

**BOARD OF FINANCE
COMBINED BOARD OF SELECTMEN AND BOARD OF FINANCE
PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING**

This combined Board of Selectman and Board of Finance Public Budget Hearing and of Finance held its Monthly Meeting on Tuesday, March 5, 2013 at 7:00 p.m. in Seminar Room 300, Board of Education Administrative Offices, and 501 Kings Highway East, Fairfield, CT.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Thomas Flynn, Chairman, Robert Bellitto, Jr., Vice Chairman, James Brown, Secretary Christopher DeWitt, Ken Brachfeld, Mary LeClerc, Robert Stone, Jim Walsh and Cathy Albin.

BOARD OF SELECTMAN

First Selectman Michael Tetreau, Robert Mayer, Chief of Staff and Chief Fiscal Officer, Selectman Kevin Kiley, Selectman Christine Vahey

ALSO PRESENT

Caitlin Bosse, Clerk of Board of Finance, Dr. David Title, Superintendent of Schools, BOE, Phillip Dwyer, Chairman, BOE, Doreen Munsell, Director of Finance, BOE, Steven Ribeiro and Carlton Lindgren, AON Consultants and John Ficke, Transportation Supervisor, BOE.

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7 05 p.m. by Chairman Flynn.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Chairman Flynn asked for a moment of silence for Sherri Steenack's brother who passed away suddenly and also her mother, who lost her son.

Mrs. Vahey gave a public service announcement on behalf of "One Book", "One Town". The book is called Saving Civility and will be discussed on Saturday, March 16th. It addresses fifty two (52) ways to tame, rude, crude attitude for a polite planet.

3) SUPERINTENDANT OF SCHOOLS

Summary Budget Presentation

Dr. Title and Phillip Dwyer presented the Board of Education Summary Budget to the Boards (refer to handout for summary).

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Board of Education Budget

Following the Summary Budget:

Dr. Title presented and discussed the BOE's proposed operating budget of \$156 million. Despite a steadily increasing school population, the BOE budget has increased less than the state average in the last ten years. There has been \$4 million and \$5 million dollars in savings in the school operating budget over the last three years. The largest increase in that budget is the \$5.4 million increase in health insurance for the school system employees.

Members of the Board questioned Aon consultant, Carlton Lindgren, as to whether the increase really needed to be that big. Mr. Lindgren noted the school system had seen \$3 million in large claims in the past four to five years, which is a little lower than the norm for a group this size. In the past year, there had been \$6.9 million in claims over \$50,000, a significant increase and totally driven by large claims such as cancer and cardiology.

Christopher DeWitt noted why burden next year's budget with a big bill just because there's a year of bad data.

Mr. Lindgren noted the group of 1,400 members was large enough that not to use its own claims experience would not be sound enough.

Chairman Flynn noted, one of the issues is there is not a lot of reserve against this and there isn't a cushion for another bad year.

The Board was surprised to hear that the large claims experience was for fifty-six (56) people out of one thousand four hundred (1,400) insured, or out of three thousand (3,000) people if one included the dependents.

Dr. David Title addressed a graph in which the number of administrators had barely budged in the last ten years, even though the school population and number of teachers had steadily risen. Also, the number of teachers had not risen as fast as the school population. Since 2004-2005 school years the student population has increased 19 percent, while teachers and support staff has increased by 11.4 percent and administrative staff has increased by only 2.8 percent. It was noted adding the percent of paraprofessionals decreased by 9 percent.

Dr. Title stated leadership is critical to the functioning of the district and he believes it's a bad place to save money. He also stated that curriculum leaders seemed to be a lightning rod and will put an explanation of what they do on their website.

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James Walsh noted that salary and benefits together are 80 percent of the schools budget. Learning that middle and high school class size was fixed by a contract with teachers, he wondered if one student could be added to each class at the elementary level, making those classes twenty-four at Kindergarten through Second Grade and twenty-six in Third through Fifth Grade.

Dr. Title discussed the impact of increasing the maximum class size at the elementary level as a potential cost savings. He noted that would save about seven teachers for a total savings of salaries and benefits of approximately \$490,000.

James Brown questioned what partially funded mandates are there in the school system.

Dr. Title noted the entire public school system is a giant mandate from the State of Connecticut and one hundred eighty days of school was a mandate, transportation was a mandate and giving a free, appropriate public education for children with disabilities from the age of three to twenty one or until they graduate from high school, was a mandate. New mandates include the state deciding that teacher; administrator and pupil evaluations would have to be done in a certain way, requiring new software.

James Walsh talked with people around town regarding the 6.4 percent tax increase and noted cuts will have to be made, that's what it will come down to.

Chairman Flynn asked Dr. Title if the BOE has given any thought to programs that could be reduced or eliminated if a cut does come to the district's budget.

Dr. Title said that the board has not cost-out each program offered by the district and it would be more effective to go over possible service reductions if the budget is actually reduced by the Board of Finance and RTM.

Public Comment:

Suzanne Miska, 123 Ryegate Road, was concerned about looking at cutting services when the drivers are pensions and health care. She stated that music and library are not drivers of the budget and felt we are a little short-sighted when we start to talk about programs.

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Lisa Havey, President of the Parent Teacher Association Council agreed with Mrs. Miska. She stated there is no growth in our education and no advancement of our programs. She also stated, Fairfield was ranked 64th by Money Magazine as a great town in which to live and that education was a main reason for that.

Health and Welfare Services

Andrea Leonardi, Director of Special Education and Pupil Services for the BOE presented this item. She noted this partially funded mandate is to do with child fund activities for all non-public schools. Students traveling from other towns who may have a disability are evaluated to determine eligibility.

Chairman Flynn asked why the Health and Welfare Services is down by \$21,000 this year.

Ms. Leonardi noted it is due to higher paid staff that has since retired and have now been replaced with lower paid staff.

Private School Bus Transportation

John Ficke, Transportation Supervisor, BOE presented this item to the Boards. He noted fuel cost increased to \$191,000.

Following discussion: Chairman Flynn asked Dr. Title to include the bus transportation cost as part of the overall analysis they previously discussed.

Mr. Mayer noted for clarity, there is a positive variance of \$61,000 in the school contract and the estimated fuel cost is \$237,000, does that mean the bus contract went up for the same services at \$170,000.

Mr. Fike said that is correct.

4) Adjourn

There being no further business to come before the Board, Cathy Albin moved and James Belitto seconded to adjourn the meeting at 10:45 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Josephine M. Keogh