

**COMBINED BOARD OF SELECTMAN AND BOARD OF FINANCE
PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING
MINUTES OF MEETING
MARCH 18, 2010**

Pursuant to the call and written notice, the Public Budget Hearing of the Board of Selectman and the Board of Finance was held on Thursday, March 18, 2010 at 7:00 pm in the Board of Education Administrative Offices, Seminar Room 300, 501 Kings Highway East, Fairfield, Connecticut.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Chairman Thomas Flynn, Robert Bellitto Jr., Ken Brachfeld, James Brown, Kevin Kiley, Mary LeClerc, Robert Stone, Michael Tetreau

MEMBERS ABSENT

Christopher DeWitt

ALSO PRESENT

Kenneth Flatto, Sherri Steeneck, Board of Selectmen, Town of Fairfield
Paul Hiller, Chief Fiscal Officer and Clerk of the Board of Finance
Linda Gardiner, Budget Director, Town of Fairfield
Caitlin Bosse, Controller, Town of Fairfield
Sue Brand, Chair, Board of Education
Bonnie McWain, Director of Finance, Board of Education
Dr. Ann Clark, Superintendent of Schools, Board of Education
John Boyle, Deputy Superintendent of Schools, Board of Education
Margaret Mary Fitzgerald, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Human Resources
Dr. Gary Rosato, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Board of Education
Thomas Cullen, Director of Operations, Board of Education
Andrea Leonardi, Director of Special Education and Special Programs, Board of Education
John Ficke, Transportation Supervisor, Board of Education

Chairman Flynn called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

First Selectman Kenneth Flatto presented his public comments on the BOE budget recommendations.

Mr. Flatto stated that the requested BOE budget was 3 ½% over this years budget. Mr. Flatto congratulated the BOE Central Office staff for managing this year's budget very well. Mr. Flatto further stated that there has been no significant improvement in the economy this year so it was his intention to seek a budget based on move forward costs as much as possible. Mr. Flatto stated that his overriding constraint was to keep taxes low. Mr. Flatto also stated that, in his opinion. The BOE budget has 2 areas that could handle adjustments. The first area is the excess cost sharing income estimates. Mr. Flatto felt that the estimates for next year are too low (\$200K-\$300K) at 70% while this year's percentage is 84%. Mr. Flatto stated that the second area in the BOE budget that could be adjusted is the wage/benefit reserve (\$1M) which, in his opinion, probably won't be needed. Mr. Flatto stated that staffing increases cannot continue to outpace student number increases. Mr. Flatto stated that

Combined Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance

Public Budget Hearing

Minutes of Meeting March 18, 2010

Fairfield is at the top of the list of staff per student compared to similar communities in the state. Mr. Flatto also stated that technology spending is way up (\$1M annually) and, in his opinion, he felt that \$2M is a viable increase for this coming year.

The budgets were reviewed as follows:

8010 Board of Education follow-up

Ms. Leonardi stated that the excess cost sharing budget was built in conjunction with State BOE recommendations. Ms. Leonardi stated that the State BOE had recommended a 60% figure and Fairfield budgeted at 70%. Ms. Leonardi further stated that, in her opinion, it would be fiscally irresponsible to under fund the districts most disabled students by estimating the income from the excess cost sharing at too high a percentage.

Dr. Clark, in response to a question from the Board, stated that the State sets aside a pool of money and each district in the state applies for their share of the excess cost sharing reimbursement. Dr. Clark also stated that the teacher's contract was just renegotiated for the period of July 1, 2010 thru June 30, 2012. Dr. Clark also stated that the staffing increases that have been requested in the new budget are needed to provide for the existing program currently in place.

Chairman Flynn asked Mrs. Fitzgerald to provide the Board with the minimum number of teachers that would be needed in order to avoid any contractual problems.

The Board asked Mrs. Fitzgerald how 6 new people were hired when the BOE said that 5 staff positions would be cut. Mrs. Fitzgerald replied that hours were reassigned and retirements were part of the plan to eliminate 5 FTE's. Mrs. Fitzgerald informed the Board that a FTE did not equate to one employee, but rather, hours cut from many different positions to equal 5 FTE. Mrs. Fitzgerald stated that many different areas of the budget were affected by the reassignment of hours in an effort not to have any impact on the students in the district. Mrs. Fitzgerald also stated that some ARRA and SFSF funds were used for some staffing needs.

