

**COMBINED BOARD OF SELECTMAN AND BOARD OF FINANCE
PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING
DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING
MARCH 1, 2012**

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 1, 2012 at 7:00 pm in the Board of Education Administrative Offices, Seminar Room 300, 501 Kings Highway East, Fairfield, CT.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Chairman Thomas Flynn, Robert Bellitto, Jr., Ken Brachfeld, Kevin Kiley, Mary LeClerc, Robert Stone, Elaine Gaffney

MEMBERS ABSENT

James Brown, Christopher DeWitt

ALSO PRESENT

Michael Tetreau, Cristin McCarthy-Vahey, Board of Selectmen, Town of Fairfield
Paul Hiller, Chief Fiscal Officer and Clerk of the Board of Finance
Dr. David Title, Superintendent-FairfieldPublic Schools, BOE
Karen Parks, DeputySuperintendent-FairfieldPublic Schools, BOE
Doreen Munsell, Director of Finance, BOE
Thomas Cullen, Director of Operations, Board of Education, Town of Fairfield
Linda Gardiner, Budget Director, Town of Fairfield
Pamela Iacono, Chairman, Board of Education, Town of Fairfield
Margaret Mary Fitzgerald, Deputy Superintendent of Schools, Human Resources, BOE
Anna-Cutaia-Leonard, Director of Elementary Education, BOE
Dr. Gary Rosato, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, BOE
Andrea Leonardi, Director of Special Education and Pupil Services, BOE
Nancy Byrnes, Manager, Information Technology, BOE
John Ficke, Transportation Supervisor, BOE

Chairman Flynn called the meeting to order at 7:06 pm.

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Dr. Title, Ms. Iacono and Ms. Munsell presented the Board of Education Summary overview to the Boards (refer to handout enclosed for summary).

Ms. Iacono stated that the Board of Education approved the proposed budget unanimously and that this was the lowest BOE proposed budget Brought forth within at least the past 10 years.

Mr. Tetreau stated the he recommended one change in the BOE proposed budget-reduction of \$612,525-due to required contribution to the Pension Fund was lowered by

this amount by the Actuaries recommendation-which information was not available until after the release of the BOE proposed budget.

Dr. Title stated that this reduction will be harmless and not affect programs and services

Question and answer phase begins

Mr. Bellitto questioned the transportation costs/contract and expectations for upcoming year.

Dr. Title stated that they are in the last year of the current contract, which calls for a 3% increase that was built into this contract. Also there will be one more year with the effect of the “grandfathering” which results in more buses/routes. In addition 2 additional buses are being added next year.

The BOE is looking to go out to bid for the year 2013/14 and believes the market is more competitive and they are hopeful for a better contract.

Dr. Title addressed the part time clerical after school increase in the budget to address the issue of having someone at all schools (especially those who do not have after school programs) for safety issues for those children who are being returned by the bus whom were not met at home. This additional staffing would be on overlapping shifts that will also assist office personnel during the hectic dismissal period, same as in the early am period.

Ms. M.-Vahey questioned costs for transportation town budget revenue to BOE expenditure (not matching).

Mr. Hiller stated that funding is based on formula obtained by the numbers from the state and the figure can change constantly and actual amounts due may vary from actual costs.

Ms. LeClerc asked if there is any increase in the number of buses for the upcoming year-
Dr. Title stated 2 additional buses are included in the proposed budget.

Mr. Flynn questioned the increase to the transportation budget -\$563, 000 – or 8% -

Dr. Title stated this is due to: grandfathering clause in re-districting causing additional buses; 3% cost increase that was built into the current contract; change in High School start time requires additional runs as well as the change in some private school start times and special education transportation needs; and finally the 2 additional buses requested in the proposed budget to assist in the additional needs.

Mr. Brachfeld and Ms. LeClerc sated their concerns in regards to the libraries not being opened/staffed later hours leaving the resources unavailable to students.

Dr. Title stated the closing of the libraries after school are results of budget cuts from last year.

Mr. Bellitto questioned changes in budget totals for staffing per school from year to year-some decline some increase and would like to know how this is determined.

Dr. Title stated that as staff moves around- sometimes by what is required by enrollment figures and as younger teachers are hired as veterans are replaced, these all result in changes in staffing figures.

Ms. M.-Vahey questioned the Improved English Language services at McKinley School and asked if we are looking for additional support in this area.

Dr. Title stated that the task force is looking in the whole English Language learning course and will be increasing resources to align staff to where the program is needed.

Mr. Flynn questioned the part time employment increase and why custodian overtime is included in this line item.

Dr. Title stated that the majority of this increase is for the new afternoon clerical staffing as he previously stated-to assist afternoons in schools without after school programs.

Dr. Title also addressed the cost of custodian overtime-summer clean up; snow removal, hurricane clean up; and school buildings being used for meetings which custodian costs are not reimbursed.

He is not sure why the custodian overtime is in this line item but moving forward they will create a new line and remove it from this line.

Selectman James Walsh arrives at 8:10 pm.

Mr. Flynn questioned the certified support staff/secretarial staff increase of 4% with the same number of staff positions.

Dr. Title stated that this amount is due to a recent contract settlement that includes general wage and step increases.

Mr. Stine asked about the elimination of the house system in the high schools as recommended in the previous study conducted.

Dr. Title stated that this is a bad idea and that the BOE was able to obtain savings in other areas that would not be a harmful as our house system works and is educationally sound and that the roles of our house system were very much misconstrued.

Ms. M.-Vahey questioned decline in revenues as to building rentals versus increase in custodial overtime.

