

Bakersfield Select Board Special Budget Meeting
Wednesday, January 19, 2022
4:00pm

Meeting called to order at 4:03pm by Josh Goss.

Members present: Josh Goss (chair), Lance Lawyer, Terri Goss, and via zoom: Brenda Churchill

Members absent: Gary Denton

Residents/Guests attending: Mac Newitt, Dan Forand, Mark Allen, Kathy Westcom, Maria DeRosia, Tami Brennan

First order of business was to discuss Employee Wages and Benefits for the Road Crew. Terri made the motion to go into Executive Session. There was no second so the motion did not pass. Josh asked the Road crew if it was ok with them to discuss wages and benefits in public session and the Road crew said yes.

Mac said the last raise that they had received for a cost of living raise or anything was on June 10, 2019, and that was for 2%. They hadn't received any cost-of-living adjustment in 2020 or 2021 and they didn't want 2022 to go by without addressing this. Mac said that the cost of living in 2021 alone was 4.9%. Mark said that taking the 20% for insurance didn't help, which was a \$2200.00 decrease. Mac said that was a slap in the face with no reimbursement. Mac said that the crew had discussed it and they were asking for a 10% raise. Mac said that Abby budgeted in 3% raised in 2020 and 2021, but that never got implemented. He said that board had grumbled when they asked about dental and vision and none of that got pulled forward, only the 20% had been pulled forward. He said they would still like to see the Dental and Vision. Mac said that it wouldn't affect Dan and himself so much because they only have a few years left, but for Mark it would be good. Lance said that the cost of living was 1.9% in 2019, and 2.5% in 2020 and 4.9% in 2021 and it's supposed to go up even higher in 2022. He said that adds up to about 9.3%. Terri said that we are not here to do back pay. Josh said that Mac is here to say that the cost of living has gone up and their wages haven't. Josh asked Mac what their hourly wages are. Mac said that he gets \$24.48/hour, Mark gets \$23.46/hour, and Dan gets \$21.42/hour. Josh said that a 10% raise for Mac would be \$2.45 to make a total of \$26.93/hour, and Mark would increase \$2.35 to make a total of \$25.81/hour, and Dan would increase \$2.14 to make a total of \$23.56. This rate would be for 52 weeks/40 hours per week/ straight pay. The rest would be overtime. The board said that the overtime for all three Road crew combined came to \$23,000.00 last year. Lance said that he doesn't think that what the guys are asking for is unreasonable. He said that they haven't asked to revisit the insurance. Lance said that he would have asked to revisit the insurance. Brenda said that with all due respect, she would like to revisit the benefits. She said that she wasn't on the board for the discussion when they took away the town coverage for the insurance. She said it was economically impactful with the out-of-pocket expense born by our town

workers. She said she was appalled that they were getting paid less due to the benefits. She would like to see the crew be given dental and vision and she has looked into what they would cost. For \$1,576.00 a year, we can cover all three employees for vision and dental. We didn't do what we said we were going to do last year. Terri asked what the coverage was. Brenda said the dental was Northeast Delta Dental plan #2 which is the most used one. It covers 80% and costs \$37.06/per person. The vision is Capital Vision for \$6.74 per person. Both insurances are through VLCT. Brenda asked Lance for a recap of the proposal. Lance said that the Road Crew asked for a 10% increase across the board for their wages and the board is looking to give an addition to the benefit package of vision and dental.

Terri asked when open enrollment is. Brenda said that you can add to a package through VLCT. Josh said that he had done some rough math. He said that last year Mac made \$60,309.40 with overtime. He was using an average of 220 hours of overtime/year. Mac would make a flat rate of \$56,014.00 and an average of 220 OT would add \$8,887.00, which would bring his pay to \$64,309.00. Mark flat rate would be \$53,684.80 and then with @ 220 hours of OT, would add \$8,517.30, which would bring his pay to \$62,202.10. Dan's flat rate would be \$49,004.80 and with 220 hours OT, his pay would total \$56,778.80. The total of wages comes to \$183,289.80, which is a difference of \$15,851.52, and then including the \$1576.80 for Dental and Vision, comes to \$17,428.32, which would be the total increase to the town. Mac asked that if this flies, would the board have a problem with adding his wife to the insurance at his own expense. And possibly the same with Dan. Josh said he saw no problem with that. Lance said that he thinks that the Road crew has done a hell of a job and have put up with a lot the last few years and he is 100% behind giving them the pay raise and the vision and dental.

