Rowe Finance Committee
April 14, 2020
6:30 P.M. via Remote Participation

Present:	Vice-Chair Loretta Dionne, Christopher "Selmi" Hyytinen, Paul McLatchy III, Laurie Pike
Absent:	Chair Wayne Zavotka
Board of Selectmen:	Chair Charles Sokol, Selectman Edward Silva, Executive Secretary Janice Boudreau
Other Attendees:	Fire Chief Dennis Annear, School Superintendent Jonathan Franzoni (joined at 6:55), School Principal William Knittle (joined at 7:00), School Business Manager Jennifer Macksey (joined at 6:55)
Audience of Citizens:	Joanne Semanie, Assessors Chair Frederick Williams (joined at 7:19),

Note: Due to the national COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting was held via remote participation as authorized by executive order of the governor. All votes are taken via roll-call vote.

Call to Order: Vice-Chair Dionne called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:37 P.M., with a quorum of the committee present.

Fire Department Personnel: Chair Annear attended the meeting to discuss his proposal for a new position on the fire department. This person would involve someone working sixteen scheduled hours a week to provide more coverage during the day when most department members and first responders are at work. Vice-Chair Dionne inquired as to whether this person will be scheduled around police officers, who already respond to medical calls during their shifts. Chief Annear answered that this person would be scheduled so as to not overlap. While this person would not be considered a shared employee, he is also hoping that Charlemont will employ this individual for a further sixteen hours a week. This would allow for some overlap between the two towns.

> Vice-Chair Dionne asked about when most of the calls come in, but Chief Annear was unable to provide that information at this time. He explained that in addition to providing coverage, he also envisioned this person as a potential successor when he retires in three years. The current deputy chief (who used to be the chief) has told Chief Annear that he has no interest in returning to that role. Chair Sokol requested a breakdown of the current officers and firefighters, including the time/costs put in and their area(s) of responsibility. Chief Annear will provide this.
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> Vice-Chair Dionne expressed concerns about finding someone willing to work 32 hours a week (sixteen for both Rowe and Charlemont) without receiving benefits. Mr. McLatchy opined that if there was a goal of cross-coverage (responding to a Rowe call while stationed in Charlemont, for example), it might be slightly skewed due to Charlemont having a population 3-4 times that of Rowe.

There may be a grant possibility which would fund 70% of this position for the first two years, followed by 35% in the third year. A motion was then made by Mr. McLatchy to support this position contingent upon receiving the grant. The vote was seconded by Vice-Chair Dionne, and the votes were as follows:

Christopher Hyytinen	Abstain	Paul McLatchy III	Yes
Loretta Dionne	Yes	Laurie Pike	Yes

Chief Annear was thanked for attending, and left the meeting at 7:07.

School: Superintendent Franzoni began by explaining that the news has not been very good on the state level in regards to the budget. Due to the COVID-19 situation, the state is estimating between $3-$5 billion in lost revenue. This could mean that state funding through rural aid and Chapter 70 might be drastically reduced. Rowe's FY20 Chapter 70 funds are approximately $140,000, and the rural aid is roughly $6,000. While not *all* of that will disappear, it's difficult to project what amount the town will receive. Ms. Pike asked if state support is lost, will the budget get redone. Ms. Macksey said that it would be up to the town, as the Chapter 70 money goes directly to the town and is not part of the school's actual budget.

Selectman Silva asked how many students there are in the school, including preschool. Principal Knittle replied that there are 26 Rowe students and 46 choice/preschool students for a total of 72. Preschool students aren't covered under school choice, but some revenue is still received. There are currently four Rowe preschoolers and five from other towns. These numbers mean that Rowe spends approximately $19,700 per student without factoring in school choice and grants, and $14,624 after choice/grants.

The school central office has taken a new approach to presenting the budget. In years past lines that would be paid for using choice funds were simply reduced by the amount that would be paid from that revolving account. Moving forward, they are showing all costs and subtracting choice/grant funding at the end. This will give a better picture of the actual costs to educate, but makes comparing FY20 and FY21 budget lines very difficult. As Superintendent Franzoni and Business Manager Macksey were not really involved in the previous year's budget, it's not 100% clear where the increases lie. Members were appreciative of this new approach to budgeting, but a great deal of discussion revolved around where a difference of roughly $178,000 came from over the current year as it couldn't be easily identified. School administration will look into this and see if they can find out anything further.

Mr. McLatchy said he would like to see more long-range financial planning for the school, perhaps involving the Board of Selectmen and/or Finance Committee. Superintendent Franzoni replied that the state is not supporting these smaller schools as they should be, which places greater burdens on the towns.

Discussion followed about the concept of a school in general for the town. As of now, there is a ratio of approximately 10.4 students for each teacher, not counting aides.

Members were asked by the superintendent what they thought was an appropriate "cut off" point for number of Rowe kids, but no one had a clear answer.

A point was made by Mr. McLatchy about how the school is a sensitive topic in town, where people who question finances and the overall cost often get backlash and labeled as anti-school. Members discussed how to improve transparency and efficiency while still providing quality education.

A request was made by Mr. McLatchy to see the breakdown of what areas a retiring teacher is responsible for, and to see if that could somehow be rearranged amongst existing staff rather than hiring a new full-time person. Vice-Chair Dionne said she couldn't support cutting a teaching position at this time. Ms. Pike felt that a better phrasing might be to see if there is a way to be more efficient with staffing needs.

Departure: Vice-Chair Dionne departed the meeting at 8:51.

Time was spent going over the requests from the Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen, and a timeline for following up. Members will try to meet with school officials during the first few weeks of May. Superintendent Franzoni, Business Manager Macksey, and Principal Knittle left the meeting at 9:09.

Next Meeting: The Committee will meet at 6:30 on April 21st to review special/capital projects and any remaining lines not yet addressed. Until further notice, these meetings will be held remotely.

Adjourn: A motion was made by Mr. McLatchy and seconded by Ms. Pike to adjourn the meeting at 9:18 P.M. The votes were as follows:

Christopher Hyytinen	Yes
Laurie Pike	Yes
Paul McLatchy III	Yes

Respectfully Submitted,
Paul McLatchy III, Secretary

Approved: April 21, 2020

Paul McLatchy III, Secretary

Unable to be signed by entire committee due to COVID-19 pandemic.