

**Town of Sherman
Board of Selectman Special Meeting
Monday June 7, 2021 at 7pm
Via ZOOM Teleconferencing**

Member's Present: First Selectman Don Lowe, Selectman Bob Ostrosky, and Selectman Kevin Keenan

Member's Absent: None

Audience & Invited: Superintendent Jeff Melendez, BOE Chair Kasey Diotte, and residents from the community

Clerk: Margaret Beatty

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm followed by the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance.

1) Set the Mill Rate for the 2021/2022 fiscal year: The Mill Rate is set at 18.64 which is 2.5% down from the previous year.

Motion: To set the Mill Rate for the 2021/2022 Sherman fiscal budget which includes both the Education budget and Town budget for 18.64.

Motioned by: First Selectman Don Lowe

Seconded by: Selectman Bob Ostrosky

All in Favor: Unanimous

Selectman Kevin Keenan joined the meeting at 7:08 pm.

2) A request from the Board of Education for funding not to exceed \$300,000 for the replacement and repair of two Sherman School playgrounds: First Selectman Don Lowe began by clarifying the agenda item. He explained that the BOS is starting the process to potential get the funding in motion and reiterated that the residents would vote for approval at a referendum. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the possibilities. Selectman Bob Ostrosky added that tonight's meeting acts as an intake for ideas and that there will be plenty of time for residents to digest the proposal. First Selectman Don Lowe turned the meeting over to Superintendent Jeff Melendez for a presentation.

Superintendent Jeff Melendez provided slides with the breakdown of design and fees associated with the two playgrounds in question. He also noted that the BOE is not requesting 2 new playgrounds but to repair and improve the Pirate Ship Playground and demo and fully replace the lower playground. He recognized the Playground Committee that worked to devise the best, cost efficient gym that would serve the student body as well as stay in line with the

Town's rural landscape. Throughout the presentation information was provided with breakdown of the process and fees as well as images of the disrepair of both playgrounds. In conclusion, Superintendent Jeff Melendez finished his presentation by opening up the conversation to questions and/or comments.

Questions/Comments: Selectman Bob Ostrosky thanked the committee for the hard work put into providing a plan that was thoughtfully considered from every angle, from design to price.

Superintendent Jeff Melendez added that the lead time on securing funding and ordering the materials, which would take between 14-16 weeks, with 4 weeks of installation. He inquired if the school could do anything more to accelerate the process. First Selectman Don Lowe will work to efficiently follow the rules to bring the proposal either to a BOS meeting or Town Meeting.

Rick Hudson of 20 Crooked Furrows inquired if all documents and illustrations were available either through the Town of the BOE website. Dr. Melendez responded that the documents were emailed to the BOS and are not currently on the school website but be happy to share the documents. First Selectman Don Lowe responded that he would provide all the information on the Town website.

Collette Shulman of 107 Route 39 North wanted more information as to the safety factors and whether there are documented accidents. Dr. Melendez pulled up illustrations of noted deficits such as missing parts, fraying cables, gaps in surface that are tripping hazards. He reiterated the general disrepair overall.

Bob and Donna Acosta of Atchison Cove asked who will be responsible for maintaining the new playgrounds. Dr. Melendez replied that the only maintenance that would be regularly need is replacing the woodchips on the lower playground which would be included in the yearly budget provided by the school. He also noted that the schools insurance company CIRMA does an annual report to assess the infrastructure and a report is provided of any recommendations. The playgrounds proposed are commercial grade installed by professionals and wont foresee real issues with routine maintenance. The acting facilities manager will also provide a level of care and recommendations to help maintain school grounds.

Stephanie Warren of 107 Rt. 39 North commented that not enough information was provided in a timely manner for residents to digest the price of \$300,000 for a playground. She also expressed support in encouraging the need for improvements in educational standards and that the Town would support those strides. First Selectman Don Lowe reiterated that no decisions were being made about funding but that this meeting was to provide a springboard for the idea. Dr. Melendez added that the BOE appreciates all feedback and will work to improve more communication with the residents.

