

**TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
BOARD OF FINANCE**

March 31, 2010
7:00 pm
Town Office Annex

Call to Order

The Special meeting of the East Haddam Board of Finance was called to order by Chairman Paul Maxwell on Monday, March 31, 2010 at 7:02 pm at the Annex. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

In attendance:

Members:

Paul Maxwell, Chairman
Bob Bennett
Matthew Budzik
Bruce Dutch
Susan Link
Ed Schwenzfeier

Also in attendance:

Mark B. Walter, First Selectman
Emmett Lyman, Selectman
Deb Denette, Town Clerk and BOF recording secretary
Cindy Varricchio, Finance Administrator
Dr. Ellen Solek, Superintendent of Schools
David Scata, Director of Pupil Personnel Services
Nancy Haslam, Chairman, Board of Education
Deb Fiala, Board of Education
Susan Taylor, Board of Education
Bryan Perry, Board of Education
Everett Herden, Board of Education
Irene Herden
Wyley Peckham
Sandra Schwenzfeier

Ed Schwenzfeier opened with a statement for the record that his wife is a full time, untenured, teacher at the Elementary School.

Mrs. Varricchio distributed revised summary statements of projected revenues and expenses reflecting changes from the prior meeting. In particular, the summary now projected \$25,000 less in capital for the Fire Department kitchen renovation project and included adjustments with fuel that generated savings. Mr. Walter presented documentation regarding the proposed capital budget for ventilator units at the Elementary School, the design for roof replacement at the Elementary School and the chimney replacement at the High School.

Mr. Maxwell advised that he invited Bonnie Barnes, head of East Haddam's CEA to attend the meeting. Her response indicated that she had a prior commitment and was unable to

come on such short notice, but that she would be amenable to attending a Board of Finance meeting that her schedule would allow. It was the consensus of the Board to invite her to another meeting.

2010-2011 Budget

Mrs. Link inquired of the Superintendent whether she believed that the union would consider concessions if the Board of Finance appropriation was at a 0% increase over last year's budget.

Dr. Solek responded that she was doubtful. She also stated the administrative position for no concessions is coming from Hartford and does not come from local staff. She added that it is helpful to know that the current CEA contract is up in June of 2011 and stated that negotiations for the contract begin this fall. She stated that nearly all contracts are ending up in arbitration and raises of 0% to 1% are being negotiated over a three year period. Health insurance factors were also noted to be a large part of arbitration discussions.

Mr. Maxwell requested clarification on the non-tenure notice. He acknowledged that he has asked about this previously. He stated that he wishes to assure that a deadline to send these non-tenure notices or pink slips has not passed. Dr. Solek clarified that it is not necessary to blanket notices to East Haddam's non-tenured teachers. She stated that State Statute allows a Superintendent to issue a non renewal to a non-tenured teacher anytime. She also stated that a tenured teacher would "bump" a non-tenured teacher in the event of position elimination.

Dr. Solek passionately defended the 2.51% budget and reiterated that her budget proposal was at 5.01%. She stated that cuts were made to bring the number down, and she noted that those cuts will hurt. She further stated that the Board of Education feels that the proposed cuts will have the least amount of student impact while appreciating the difficult times which we are presently in.

Nancy Haslam stated that a 0% increase budget two years in a row would start to dismantle what we have. She stated that she is proud of the school system that has been built in East Haddam and raised concern with what will happen if it is continually chipped away at. Mrs. Haslam cautioned that you punish the children when you take anger out on the unions.

Mr. Maxwell stated that he appreciated the passion for education from both Dr. Solek and Mrs. Haslam; however, he offered the following question which he noted was rhetorical in nature. If your passion cannot convince the teachers in the school system, how do you convince the Board of Finance?

Dr. Solek stated that there are two teachers unions in Connecticut, the AFT and the CEA. East Haddam is part of the latter, whose position has been not to budge. Mr. Maxwell stated that administration is working hard to live within the revenue regarding budgeting, he cited the various reasons, including losing two large taxpayers. He stated that the revenue is less than last year's.

