

*Special Board of Finance Meeting
Annual Budget Hearing
8:00 p.m., Monday, April 12, 2010
Julian B. Thayer Auditorium, Coginchaug Regional High School*

Minutes

Members present: Fran Korn, Loraine Coe, Rosemarie Naples, Helen Larkin

Members absent: Renee Edwards, Rob DeSimone

Others present: Maryjane Malavasi, Laura Francis, Jim McLaughlin, John Szewczyk, and approximately 40 community members.

Fran Korn called the meeting to order. Elmer Clark led the pledge of allegiance.

F. Korn opened the meeting by saying the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance really tried to minimize the budget increase and that Departments recognized the economic times. He then continued with a PowerPoint presentation that outlined the financial position of the Town and also detailed the proposed budget for fiscal year 2010-2011.

The budget as proposed represented a .77 mill rate increase overall including both general government and board of education anticipated revenues and expenses. The proposed net general government budget is a 3.7% increase over the current year. He noted that revenues are down by \$161,769 and expenses are up by \$191,922. Salaries, benefits and the proposed Durham Activity Center make up the majority of the increase.

The meeting was then opened up for questions related to specific budget categories.

Elected Officials and Boards

L. Francis noted two reductions that will result in savings were not reflected in this budget; staffing - one part time position will be reduced due to a voluntary leave and one part time position will be eliminated due to a retirement; and voluntary furlough days offered by employees. L. Francis also thanked all departments, boards, and commissions by noting that 50% of budget line items came in the same or under budget this year.

Donia Viola objected to the 3.25% salary increases across the board and any increases beyond the 3.25% saying it was a disservice to taxpayers.

Professional Services

Rick Parmelee stated he was not sold on the furlough day idea and questioned why the Town was doing plowing and road work for RSD13. L. Francis responded that the Town does not provide plowing at schools; road work was done on Pickett Lane but RSD13 paid for all materials. R. Parmelee also asked about the status of the Silver Eagle lawsuits. L. Francis responded they were done.

General Expenses

Elmer Clark questioned the new #2568 Facilities Management budget confirming that all line items related to this budget had been reduced to zero.

Harry Hall asked if the Town employee health benefits could be combined with RSD13. F. Korn replied that they already were.

Public Works

D. Viola asked how many catch basins there were. F. Korn responded that the Town has 1300 catch basins at \$19.00 a basin.

Public Safety

D. Viola questioned the cost of the Emergency Notification System. L. Francis explained that the Town paid \$2,667 in this year's budget; next year RSD13 will be using part of the module and will be reimbursing the town one half of the budgeted amount of \$4,900. Ms. Viola's objection to the school being part of the program was due to the fact the Middlefield was not sharing in the initial cost.

Maryann Boord asked if the Resident Fair Overtime was still eligible for a municipal discount. L. Francis responded no. L. Francis continued saying that it used to be when the Town contracted for the overtime it would get charged at Resident rate of 70/30, now any overtime will be charged at 100% full rate plus fringe and benefits. It would not be advantageous for the Fair Association to get billed through the Town.

Library

H. Hall asked how the Town spends \$50,000 on books and media. F. Korn gave the following breakdown; \$24,500 general, \$13,500 children, and \$11,000 on media. Valerie Kilmartin stated that over the last five years there has been a 20% increase in pricing and circulation has increased 100%. She noted the average price of a hard cover book is \$27.00 and subscriptions have increased. She also noted that people generally want new releases and are also using the library more for entertainment. H. Hall asked what happens to the old books. V. Kilmartin responded that they are sold at the annual book sale.

K. Bober asked how many people outside of Durham utilize the library. V. Kilmartin responded that there is a state wide right to use any other library and that there is a cooperative system in place that reimburses the Library for out of town users. D. Viola asked how much money the Library collected with this system. V. Kilmartin responded \$18,000 for next year and by state law it goes directly into the Library Board of Trustees account.

H. Hall questioned the reduction in revenue. V. Kilmartin stated the Library has cut back in fines due to email reminders that have been instituted.

D. Viola suggested that cutting back on restocking of books would be appreciated.

Recreation

Joan Zito talked about the proposed Activity Center saying she did not think the elderly would go out in the winter, that the Town did not need a center in today's economy, and it should be put on the back burner.

Frank DeFelice asked how many square feet the building was. L. Francis responded 5,000 active plus storage.

Resident asked what else would be happening in the space. Sherry Hill explained that current senior programming being held in other municipal buildings would be moved there and also other recreational programs.

Hank Robinson thanked the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance for putting the Activity Center into the budget claiming the town has a use and need for a center and thought this was an economical plan. The town currently does not have enough space and this proposal was at a reasonably small cost;

this would be a way to scope out programs and usage, explore possibilities. He encouraged everyone to keep funding in the budget.

A resident noted that she attends exercise classes three times a week and is now in better health; the class needs more space.

Lainy Melvin stated the Town has many vibrant seniors and the proposed activity center was centrally located and will provide the possibility to connect with more people. She also noted that was a lot of interest in the community.

M. Boord commented she thought this was an excellent opportunity with very little investment, and the Town could opt out if need be. She also felt that current programming is very fragmented.

Henry Coe talked about current senior schedules from surrounding towns and noted that although many people are interested in expanding senior activities Durham can't because they have no place to do so. Anne Cassidy commented she thought piloting this center for a couple of years was a practical way to try it out.

H. Robinson commented that the center would provide opportunity for other ages, not just seniors.

Ona McLaughlin talked about the library usage doubling over the past couple of years and the opportunity for residents to get something back for their taxes.

Etsy Heyl talked about the benefits she received by attending senior exercise classes over that past four years and urged everyone to keep the activity center in the budget.

Roger Kleeman asked if the town was going to lease the building. L. Francis responded yes, at \$30,000 a year, year to year basis, very flexible (no restrictions), COLA increase embedded. She noted this price was one half of what the town paid when town hall utilized the same space.

Robert Melvin compared the \$14,000 cost per student versus the minimal cost of the proposed center.

J. Zito stated she had no objection to renting the facility and spoke about prior proposed costs.

D. Viola stated she felt the internet, maintenance, and cleaning costs associated with the center should be paid by the building owner. She also commented that just because other communities have a center does not mean that Durham should have one and suggested this go to referendum. F. Korn commented that it would be going to Town Meeting as part of the budget and everyone is welcome to attend.

Martin French stated he fully supported the \$37,000 line item that would benefit so many.

Gwen Clark, who currently participates in exercise classes, noted that expenses were not set in stone and if it doesn't work out the town could opt out at very little expense.

M. Boord thanked the Board of Finance and Maryjane Malavasi for the presentation saying she thought it brought transparency to a new level.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Moncata