Terri said that she thought that 10% was a little much. Brenda said that if you look over the last three years. Terri said we're not talking about the last three years. Brenda said it is what has happened in the economic structure of everywhere around us. These are real costs. She said this is not a case of penny pinching, her issue is with underpayment which is causing a problem. She said it's about keeping good help. We have got well trained guys and we want to keep them from going to other communities. She said employers are having a hard time keeping people. Brenda said that frankly she had been going to ask to give the 20% back too. Lance began to make the motion regarding the proposal and Terri interrupted him and said that she thought Lance should abstain from the vote because of his relationship to Mac. Josh said that he had looked into it and the relationship between Lance and Mac was not close enough to warrant Lance abstaining. They are not close enough relations. There is no blood, and they are really no more than friends. Tami asked if there were any rules about having blood relations on the Select Board. Josh said if there is then we're in trouble because we're all related. Kathy said that when she was elected Town Clerk and Dave was on the board, they looked into it and there was no conflict, but Dave didn't run again because she was the Town Clerk. Lance said in consideration of Terri's objection, he would

abstain from making the motion. Brenda made the motion to accept the numbers for the Highway Dept. for the new wages and to include increased benefits. Tami asked if the motion could be more specific. Josh said told Brenda that he was going to reword the motion. Josh said that the motion was to pay the Road crew a 10% increase in wages based on their hourly wages, and to include Dental and Vision in their benefits package. He noted that the town crew is agreeing to pay 20% of their Health Insurance. Mac asked the crew if they were ok with that, and the guys said yes. Lance seconded the motion and the board vote was: Brenda Churchill-yes, Lance Lawyer- yes, Josh Goss- yes, Terri Gates- no. The motion carried by a vote of 3-1. Dan thanked the board for the raise and the complements. The total budgeted amount for the Road wages is \$184,938.28, which is a total increase of \$17,500.00.

Brenda asked the board to include the letter to the board from the Listers. The Listers have not had a raise in pay since May 2019. They are asking for an increase of \$3.00/hour for the chair of the Listers, Sue Sonski, and \$2.00/hour for the other two listers. Sue's current wages are \$17.00/hour, so this would bring her wages to \$20.00/hour. The other listers currently make \$15.00/hour and would be raised to \$17.00/hour. This would be included in the General Fund. The board asked what the average hours for the listers is. Kathy said that this time of year there are not a lot. They have to launch the Grand List, so they are in the office pretty regularly in March. It's hard to say. Maria said that the total spent for listers last year in 2021 was \$7200.00, which included all three listers. By adding the increase in wages, it would come to a little less than an additional \$800.00. Sue had around 100 hours total, and the others had around 40 hours total.

Maria said that she still needs a budget amount for Telephone for the garage. \$750.00 was last year's budgeted amount. Mac and the board thought \$750.00 would be good again this year.

Kathy told the board that for this year, because of the most recent bill from the State, anyone running for one of the Town Officer positions, voted by ballot or off the floor, only need to submit a ballot consent form to the Town Clerk by Monday, Jan. 24, in order for their name to be placed on the ballot. They will not be required to submit a petition.

Brenda said that she would finish up the article for the treasurer position that the board had discussed and make sure that the language is compatible with Bakersfield. Brenda asked Kathy if the articles are in any specific order on the ballot. Kathy said that they will be.

For the estimation of Social Security for the new wages, Josh took 2021 social security budget, which was around \$14,300.00 and added 10%, which would put that at around \$15,000.00. This line item is always an estimate because you don't know about the winter snows.

Maria said with the numbers that he added up, with the pay increases, social security, and including all the expected expenses to keep the roadwork going, the Road budget comes to \$351,706.60, not taking into account State aid. Last year we budgeted \$300,000.00 without the state aid. Mac said we still have \$150,000.00, because of State Aid received. He said that last year's state aid came to \$90,501.60. Josh said that would look like a ballpark estimate of a rise from .25/100.00 to .30/100.00. Josh said the last 5 years of State aid was: 2017-\$86,700.00, 2018-\$86,700.00, 2019-\$87,500.00, 2020-\$113,500.00 which was higher due to Covid, 2021-\$93,501.60. Josh said that he hates to bank on State Aid at all, but we're looking at a budget of around \$350,000.00, so if we planned on State Aid of \$75,000.00, which is a 5-year low, and we bumped our budget back to \$325,000.00, and we received the state aid, it would bring us up where we need to be and give us around \$400,000.00. Mac said that we have a \$150,000.00 cushion from over a couple of years, and we haven't transferred that. It's not from one year. We started the year with \$60,000.00. The Equipment earnings were when we charged ourselves for the equipment use, we took the truck payments and put them in a separate item. We charge and pay ourselves per hour for our own equipment use, based on the hours used in a day. That money is transferred into new equipment fund to be ready for new equipment. Kathy takes all the gas funds etc, anything left over is equipment earnings. We haven't done that for the last couple of years. If we can continue in this direction, it could reduce the chance of us having to get a TAN loan each year. Josh said that if we keep approving the budget, we could possibly get on track to a fiscal year in the next 3 to 4 years.