Al Zeisler 4 Rising Sun Trail had several points. First, he began by asking the board if they received the documents he gathered from playground companies that installed gyms in 2

schools with similar student body numbers. He noted that from his research that \$175,000 was a competitive price and anything over was overpriced. Secondly, he questioned if the highest priority for the school was purchasing play equipment. He questioned if the teachers were getting adequate supplies such as text books, computers, desks should take precedence and that the school should focus more on academic excellence. Kasey Diotte, Chair of the BOE, responded to the second portion of Mr. Zeisler's concerns stating that budget provided by the school includes funding for new texts books, computers, and needs of the teachers to provide advanced learning. Upgrades to educational needs are categorized as a line item in the operating school budget. The school feels that replacing and updating existing playground infrastructure, due to safety, issues is a priority. Selectman Bob Ostrosky interrupted with a point of order to get the conversation on track. Lastly, Mr. Zeisler inquired if his email was received noting the information he gathered about the competitive playground pricing from the 2 schools he contacted. Carrie Depuy, the school's Director of Finance, replied that she reached out to Danbury and had not heard back from their Director of Finance but explained that other Town's ability to secure gyms at a lesser cost came down to buying power. Town's may be purchasing multiple playgrounds lessening the costs of the gyms. She also explained that Sherman pays prevailing wage in Fairfield County which is not the same as Litchfield.

Arthur Von Plachecki of 11 Sail Harbor commented that a playground is more than just the structure. He feels that a playground can set the framework for creating new interpersonal relationships with peers. He feels that having outdoor time is also a part of the educational experience and if safety issues are present on the equipment that can lead to unnecessary litigation for the Town.

Glenn Kiefer of 37 Orchard Rest he substantiated that the playground needed addressing and supports the need for replacement. He wanted to know what other competitive bids were considered before the school decided to work with Little Tykes. Superintendent Jeff Melendez replied that the Playground Committee looked at multiple vendors but Little Tykes was ultimately was chosen by design. He noted all prices were similarly competitive because the prices are on a national bid, meaning as a municipality we are charged a certain price for a certain quantity of playground.

Kim Kean of 66 Rt. 39 South agreed with Mr. Von Plachecki that the playground provides an added benefit to the growth of each child and their creativity. She also agreed to the sentiment of Mrs. Warren that more communication about costly expenditures was more open to the residents. She felt the timing was poor after the Town just voted to approve the budget. First Selectman Don Lowe reiterated that the Town is having a discussion and no concrete decisions are being made at the current moment. Selectman Bob Ostrosky weighed in reiterating that the playground has been a topic of discussion in the past and emphasized reading through the minutes of the BOE which provides more context to the topic.

Al Zeisler of 4 Rising Sun Trail expressed confusion as to the process that got the school to the price presented. Superintendent Jeff Melendez replied that the process for procurement for the

playground is separate from the other capital projects because it is done through a national bid list. The school chose the bid that was in line with type of playground that was best for the school.

Selectman Bob Ostrosky agreed that the topic should be a Town Meeting so robust debate between resident can help dictate the decision moving forward.

Selectman Kevin Keenan agreed that several good points were made on both sides, he also agrees that the idea should go to Town Meeting.

Motion: That we go to Town Meeting for an amount form the Capital Nonrecurring Fund not to exceed \$300,000 for the repair and improvement of the Pirate Ship Playground and for the full demo and replacement of the lower playground.

Motioned by: First Selectman Don Lowe

Seconded by: Selectman Bob Ostrosky

All in Favor: Unanimous

Selectman Kevin Keenan mentioned that the Town Meeting date be thoughtfully decided for maximum participation.

Selectman Bob Ostosky moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:56 pm.

Motioned by: Selectman Bob Ostrosky

Seconded by: Selectman Kevin Keenan

All in Favor: Unanimous

Motes respectfully submitted on June 11, 2021 by Margaret Beatty.