



TOWN OF CHARLTON
Minutes of Special Selectmen's Meeting
Charlton Public Library – Dexter Hall
Tuesday – June 18, 2013 – 6:30pm

Submitted by MCT

Date 7/25/13

Received by alt

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Present: Chairman – Frederick C. Swensen, Clerk – Joseph J. Szafarowicz and Members – Kathleen W. Walker and Brent Sellew. Absent – Vice-Chairman – David M. Singer and Town Administrator – Robin L. Craver.

Chairman Swensen introduced himself and stated that other members of the board are here. He stated that the purpose of this meeting tonight is to be an open forum. We are not prepared to offer a lot of information at this time. He stated that financially as a town, we need to have this discussion and this is an informational gathering. Chairman Swensen explained how we got here now. He reviewed what the tax rate for Charlton is compared to other towns and we have one of the lowest tax rates around. He also stated that there is a sign up sheet going around if everyone could sign in.

Chairman Swensen stated that there are a few ways to construct the override. We could just throw out an amount. The second would be like a laundry list where you can pick and choose who to spend the money on. The third would be a pyramid figure. He feels as his own personal feelings, he is not in favor of the checklist. All departments in the Town Hall have been cut between 4 and 12% percent.

Claudia Dexter from Oxford Road stated that over the past year when there were discussions regarding the budget that 2 1/2 % might not be enough. She would be interested in the School Committee projecting a five year plan as well so we can achieve this in the budget.

Mike Gormley said that he wanted to hear from some of the Department Heads and what their numbers would be tonight as well as hearing from the Selectmen. What are the initial thoughts.

Mr. Szafarowicz stated that his feeling on a minimum for an override would be \$500,000 - \$600,000.

Frank Morrill from the Finance Committee stated that the information we receive will be helpful but there are other things down the road and we get the bare minimum, we will be right back in this situation again.

John McGrath from 10 Ponnakin Hill Road asked Mr. Gilrein what is the goal of the state for where are we going to be and where are we now based on the state formula. Mr. Gilrein stated that the target formula is 51.4 and Charlton's share is 20/45. Mr. Trifone stated that Charlton's amount is \$10,400,000. Mr. McGrath stated that the amount would be \$1,000,000 for the school alone and then you have to look at all of the other services. He feels that we are looking at \$2,000,000.

Peter Cooper, Sr. wanted to make a correction that we are not working at a minimum. Last year we added more. Mr. Cooper also stated that the people need to know the difference between an override and a debt exclusion. Chairman Swensen explained how it worked for the people. Mr. Cooper stated that his biggest fear is that it's easy to spend. He doesn't want to see all departments come in saying you have this much. He feels his should be a solution to the problem. He also stated that he thought the school committee was wrong and should have had a debt exclusion on the technology equipment which he feels would have passed. Mr. Morrill

stated that when a certain pot of money, whatever it is, comes to the town, it is used correctly. The Finance Board and Selectmen have used their best judgement for use of funds. Mr. Szafarowicz stated that a 2 ½ override might not be the complete answer as there are many options.

Steve Coleman from Berry Corner Road stated that Mr. Cooper is correct that there is a problem which started back in the mid 90's. This town used money out of its stabilization account to lower the tax rates. Mr. Coleman stated that when you lower the tax rate, you lower the levy limit.

Fire Chief Cloutier from Osgood Road stated that we have to be cautious where the money is used. He stated that the Fire Department back in the 80's did 200 calls a year and it worked. Now there is a lot of housing and building going on. The department went up to 8 staff members in 2001 and seven days a week. In 2007, we hired a few more staff members and went to a 24/7 operation. We are at 12 staff members now and are still understaffed per the NFPA regulations. Chief Cloutier stated that they are looking to get their staff to the level its needed. He stated that the Fire Department does 2000 calls per year. He also stated that we are running the employees ragged as it is now. He said the state is mandating training but not funding it. He also stated that the Fire Department apparatus needs to be replaced. These are 1996 pieces of apparatus. He also stated that he agrees with a 5 year plan and that we need to come up with a dollar figure. We need this to pass.