Dr. Title stated that there is a wide variety of groups that use BOE buildings for meetings and that a lot of these groups are exempt from paying custodian fees.

Mr. Brachfeld inquired if the Board has felt any effects from the discretionary cuts last year and have any been restored in this budget.

Dr. Title stated they have only been working with the current cuts for 3 months and it is too early to determine effects and that with more time changes may be made in the future.

Mr. Brachfeld questioned enrollment projects and whether we will be looking at longer term implications and trends.

Dr. Title stated they would like to look at yearly projections and the predictions are difficult due to many variables.

Ms. Iacono stated the current enrollment projections do not drop off enough to warrant any significant changes.

Dr. Title stated that they adjust teacher placement accordingly to enrollment at schools.

Mr. Bellitto questioned the +\$500,00 increase in maintenance service line item and what the key drivers are in this request.

Dr. Title stated that the \$285, 00 for student info technology services are in this line and the remainder is additional in the building envelope maintenance as they are adding 3 more schools to be included in code compliance testing.

Ms. M.-Vahey questioned roofing. Building envelopes and preventative maintenances programs costs.

Mr. Cullen said they are included in dollars per schools.

Ms. M.-Vahey asked if maintenance and training costs were included in the request for the new student info technology services.

Dr. Title stated cost for on site training is included.

Mr. Kiley complimented the improvements make to this year's BOE budget book and also noted that the last time the town went out to bid on the school bus contract the town saved money.

Mr. Walsh questioned why the summer school transportation costs have been \$50,000 under budgeted for the past 3 years and why has this number not been increased.

Dr. Title stated that the special education transportation costs are refunded by the state and reimbursement of excess costs are lump sum figures used on many line item accounts in compliance. These costs over runs are offset by the revenues received by Grants.

Mr. Walsh inquired about the electrical costs savings being realized with the new lower rates and whether that money will be returned to the town at the end of the fiscal year.

Dr. Title stated that they would hope to however they are encountering emergency repairs (such as a new boiler that Warde -\$150,000) that are being funded from the savings.

Mr. Walsh asked if the town would see any significant savings from the elimination of winter recess-Dr. Title stated there foresee no significant savings.

Mr. Walsh inquired about budgeted retirements.

Dr. Title stated that they have budgeted for 12 full time teacher retirements and they have 7 so far. Also 3 principals are retiring, however Dr. Title would not speculate on savings as the Board would like to explore the options available for new hires that would compliment the staffing for the schools. Dr. Title also acknowledged potential \$10,000 savings on the replacement for retiring M.M. Fitzgerald.

The Board stated the Special Education is fully funded and for the first time is in the black.

The Board was questioned about the cuts in Para-professionals and asked if there was a significant increase to unemployment benefits being paid because of the loss of 23.7 Para positions.

Mr. Hiller stated that unemployment benefits were being paid for info tech and tutors that were the results of the cuts and was unaware of any Para professionals collecting unemployment benefits, but will research. No teachers are collecting unemployment benefits due to budget cuts from last year.

Ms. M.-Vahey inquired if line item for textbooks was fully funded and asked about long term technical plans for usage of computers, kindles et all replacing textbooks.

Dr. Title stated that textbooks line item is fully funded and that each child whom needs a textbook will have one.

Ms. Parks replied to the questions of technology going forward-stating that the Board reached out to schools and teachers and that the priority was for wireless access in every school first, followed by projections and lastly smart boards (which Dr. Title noted that no smart boards were included in this year's budget). Smart boards are on hold as priorities from the schools are being redirected to funding for wireless access and projection systems. Dr. Title also stated that some PTA's have inquired about purchasing and donating smart boards.

Increased costs for High School sports (Ludlow 18%/Warde 15%) was questioned-Dr. Title stated that there is no increase in number of students and no additional programs have been added, however the increase is simply reinstating cuts for uniforms and other catch up items from last year's budget.

It was noted that school principals previously chose how to spend technology allocations, however, now central office is in control of these allocations.

Mr. Flynn asked for a comparison of previous budget years as to student head count versus staffing versus dollars per schools and the BOE will work on this request.

No other questions or comments from the Boards –Chairman Flynn opens to public comment.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Maribeth McCormick, Fairfield Beach Road

Dr. Title found savings to offset increases and that this is a well proposed budget an encourages support for the budget as is with no additional cuts.

Carolyn Romano, RTM member-District 1

As a former teacher, she supports teachers being able to prioritize how they teach and what products they use (projection systems). Also supports the status quo for class size in elementary schools but encourages larger class size in high schools. Lastly the number one over-whelming concern of her constituents is to not increase budget and no tax increase.

Suzanne Miska, 123 Ryegate Road

Concerned about the pension reduction coming out after budget was prepared/presented when the BOE could have used these dollars saved in other areas of their budget- especially concerned with the library –media areas closing and the impact on students.

Leann Ratner, Winnepogo Drive

Thanked the BOE for a well put together budget that is fiscally sound and the PTA supports this budget as put forward.

No further public comment.

Mr. Tetreau stated that the experience study in regards to the pension savings was not completed until the end of January and that the town did not expect to find any changes, however once drastic changes were found they called a special meeting to present the significant savings; however, the BOE budget had already gone to press and was presented. The Town budget was held up for 2 weeks for this impact and please remember that this pension adjustment is saving dollars in both budgets.

PUBLIC SCHOOL BUS TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Hiller noted a reduction of \$57,000 from last year's budget
No Board or Public Comment.

HEALTH AND WELFARE SERVICES

(provided for students in Fairfield private schools)

Board noted a \$900 difference from last year's budget.

No Board or Public Comment.

Mr. Brachfled made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Gaffney.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:17 pm.

