

Board of Selectmen

Special Meeting
Town of North Stonington
Board of Education
Wheeler Library
January 29, 2018
7:00 p.m.

Board of Finance

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A joint meeting of the Boards of Selectmen, Education, and Finance was held on Monday, January 29, 2018, at 7:00 p.m. in the Wheeler Library. Present for the Board of Selectmen was Mr. Mr. Uργο Mr. Carlson, and Ms. Kincaid; present for the Board of Education was Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski, Mr. Mathwich, Ms. Welborn, Mr. McCord (7:11 p.m.) and Mr. Nero; and present for the Board of Finance was Mr. Spring, Mrs. Howell, Mr. Simonds, Mr. Anderson, and Mrs. Banks. Also present were Senator Heather Somers and Representative Diana Urban.

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by First Selectman Mike Uργο. Mr. Uργο explained how the meeting would be run.

2. The Pledge of Allegiance – The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. Opening Comments – Mike Uργο, First Selectman – He said there are a lot of things going on right now and great things are happening. Town hall renovations were completed as well as a garage for equipment, and some road repairs were done. A new building official was hired, the web site was updated, and social media is being utilized. Looking forward to this year, the center for emergency services will be opening probably in June, school renovations will begin, a solar energy plant is coming in, and new software implementation has begun. He explained the OpenGov program. They are looking to continue more development in town, especially near Foxwoods. He reviewed the square footage of building that has been happening in town and said we are at the forefront of making things happen. He thanked the board members for all their hard work. Ms. Kincaid explained one of their goals is to have an annual meeting at the beginning of May this year for the budget. Mr. Uργο had comment on that.

4. Updates – Board of Education – Mrs. Wagner introduced those members present. She said they have been working hard and Ms. Welborn has taken over policy. The budget is well under way. She said they are very anxious to get the transition phase happening with the project. The board is working well together and they are collaborating with the other boards. Mr. Nero said this board and the previous board has been working hard on policy updates. He said they are working on the annual report. He spoke of the initiatives that have been implemented at the state since he started here. All our testing is now done online. He spoke of grants we have received. He spoke of the high test grades received at the elementary level and the middle/high school. We are preparing to move out of the Gymatorium and said it will be closed in mid-March and reopen in October. Mr. Nero said we are working with Pam Potemri of the building committee and he elaborated. A storage building is being rented. In terms of finances we appear to be fine but as the year progresses that could change. He spoke of

Medicaid reimbursements. He had further comment and spoke of the zero budgets received in the past. He had further comment on the budget.

Board of Finance – Dan Spring, chair, spoke of the new board. He spoke of the audit report and how we were applauded for the use of funds. He spoke of the introduction of the new members to items they will be working with. He spoke of the grand list. Submissions went out for budget requirements which will be compiled and reviewed by the board of finance. He explained the presentation schedule. They are looking to integrate capital projects. He said the financing for those has been well-integrated into the budget for the EMS building and he explained. The USDA rate is 2.75%. He said he sat on the school modernization committee and he elaborated. They were assisted by USDA for the financing on that with 2.75% which would be a 2 mil increase for the school project with 1 mil already being implemented for 2017-2018 year. He said it will be well-managed by the town.

Board of Selectmen – Covered above in opening comments.

5. State Capitol – Senator Somers – Senator Somers thanked all those that volunteer on boards. She wanted to update everyone on what is happening in this session. This session was focused on the budget. She is the chair of five committees and sits on other committees such as appropriations. They passed a comprehensive opiate bill and she explained. A comprehensive transparency bill was passed with the utility companies. Any profit generated was to be returned by CMEEC to the customers and that wasn't happening and she elaborated. She spoke of the ECS funding. She said the Republican Party prepared 10 budgets. She explained the process. They have put in a bill that municipalities and boards of education are done being paid in March so budgets can be developed. She is on the education committee and is hoping a fair and equitable formula is created for ECS. She explained the history of the funding and why they got the same amount of funding year after year. She elaborated. A task force will be set up to work on a formula and she had further comment.

Representative Urban – Representative Urban spoke about accountability in the programs we have. She spoke of the Children's Report Card. Some programs are overfunded. She spoke of the Medicare underfunding. She said they took the extra money being charged to the teachers and put in the Medicare funding. She said they have taken it from one place and put it in another. She spoke of the ECS funding and how her towns were overfunded and they had to make sure the money was not taken. She said each time the formula changes, it is based on what part of Connecticut has the most power at that particular time. She said they were able to get federal funds for addicted mothers for their children. They want to look at the statute of limitations based on what happened in Michigan for sex offenders. She said in essence, her message is that the constituents need to hold the reps accountable and she elaborated. She said a hole has been created. She had further comment. The pressure they get from citizens makes a difference.

6. Public Comments – Mrs. Wagner asked about the ECS funding and continuing to give it to poorly performing towns. Representative Urban clarified her comments. Senator Somers clarified her statement of underfunding of Stonington. She said we need to take the political stuff out of it. She had further comment. Ms.