Michelle Lilly from King Road stated that an override is not a bad thing. She would like to see money put back in stabilization. Have Departments get enough money back in their account. Senior Tax Work Off back to where it was. Technology for the students. Funding for the Library. We have to decide what kind of town we want this to be.

Gerri Nowicki from A. F. Putnam Road stated that her biggest concern is that a lot of education has to be done. She feels three months is not enough to educate the people. She agrees with a five year plan so people can see what we are losing.

Norman Dugas stated that he is speaking for the seniors. He understands that we are in trouble. He said capital items were never approved at Special Town Meetings before but now they are. He said the seniors are not a two income family and they have to cut back on other items. No one drives a lambrogini. He stated that if this does pass, maybe somewhere down the road there will be some consideration for seniors in this town. He as well as other seniors are on a fixed income. Chairman Swensen stated that in the past 7 years that he's been doing this, we have done nothing but cut the budgets. Ms. Walker stated that the Senior Tax Work Off only covers about 20 people. She would like to double or triple this program.

Stefan Sage from Lincoln Point Road corrected a number given for Oxford that was stated earlier. Mr. Sage stated that not all seniors are hurting. He's been asking for overrides for years now. He also stated that our tax rate is lower than the other communities around us except for Dudley and Spencer. He asked what kind of community do we want Charlton to be.

Steven Coleman came forward and wanted to correct something that Mr. Dugas said. He made a comment that we don't need a lambrogini. Mr. Coleman spoke specifically about the Fire Department. The Town hired a Fire Inspector last year and instead of getting him a brand new vehicle they are using an old one. Most of the equipment they have is old and should be updated for safety.

Karen Spiewak from Osgood Road stated that she supports the override because of the facts and figures that are being given. She does think that if this is going to pass, we need to come out with a strong, clear and unified voice.

John McGrath from 10 Ponnakin Hill Road stated that we should make sure the override is for the operating budget not for capital items.

Frank Lombardi stated that we have 10 to 11 weeks before this vote, we only have less than a month to educate everyone in town. He is looking for numbers of what everyone needs.

Chief Pervier stated that he has worked for the Town of Charlton for over eighteen years. When he started, training was at a minimum. Now it's a mandatory thing. Costs are high. He would like to be mindful as he goes forward is trying to get a reasonable level of training. The state mandates the training. If the employees are not properly trained, it can become a liability to the town if something should happen.

Robert Hartwig gave an overview of where we are and how we got here. He said the amounts that need to be put back in the budget are the monies that have been taken away from departments and the money we will be losing from things such as Millennium.

Mr. Szafarowicz stated that before the next meeting we will have the 5 year plan, do the research on the needs of the Department Heads, and we should look into restoring the cuts and training and schools.

Dave Antos from Freeman Road stated that we should actively participate with businesses to reach out and seek what is needed as far as Technology.

Kristina Mullan from 3 Meadow Lane thanked the fire chief for bringing hard data. She would expect hard data to be available so she can make an informed decision. She is for the override and is part of a ballot committee that was formed and they have a website which is www.yesforcharlton.org. She said they will hit the pavement once they have the information that they need.

Mr. Trifone, Business Manager for the Dudley Charlton Regional School District stated that what we spend on per pupil is in the bottom 5% of what they spend on education. Mr. Gilrein stated that to put it in perspective, the budget for the school has been set for this school year so they cannot come forth with the correct dollar amount. The Dudley Charlton School District pays around \$10,600 per pupil. If they paid the state average, they would have to increase their budget by \$3,000 per student. They won't know what the state budget will be next year until they get into the budget season for next year.