Dr. Solek was encouraged that the union representative was willing to speak to the Board of Finance.

Mr. Dutch inquired what impact the 0% last year had. He was advised that field trips, the summer school program and project oceanology were cut all having a direct impact on students. Additionally, much professional development was eliminated and the technology replacement cycle was bumped out. Mr. Scata added that two cafeteria monitors were eliminated and supplies were drastically cut. He also added that every grant possible was tapped and regionalization with East Hampton occurred where possible.

Mrs. Haslam noted concern that students take a technology step backward when they enter the High School.

Mr. Schwenzfeier stated that the Board of Finance is charged with looking at the needs of all, not just the children; he noted that those needs must be considered both now and in the future. He stated that it is very unfortunate that the unions only care about the teachers, and not the kids or seniors.

[Mrs. Denette, Mr. Walter and Mr. Lyman left the meeting at 7:50 pm to attend a town meeting. They returned at approximately 8:10 pm.]

Mrs. Haslam indicated that she shared Mr. Schwenzfeier's concern.

Mr. Maxwell stated that he is not prepared to vote on the budget until he hears an answer "yes" or "no" from the union with regard to concessions.

Mr. Budzik voiced his agreement that we need an answer from the unions. Mr. Budzik stated that the role of Superintendent and the Board of Education is to present a budget that they believe provides the necessary funding to properly educate our students and that it is up to the Board of Finance to decide what we are able to afford. Mr. Budzik stated that for a small rural town that the education system is our most important economic resource and that we must provide a good education system or people may leave the town.

Dr. Solek provided information as to what additional reductions to the proposed budget would potentially impact:

- ✓ 1% increase—an additional 5 to 6 staff members—certified and non certified
- ✓ 0% increase—an additional 7 to 8 staff members—certified and non certified (at least half certified)

Mr. Budzik asked for a breakdown of the staff potentially reduced. Dr. Solek responded certified teachers, administrative staff, non certified staff, secretaries, custodians, paraprofessionals, nurses.

Mr. Maxwell asked about the prospects of a teacher who is laid off seeking employment elsewhere. Mrs. Haslam responded that for those who are in specialty areas such as math, sciences, world languages, music, administration and special education it would be easier because there is a shortage in those areas. For an elementary teacher the prospects would not be as favorable.

Dr. Solek indicated that there are fixed costs that do not go away such as health care, special education tuition and if there are additional layoffs the cost of unemployment will go up as well.

Mrs. Fiala expressed her concern of the impact of reductions in the next five to ten years to our children adding that many parents may chose to seek out magnet schools for their children which we would be required to pay tuition for as well.

Mr. Maxwell asked about East Haddam creating a magnet school. Dr. Solek indicated that at one point the State of Connecticut reimbursed 100% for the refurbishment of an old school building for an inter-district, theme-based school; the State has now cut that funding.

Public Comment

A teacher, stated that they hear Mr. Maxwell's concerns and that all teachers should not be lumped in. Teachers are willing to make concessions. They talk about it everyday. They have mentioned to their union representative and they are told to utilize the "suggestion box". There are a lot of teachers who want to make concessions.

Mrs. Link stated that she has heard from teachers who are willing to discuss concessions.

Mrs. Haslam stated that if she was still a teacher she would write a check to the district representing two days of pay on September 1 because that would be the right thing to do.

There was discussion among the Board that another request be sent to the union asking for a specific response timeline with regard to meeting with the Board of Finance.

Mr. Peckham stated that the union representatives must do what the membership instructs them to do. If the union is not willing to come to the table with concessions, any cuts or reductions to programs or teaching that impacts the children of this town are entirely on the shoulder of the union. He also continued that the unions are made up of and represents the school staff, and if the staff is not supportive of that position, it must let its unions know. If the union does not follow the wishes of those it represents, the union can and must be discharged.

Mr. Dutch motioned to adjourn at 8:21 pm. Mr. Schwenzfeier seconded the motion. The motion to adjourn carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Deb Denette