Mr. Brachfeld asked Mr. Cullen why the green cleaning costs for the BOE are so much more than those for the Town DPW, which stated in their budget presentation that they had saved significantly by utilizing green cleaning products. Mr. Cullen stated that the budget for this item had no increase last year. Mr. Cullen also noted that the BOE paid \$37K for hand cleaners in the school due to the H1N1 scare this year. Chairman Flynn asked Mr. Cullen to meet with Richard White, Director of Public Works for the Town, and produce a report on the differences with the cleaning products and fuels that the two entities purchase and have that report ready for the Board by next week.

In response to a question from the Board, Dr. Clark stated that there will be no give back to the Town this year from the 2009-2010 budget of \$139M and this year there will be an increase in the amount needed to go into pension of \$572K. Dr. Clark also stated that cuts will be made to maintenance, technology and utilities if needed but it is her goal to avoid cuts to staff and changes to class sizes. Mrs. Brand, Chair of the Board of Education, stated that the BOE's priorities are class size and program and, in her opinion, technology cannot continue to take a hit in the budget.

Mr. Ficke was asked what impact the closing of a parochial school would have on bus transportation costs. Mr. Ficke stated that there would be some impact and problems would arise due to bell time differences, the number of students who currently walk and will now need a bus, and other various issues.

Mrs. McWain stated that self-insurance has worked well for the BOE and the claims experience has been good. Mrs. McWain stated that she was confident in the estimate utilized for the reserve in this

Combined Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance
Public Budget Hearing
Minutes of Meeting March 18, 2010
budget.

Public Comment

Pat Brady, Principal, St. Thomas School

She thanked Mr. Flatto, the BOF, and the BOE for their support of non-public schools in Fairfield, especially in the areas of special education, health, and bus transportation. She noted that enrollment is increasing at her school and she asked that bus transportation be supported in order to provide those students with safe and reasonable schedules as has been done in the past.

Meredith McCormack, Sherman School budget representative

She asked that the BOF support the BOE budget as presented and she noted that technology and maintenance cannot continue to be cut.

Charlotte Leslie, 160 Hunter Road, PTA Council President

PTA Council is aware of the economy and what is happening but the Council also supports the BOE budget and class size recommendations.

48 Milandale Road, Fairfield

No further cuts and support the budget as presented.

Eric Newman, 85 Eastfield Drive, North Stratfield School, PTA Council

Please support the budget as presented.

206 Farmington Avenue, Fairfield, FWMS budget representative

Please support the budget and don't be penny wise and pound foolish.

Marilyn Feranec, President FEA

A high quality education is expensive and Fairfield provides an exemplary education for its students.

She applauded the BOE and asked the BOF to support the budget as presented.

Diane Smola, 677 Eleven O'clock Road

She asked the BOF to support the budget and she noted that using SFSF funds sets us up for failure next year.

Tim Kery, Board of Education

Last year there were 9,951 students budgeted but 10,002 students actually showed up to be educated. He noted that the Chancellor of the Catholic Schools has stated that most of the students currently in parochial schools will remain in parochial schools even if some are closed and/or merged. He also stated that even with a budget of \$1.4M, \$997K in excess cost funding will evaporate. He also noted that the district currently has 859 computers that date from 2002-3 which is considered really old and many switches are also old and will require replacement in the near future.

2531 Private School Bus Transportation

Mr. Cullen and Mr. Ficke reported that there will be the same number of routes with different allocations. They also reported that a new private school opened in town but contract negotiations have resulted in some savings.

Public Comment

None

2073 RYASAP

Public Comment

Robert Francis, Director

He is disappointed with the proposed 62% decrease from the BOS. He hopes to talk with Mr. Flatto about the proposed decrease. He stated that a survey of youth is done every 3 years, at a cost of about \$10K, and the results of that survey are used to work with the various towns for appropriate programs. He asked the BOF to restore the budget request for this item.

Combined Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance

Public Budget Hearing

Minutes of Meeting March 18, 2010

Krista McCarthy Vahey, RTM District 6

Ann Stamler read a statement from Ms. Vahey.

