

Town of Sherman  
Town Annual Budget Meeting  
April 25, 2020, 10:00 a.m.  
Via ZOOM

**Member's Present:** First Selectman Don Lowe, Selectman Bob Ostrosky, Selectman Kevin Keenan, Treasurer Eric Holub, and Business Manager Liz LaVia

**Member's Absent:** None

**Audience/ Invited:** Superintendent/ Principal Jeff Melendez, BOE chair Kasey Diotte and many members of the community via ZOOM teleconferencing

**Clerk:** Margaret Beatty

**Call to Order/ Pledge of Allegiance:** First Selectman called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

First Selectman Don Lowe began the meeting by addressing the participating public that due to the Covid 19 virus that the budget will be passed without referendum as per Governor Lamont's executive order S and I. On May 9, 2020 the BOS will vote on the two budgets, the Town Budget and the BOE Budget. He then shifted the conversation addressing the highlights of the budget.

Highlight: The town budget is decreasing by 6.3%, mainly driven by a \$408,000 decrease in our debt services spending. The education budget is flat for another year, the education budget represents 2/3 of the total budget, and the two budgets together represent a 2.3% decrease. The town has an increase in revenue, decrease total taxes and mill rate from 19.81% to 19.18% that represents 3.2% tax decrease for the community. First Selectman Don Lowe then offered the floor to Treasurer Eric Holub to provide extra input.

Eric Holub responded by mentioning what is really being voted on is the expenditure appropriations, the town spending and the BOE spending. He also mentioned that the state revenues are flat from last year. The BOS has agreed with the BOE to halt preschool tuition which is a change from the last year. He mentioned we have a surplus which equates to about 22%. Overall the budget is fairly status quo. Lastly, he commented that this budget is a balanced budget.

First Selectman offered an opportunity to the BOE to give an abbreviated presentation before opening up the floor to town members for questions and comments. In turn BOE chair Kasey Diotte presented highlights from the BOE Budget.

Kasey Diotte described the role of the BOE. She went on to attribute the development of budget to our Superintendent Jeff Melendez, who works very closely with his administrative

team. The job of the board is to make sure the spending, as proposed in the budget, is in line with our vision, supports our goals, and is done responsibly to our tax payers.

At this point, First Selectman Don Lowe opened up the meeting to questions and comment to the general public.

### **Comments/Questions:**

Patricia Bailey of 34 Big Trail asked why the number of students, in total, were not listed for accounting purposes, including elementary through high school.

Jeff Melendez responded noted that the Sherman School is anticipating for the next calendar school year 259, pre-k through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 134 high school students. He also went on to direct Mrs. Bailey where she can find the breakdown of information in the BOE slide presentation, notable slides 13 and 14. Kasey Diotte offered supplemental information that the BOE approves a complete enrollment report every month at regular BOE meeting, this information can be found on the Sherman School website.

First Selectman Don Lowe also contributed to the conversation stating that there is a level of uncertainty that the Covid 19 crisis will bring to town in terms of enrollment/attendance. There is a possibility that we will add new enrollment. Kasey Diotte also mentioned in years passed the BOE would factor in unknown students into the budget but with declining enrollment that practice has been phased out, and at the current moment that variable is budgeted on the conservative side.

John Dwyer of 10 Spring Lake Rd. started off by thanking everyone for their hard work. He then went on question whether adding a new item, like free preschool to the budget, was a good idea since families are potentially going to feel the impact of the virus financially. He felt delaying the idea a year might be a better consideration.

First Selectman Don Lowe answered by reminding the public that the free preschool does not add to the education budget, it does take away some revenue from the town budget. The preschool tuition goes into our Town General Fund resulting in a loss of \$35,000.

Treasurer Eric Holub also commented stating that it does not affect spending, but the loss of revenue could affect the mill rate.

John Dwyer went on to say that the tax payers should have a voice in the decision to withhold tuition. First Selectman Don Lowe said he appreciated his comments and he will take them to heart when making the decision.

Deirdre Fitzpatrick of 13 Smoke Ridge Dr. agreed with John Dwyer that town residents should be able to vote on free preschool. She also thinks that the BOE should look at administrative cost and the amount of students and other teachers, such as interventionists/specialists. Are there plans for furloughs, any hold on raises or delayed raises to administration if we continue with distance learning into the next calendar school year?

Kasey Diotte commented that it was impossible to know what the fall semester outcome will be, the board has not yet discussed any possible furloughs, we are looking at the long term impact of the virus and distance learning plans. We are focused on the current budget and not long term. Mrs. Fitzpatrick also asked if administration is being paid over the summer months and Kasey Diotte responded yes.

Tony Brazil of 3 Rising Sun Trail wanted to thank the two boards for their wonderful work, commenting that the process can be a bit confusing.

William Jones commented that we can be proud of our leadership in town. Keeping the citizens informed with all pertinent information, whether budgetary or Covid 19. He was very thankful.

First Selectman Don Lowe took the opportunity to update the public on the latest information pertaining to Covid 19. He also recognized our volunteers for their hard work in keeping our town safe.

Selectman Bob Ostrosky commented that there are a lot of unknowns happening now that can affect the budget moving forward. He mentioned that the board tries to be conservative but also realistic. Lastly, take the time to appreciate our volunteers, any good gesture to show our support.

Corrine Kevorkian of 1 Jericho South also agreed with the sentiment of previous town member's opinion's that citizens should have the opportunity to vote on free preschool. Her question was directed to Jeff Melendez, she questioned how our special education budget compared to schools of equivalent size. Is there any statistical data?

Jeff Melendez responded that there is no model that specifically identifies an amount allocated for programs. No easy way to determine spending costs. He offered to contact the special education director with her specific question, but programs are on an individualized basis.

Patricia Bailey of 34 Big Trail wanted an explanation of what the XP program entailed. Her second question pertains to the Innovation Fund and its purpose.

Jeff Melendez explained that it was a program developed a few years ago offering more enrichment classes. Students choose through a series of elective programs. The innovation Fund is a supplemental fund amounting to \$7500 provided to the educators. This fund allows teachers to use the money for supplies relating to new lessons and how it aligns with our educational vision.

John Dwyer of 10 Spring Lake Rd. directed a question to our Treasurer Eric Holub, is the anticipated aid for the state is it comparative to what we usually receive?

Eric Holub replied that the aid is statutory. As long as the state is willing to go to bonding commission and get new debt the town will get the money. The town is self-sufficient and does not rely on income from the state. We pay more into state with income tax and most of that money goes to larger cities.

Selectman Bob Ostrosky also commented that the town has a significant surplus if the town took a hit financially that we would be able to cover the budget. Eric Holub also mentioned that the BOS voted to pass a property Tax Deferment Program at the regular monthly meeting on April 23, 2020. This program allows residents to defer tax payment for 3 months easing some financial burden. First Selectman Don Lowe reminded the residents that the application for the deferment program must be done prior to July 1, 2020 and the deferment goes until October 1, 2020.

Michele MacKinnon of 14 Bridgeworth Lane just wanted to express her gratitude for all the hard work the boards are doing.

First Selectman Don Lowe wrapped up the meeting thanking everyone who participated in our virtual meetings. He also extended a heartfelt thank you to the town Business manager Liz laVia and Treasurer Eric Holub.

First Selectman Don Lowe entertained the motion to adjourn the meeting, Selectman Bob Ostrosky moved to adjourn at 10:38 a.m. The motion was seconded by First Selectman Don Lowe.

**Motioned by:** Selectman Bob Ostrosky

**Seconded by:** F. Selectman Don Lowe

**All in Favor:** Unanimous