 years, to self-finance and not pay interest. That is \$20,000 of a \$50,000 increase this year and the other \$30,000 is for potentially replacing a pump truck, which could be replaced. When the pump truck goes we don't want to go after another large bond, we are paying 20,000 interest for 2 fire trucks, and they don't want to have to do the same thing with the pump truck and buy something immediately and get worse interest. Put away \$30,000 for a capital improvement plan for the pump truck. Red asked for the total increase for the Town of Ferrisburgh and Jim Breur replied that it needs to go to City council first. Jessica asked when that would be and Daniel stated it would be next week

Red asked the current budget amount, and Deb stated it is \$85,359, and we shoulder 38% of the budget. Chris asked what Ferrisburgh's portion of calls were and Jim Breur stated that he didn't have that information in front of him. Daniel Hofman stated that the figure is from the Grand List, and that's how we divide the budget expenses.

Jim Benoit stated that it seems like it has to change, and he is having a hard time seeing that the Town of Ferrisburgh is paying more of a percentage than the City of Vergennes. Jim said he understood the Grand List, however as stated as a taxpayer, something needs to change. Chris agreed with Jim's statement. Daniel said this has been going on for a long time, and needs to be a larger discussion, and Jim Breur said it has been that way for as long as he has been on the Department, 50 years. Jim stated that it is no way, shape or form of disrespect to the department or the people who run it, it is financial and the business part of it. Jim Breur said that he didn't disagree, and we need to start lining ourselves up like some other departments are doing in the area. Jim Bruer said they are paying \$20,000 in interest, and having to keep doing this, and a

piece of it is to pretty much line each other up like the other depts are doing, such as Bristol, as it is closest in size however it is less territory than what Vergennes covers, i am going by budget wise, and it really is a 4 town dept, as we all have a piece in keeping this going. Jim Breur said that Middlebury has a separate line that is just going to capital improvements, and they have a been looking at what other departments are doing for saving, and get away from bond after bond, and it will jump up to get to that point. Daniel stated that the water tower fund is available. Jim Benoit shared that is a short term fix and Jim Breur agreed, that they need to think ahead. Red asked if Ferrisburgh pays for their own bonds and Vergennes doesn't pay for them. Deb stated that Ferrisburgh only pays for them, not Vergennes. Red stated that when a bond issue for a truck, it is spread over the 4 other areas, and trying to grasp it. Jim Breur stated that we have 2 contracted departments and the town doesn't have their own dept, it is a contract. Red stated we owned the property. Red stated that we are given an hourly rate bill for every call, and we are going to look at the \$100,000 mark. Daniel Hofman stated that if we consolidated and one fire department covered Ferrisburgh it would probably be cheaper, and that would be a much larger discussion than what we are talking about right now. Daniel Hoffman mentioned that they need a capital improvement plan. Jim Breur mentioned that they are working on getting a grant for the SBEA air tanks. They will get back to the board for the 17th of November meeting.

3. Budget discussion

Deb reviewed the draft budget with the Selectboard for FY2020/2021. The draft also shows the unaudited year-end numbers for fiscal year 2019/2020. There was then discussion regarding the Vergennes fire department contract. It was mentioned that Vergennes should be charging enough each year for the fire coverage that includes having the money to replace equipment without needing to go Ferrisburgh, Panton and Waltham to ask for extra money to replace that equipment. There was also concern with the fact that Ferrisburgh is paying 38% of the total with no say in how that is spent. Red wondered if it made sense at some point to house a couple of trucks in West Ferrisburgh to provide coverage there. Clark felt that in the future there needs to be an emergency services plan for the 4 or 5 town area. Perhaps the calculation should be changed to the value of the buildings only, and not include the vacant farmland and the expensive lakeshore land, since the fire departments don't provide coverage for the land.

4. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn by Red Muir and seconded by Jim Benoit. Motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 5:54 pm.

Respectfully submitted

Jessica James, Chair