Josh made the proposal to go with the \$352,000.00 budget and bank on \$75,000.00 state aid, to vote on a \$325,000.00 2022 budget. Brenda asked if FEMA was included in any of this. Lance said No that FEMA is a separate thing with a separate loan. Kathy asked if we should budget our portion of FEMA. Lance said that we have already paid our portion, we've paid more than the 7 ½%, in kind, with gravel from our own pit. Kathy asked if we need to budget for the interest that we paid on the FEMA LOC. Lance said that the interest would be covered. Lance and Mac said that the State has \$460,000.00 in their hands for us, waiting to release.

The board agreed to put \$325,000.00 on the ballot for the Road budget. This includes Dirt work and Winter Work.

Kathy said that Vera said that she was willing to be Assistant Treasurer for one year.

The Cemetery Commission is requesting \$10,000.00 this year. In 2020, they requested \$15,000.00. In 2021, they requested \$10,000.00. This will be an extra line item since it is usually voted off the floor. This is for Maple Grove Cemetery. The line item in the General Fund is for Cook's Cemetery.

Dispatch- Line item- \$16,080.00- no choice on this one. It's not for ambulance, it's for the Fire Dept.

Kathy asked if the board has received the library request yet. The board said no. Kathy checked and she said that the library is requesting \$35,000.00 this year. No increase. And keep in mind that the library transferred \$15,000.00 back to the Town General Fund last year to help the Town.

Historical Society- Requesting \$5000.00. Will have a request letter to the board by Monday.

The board went over the individual donation requests sent to the town to decide whether to place them on the ballot to be considered by the voters.

-The Lucas James memorial fund- request of \$1000.00. Terry said no. Josh said that is a town-based organization. The board put aside to reconsider later.

-Franklin County Caring Communities- request of \$1000.00. Out of St. Albans, work with those in difficult life circumstances, mentoring teens impacted negatively. The board said that this is a new one, not one that we have passed before.

-Franklin County Northwest Development Corp- request of \$200.00. Lance said that they have given quite a bit of money to Bakersfield. Josh said that we are not approving or denying these requests, we are only deciding whether or not to put them before the taxpayers.

-Northwest Regional Planning Commission- they request 1.12/per capita. Lance said that they help us tremendously. This year it will be down because our population went down.

-Age Well- their 2019 request was \$1100.00, 2020 request was \$1200.00, no request last year, and they are requesting \$1500.00 this year. They provide services at no charge to help our aging population, ride to doctors, people delivering meals, etc.

-Northwest Counseling- request of \$600.00. Has requested that amount since 2016.

-Green-Up Vermont- requested \$100.00, the same as every other year.

-Vermont Family Network- request of \$250.00. They give support for parents, teens, youths, and children in Bakersfield, especially those with disabilities. They are a statewide organization. Lance said let's target the ones that are local. Terry said nay to this one. The board agreed.

-American Red Cross- asking \$500.00. Same as before.

-Franklin County Home Health- requesting \$2776.00. Same as the last 6 years.

-Northwest Solid Waste Management District- requesting \$14000.30, which is up \$100.30 this year.

-Community of Vermont Elders- Brenda said she used to work with this organization. They work to prevent fraud among the elderly and work to keep

our seniors safe. They work with Social Security and other agencies. Josh said there was no request for money, it was just an informational report.

-Missiquoi River Basin Association- request of \$600.00. Same as the last 3 years in a row.

-Fairfield Community Center- Asking for \$4000.00. They asked for \$4000.00 last year and we cut it back to \$2000.00. Josh asked if they should put the \$4000.00 out there or cut it back to \$2000.00. Terri said to put it at \$2000.00. Josh said we can put it at \$4000.00 when we can have a discussion on the floor.

Lance said this is going to get complicated. This is the first year that Rosalie has asked for money and her organization and it is a local one. And we are giving to out of town organizations. This one is the only town based one. If we go to \$2000.00 for Fairfield, we could add the \$1000.00 for the Lucas James. Brenda said that Rosalie has successfully run programs that benefit the town, i.e, the Hunter's Safety Course, Free Fishing Day, etc. It is a very big plus side that benefits the town. The Eagle Club gave \$500.00 to us the pavilion, which Brenda said is an underused facility. All we have to do is ask.

-Cat Crusaders- The board said yes to put before the voters.

Terri made the motion to adjourn the meeting. Brenda seconded the motion and the motion passed with a vote of 4-0 at 6:05pm.

The next Regular Select Board meeting is Monday, January 24, 2022, at 7:00pm at the Town Hall and via zoom.

Meeting minutes recorded by Tami Brennan.