She is upset with the cut to this budget. She noted that a task force on alcohol and health has been formed and RYASAP works on these problems.

2130 Pequot Library

Public Comment

None

2150 Fairfield Counseling Services

Public Comment

Dorothy Timmermon, Executive Director

She stated that her organization has increased their hours to deal with the increasing problem of underage drinking and they have also formed a job loss group which has been well attended.

2170 The Discovery Museum

Public Comment

None

2190 Greater Bridgeport Regional Planning Agency

Public Comment

None

2210 Audubon Society

Public Comment

None

2230 Greater Bridgeport Transit Authority

Public Comment

None

2250 Fairfield Museum and History Center

Public Comment

None

2270 Fairfield Veterans Advisory and Info Service

Public Comment

None

2290 Southwestern Connecticut EMS Council

Public Comment

None

2310 Southwest Regional Mental Health Board

Public Comment

Kim O'Reilly, Executive Director

She thanked the BOF for their support and she reported that her organization is a Citizens Watchdog Association.

2320 Southwest Regional Communications Center

Public Comment

None

2330 Greater Bridgeport Council of Churches

Public Comment

John Cottrell, Chief Operating Officer

He stated that their revenues come from grants based on matching grants protocol. He asked the BOF to

Combined Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance

Public Budget Hearing

Minutes of Meeting March 18, 2010

keep the budget as proposed.

2350 Grasmere by the Sea

Public Comment

None

2370 Sullivan McKinney Elder Housing

Public Comment

Roger Autuori, Secretary on Board of Sullivan McKinney Elder Housing

He reported that they have had a refinancing meeting with HUD officials and the plan is to replace the roof, boilers, etc. and the budget will be used as part of a grant process.

2390 Fairfield Arts Council

Public Comment

Billy Jean Sullivan, Executive Director

She hoped for the continued support of the BOF.

2430 The Kennedy Center

Public Comment

None

2450 Mill River Wetland Committee

Public Comment

None

2470 Pilot House

Public Comment

Diane Smola, Eleven O'clock Road, Fairfield

She reported that this organization has moved into the Sullivan McKinney Eldercare building. She reported that they serve about 300 families with special needs children and they depend on this funding to keep their costs low. She added that, as Mr. Autuori had already stated, there are issues with the boiler in the building and the roof also has issues but in addition to those problems there are also ADA compliance issues that must be addressed.

2480 The Center for Women and Families

Susan Schnitzer, employee

She distributed a brochure about the program. She also explained that they are a domestic and sexual abuse prevention agency. She said they are currently looking to obtain space in Fairfield but they are currently renting space in Bridgeport. She also noted that they train police officers on how to handle this type of situation and they work closely with Janus House.

3150 Unemployment Compensation: Mr. Hiller presented this item to the Board.

Mr. Hiller reported that it will be difficult to estimate if this item will go over budget this year. Mr. Hiller explained that this item covers seasonal employees at the golf courses as well as the crossing guards and it has been determined that this is the most cost effective way to handle these situations. Mr. Hiller stated that he is not comfortable with the budgeted amount and he estimates that at least \$150K will be needed. In response to a question from the Board about assigning the expense for this item to the individual departments, Mr. Hiller said that could be researched for the future.

Public Comment

None

1330 Risk Management: Mr. Hiller and Caitlin Bosse presented this item to the Board.

Mr. Flynn reviewed a handout concerning this item with the Board. Mr. Flynn noted that the Town reserve is not adequate but the BOE reserve is okay. Mr. Flynn also reported that the budget, on the

Combined Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance

Public Budget Hearing

Minutes of Meeting March 18, 2010

Town side, is an internal calculation while the BOE uses the estimate from AON as a budget. Mr. Flynn also noted that the Town and the BOE have their reserves combined in the Internal Service Fund for audit purposes. Mr. Hiller, in response to questions from the Board about using an outside plan rather than being self-insured, reported that an outside insurance plan would cost 8% more than AON has estimated what self-insurance costs would be and the Town needs to address run-out costs if an outside insurance plan is chosen.

Public Comment

None

Chairman Flynn reminded everyone that at the meeting scheduled for March 25, 2010 the Board will go through the budget book page by page but no voting will take place until the April 1, 2010 meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:08 p.m.