Kristen Kustigian from Carroll Hill Road came forward. She is in favor of an override. She would like to see the children get what they need. The teachers are working with more for less. The textbooks are 15 – 20 years old. There are no computers for the students. There are no smart boards in any of the classrooms. She feels the teachers need tools now. She agrees with Mr. Antos's idea to have a 5 year plan for what all departments need. She would like to see some advocacy from the Department Heads to see what's best for the students, teachers and citizens.

Cheryl Hansen, Library Director came forward. She stated that she had hard numbers if the people wanted to have Fridays reopened at the Library, it would be an additional \$36,000.

Karen Spiewak came forward and asked if it would be possible to put a check box on the tax bills to see if they would like to donate money to the General Fund above and beyond their actual bills.

Nancy Chalk from City Depot Road came forward and stated that we need to educate the people and if we do what our children do, word can get out fast. Facebook and just talking to friends to get them to come out to vote.

Beth Butler came forward and stated that there is a loop called 495 which donate computers to schools. They have community outreach and you can apply online.

Mr. Sellew wanted to recap some of what he's heard. He did not like the comment that people drive lambroginis. He stated that no one in town drives one of these. The vehicles that are used are old and are used until they cannot be of any use. Mr. Sellew stated that we have been going to the businesses in town for donations and have done everything that can be done. If we wait until May, we will be in trouble. We are already in trouble. He also agrees with a five year plan.

Frank Lombardi from Prindle Hill Road has a concern. He stated that it was mentioned earlier that departments were cut but it wasn't uniform for all. He said he hasn't made up his mind yet of which way to vote and he understands the concerns of all here.

Kelly Quiron from Kelly Lane stated that she is in favor of the override. She said she would be looking at a number of 1 to 2 million at least and it should be considered.

Monique Lemare stated that volunteers have been writing grants for technology and she just wanted to say that these might not be necessarily something the schools can use.

He asked who is the body that decides the amount? How does the level of service get put in order such as police, fire, etc. Chairman Swensen stated that the final number will be agreed upon by the Board of Selectmen with the assistance of the Finance Committee and Department Heads. He stated that our goal is to avoid them pinning against each other and get them back where they need to be. Chairman Swensen stated that the next meeting will be here on July 9, 2013 at 6:30pm. Mr. Gilrein stated that we can host the meeting at the Charlton Middle School.

Peter Cooper Sr., from 190 Berry Corner Road asked Mr. Gilrein that with the five year plan, could it be split to show what the technology cost is. He stated that we have to be realistic but honest. There is a difference between want and need.

Chairman Swensen stated that he would like to take up Mr. Gilrein's offer and have the next meeting at the Charlton Middle School.

Stephanie Reed stated that when she came in, there were three ways to go brought up and she would like to see a fourth by giving an amount and a yes or no.

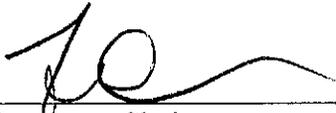
Chief Pervier gave an overview of the differences in services from 2008 to 2012.

Chairman Swensen asked that if anyone didn't get a chance to sign the sign in sheet yet to please do before you go. He also thanked the Library for hosting the meeting tonight and thanked everyone for coming. He stated that they will work to provide as much information as we can at the next meeting.

Motion by Mr. Sellew to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Szafarowicz, motion carries.

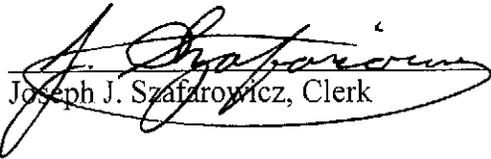
Submitted by:
Mary C. Devlin
Administrative Assistant

Accepted by:



Frederick C. Swensen, Chairman

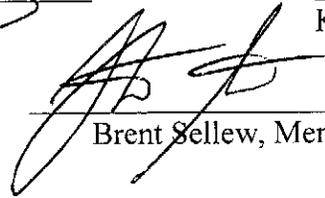
David M. Singer, Vice-Chairperson (absent)



Joseph J. Szafrowicz, Clerk



Kathleen W. Walker, Member



Brent Sellew, Member