Welborn asked Senator Somers about what she felt the formula should be. Senator Somers explained it didn't change and she explained what it would be based on. Mr. Urgo thanked everyone for being here and for their hard work. Brian Rathbun, citizen, spoke about accountability and how he had approached past boards about it and they wanted nothing to do with results-based accountability. He had further comment. He asked the boards to look at that. Mr. Urgo spoke of the results-based accountability and that this new software will help with that. Mr. Karpinski spoke of the budget meetings the board of education has and how there is never anyone present. He had further comment. Mrs. Howell had comment. She is working on the annual report and elaborated. A citizen asked about the state passing the teacher retirement burden on to the towns and what happened with that. Representative Urban said what they did initially was dump it on the towns and that was not the right thing to do. She said it should fall a little on the towns. They are caucusing and she thinks that will come up. Senator Somers said her caucus believes that is not the way to go; a deal was made on this many years ago. She elaborated. This was developed and promised between the union and the governor so the towns should not have it pushed down to them. She had further comment. She said the state just doesn't have the discipline to set aside money. Representative Urban said when they took the additional 1% from the teachers they took it again and applied it to Medicare. Mr. Olson, citizen, said there was a long process to get a budget in the state and asked how reliable can we expect the state to be to tell us what they are able to afford. Senator Somers agreed. She said in this budget cycle they told the governor about ways to look at where to get savings and she elaborated. She said the governor has the ability to red line. They told him where to take the money but he chose not to do that. She elaborated. Representative Urban said she agreed as well. She said a lot of the lawmakers agree with that. Mr. Palazolo said he hopes everyone is pleased with his efforts. He had further comment. He asked about how much time will be given to him and Mr. Olson at the town meeting. Mr. Urgo said delaying this would be very dangerous to the town and he explained the ramifications. He has candidates for highway foreman and one of them said they may not be interested because of the negative press of what is happening. He spoke of what happens with misinformation. He told Mr. Palazolo they have not formulated the time limit yet but would let them know. A citizen asked if they would have the ability to ask the petitioners a question. Mr. McCord asked about how to work to continue to get a revenue stream. Representative Urban said the tax bill is devastating for the state and elaborated. She has been working with a group of businessmen to figure out how to make that work. She said they need to look at a path to fix this. Senator Somers spoke and said this tax bill really hurts Connecticut. She had comment. She said they are trying to do things to make Connecticut a place to stay. She gave an example to show that people of wealth are leaving Connecticut. She had further comment. She said an entire year needs to be spent on tax reform. Chris Chrissos, citizen, asked if there would be an agenda item explaining her math question. Mr. Urgo explained. Mr. Urgo had further comment and explanation. Representative Urban had comment. She said they had to work really hard to get North Stonington the reimbursement. She had comment. She talked with the Secretary of the State and the Attorney General and they both said they have dotted their I's and crossed their t's. She said from what she has ascertained they are in compliance. Senator Somers said this is a local issue. They made sure the town got the funding. She said the school construction bill was very difficult to get her towns the funding. She said if you choose not to go forward, she didn't feel there would be school construction money available for future funding.

She had further comment. In the future, she doesn't feel there would be future funding for schools. Jay Petersen, citizen, spoke. He felt it was a matter of the lower income not being able to afford the taxes. He had further comment. He views the schools as a place where the lower income children can equalize the situation and give them a chance. He spoke of the property taxes and wondered if there could be a way to tax on income. He explained a different way to collect an income tax for the schools. He had further comment. Mr. Urgo said the selectmen have had a meeting on tax relief and he elaborated. He explained why they started to look at this. Lisa Mazzella, citizen, asked about reimbursement on the roof project. Mr. Urgo had comment. He said we would be getting one hundred some thousand back on the roof. He had further comment. Mrs. Wagner had questions on the petition and the point of it. Mr. Urgo clarified it. Mike Anderson had comment on a referendum question and he explained. Mr. Urgo explained why this is going to town meeting. Mr. Anderson had further comment. Ms. Kincaid explained the number that is in all the project funding forms. She had further comment. She said the numbers didn't change. Representative Urban said the Attorney General and the Secretary of State said they have never heard of this being done before. She said it looks to them that the board of selectmen did the right thing with their position but the end result could end up in court. She reiterated about the funding and the likelihood that it would not be available in the future. Mr. Urgo said the taxpayers need to know that this is costing the town a lot of money. He had further comment. They will follow through with the process. A citizen said he appreciates the service of the legislators. He had comment on the facets of the end statement and fears we have not met everything. He asked about the contract signing by Friday. Mr. Urgo directed him to the section on the town web site. He said the contracts are due to be signed on Friday because there are no extensions. He elaborated. He will do what he can to protect the town. Chris Anderson, citizen, said he agreed with the political process but what he is concerned about was that the town attorney referred to the Preston case and he elaborated. He said he read the Preston case and explained. The difference is that we had a town meeting on this and a referendum on this. He asked when the petitions stop. He had further comment. Mr. Urgo said that bond counsel has indicated once this goes forward, they don't have to take any more petitions and he elaborated.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Minutes were submitted by the Board of Education on behalf of the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance