

TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
BOARD OF FINANCE
Special Meeting
May 28, 2014
Town Hall

The special meeting of the East Haddam Board of Finance was called to order at 8:15 pm by Chairman Susan Link.

In attendance:

Board of Finance Members:

Susan Link, Chairman
William DiCristofaro
Bruce Dutch
Harvey Thomas
Raymond Willis

Others:

Mark B. Walter, First Selectman
Deb Denette, Town Clerk and recording secretary
Cindy Varricchio, Finance Director
Approximately twenty people were present in the audience

2014-2015 PROPOSED BUDGET

a. Correspondence:

Mrs. Link reported that she had received ten e-mails looking to restore \$100,000 to the Board of Education budget. She stated that the comments that she heard this evening were split between reducing the budget further and increasing funding to the Board of Education. Mrs. Link solicited feedback from Board of Finance members.

b. Review and Discussion:

Mr. Willis stated that he held firm to the belief that the town wants the budget cut lower. He stated that he took exception to comments that the Board of Education's budget was cut \$700,000 and the town did not support education. He stated that the education budget is not sustainable at the rate of growth it has been receiving. He further noted that in comparison to last year the proposed budget that failed had a \$100,000 increase to Board of Education and additional benefit through funding from shared services.

Mr. Thomas stated that he was in favor of remaining with a zero growth budget for education. He stated, however, that he felt that the town should take an equal haircut. He also stated that he had the sense that many people would be willing to see even further cuts.

Mr. Dutch asked Mr. Walter where he would reduce the town's budget if he was required to. Mr. Walter stated that it would be a difficult decision. He stated that it

would pit public safety vs road maintenance and libraries. He stated, however, that if cuts are required, the Board of Selectmen will make the choices that have the least detrimental impact on the town.

Mr. DiCristofaro opined that the budget failing presents a huge challenge. He noted that much of the spending is from debt created in the past that is now coming due. Mr. DiCristofaro emphasized the need to prepare for additional projects, however, he was aware that to reduce that funding would be the easy cut. Mr. DiCristofaro concurred with Mr. Thomas that the town should also take a hit if the Board of Education is.

Mrs. Link stated that many parents were upset with the recent action of the Board of Education regarding the Assistant Principals. She sought assurance that the decisions made were outside of the budget process. Superintendent of Schools Dr. Mary Beth Iacobelli stated that the action taken was independent of the budget. She also noted that it would require Board of Education action to rescind the motion and restore the positions.

Mr. Willis stated that there is no magic number.

Mrs. Link stated that she was disappointed that the budget did not pass. She stated that the Board of Finance sent forward a responsible budget. She stated that she would be in favor of reducing the Board of Education by \$70,000 and sharing the burden with the town by reducing them \$30,000 and seeing if that would pass. She raised concern that further cuts on the education budget will hinder its passing. Mrs. Link noted that last year the budget did not pass and cuts were made predominantly to the town with promises of the parents that they would work to pass the budget. She noted frustration that we are in the same position as last year.

c. Public Comment:

Maryjane Malavasi, Alger Road commented that it is unfortunate the position the Board of Finance is in. She stated when a vote goes down it is prudent to cut it. She stated that anyone that voted no because it was too low made a bad decision. She stated however that to increase the odds of passage the net time both sides need to have impact.

Ruth Masci, concurred both sides needed to be cut to avoid pitting one group against another if cuts must be made. She opined, however, that we have enough open space and she would rather see cuts made from that.

Mary Beth Mordecai noted that the difference between \$100,000 and \$50,000 had minimal mil rate impact but would make a huge difference to the students, she encouraged additional funding for the Board of education.

Joan Dill noted that it would be foolish to not take advantage of an opportunity to reduce the floor of the Board of Education budget when it has the opportunity to do so. She noted that an equal hit to the town would still represent a budget increase.

Felicia Rand, Forest Way stated that she tallied the comments raised earlier and it was pretty well split, parents versus rest. The letters received put the parents ahead.

Kathy Klein, Lake Shore Drive, took offense that it is the parents versus other townspeople. She noted the need for a responsible budget, she stated that the town supports children as it always has.

Dean Anderson noted exception to the wording chosen in the budget document citing the need for the increase in fire department staff (\$13,000). He emphasized that he neither supports or opposes the position and does not want to be at odds with the fire department, but the documentation represents that the position is necessary to cover an ever increasing share of ambulance responses. He noted statistical data from the 1739 calls since July of 2011 and stated that the rationale cited in the supporting documentation simply is not true.

d. Vote to Send to Town Meeting:

Motion was made by Mr. Thomas motioned, to hold the Board of Education budget at a zero increase and reduce the town by \$32,000 from the present request for a total budget of \$29,631,227. Mr. Willis seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Mr. Dutch inquired if Mr. Thomas would support a shared split of the \$100,000 reduction, he replied that he would not.

It was noted that at the last meeting there was discussion about taking an additional \$93,000 from the Board of Education. The Board of Finance was not in favor of doing that at this time but stated it will if it has to. Mrs. Link called for a vote on a total \$132,000 cut (\$100,000 from Board of Education and \$32,000 from General Government.

The motion was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Rathbun Library Grant Application Request:

Library Director Michael Gilroy joined the Board members. He noted that the Rathbun is in need of significant repairs. He stated that he would like to apply to the Connecticut State Library for a grant in the amount of \$200,000, \$100,000 of which is matching funds. These funds have already been identified in the capital improvement plan.

Motion was made by Mr. Willis motioned to authorize the Rathbun Library to apply for the Connecticut State Library grant. Mr. Dutch seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Mr. Dutch sought assurance that local contracts are utilized. **Facilities, Operations and Emergency Management Director Craig Mansfield indicated that they would be.**

The motion was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Randy Dill congratulated the Board on the amendments it made, he stated that he was doubtful it could have passed as originally revised.

Joan Dill requested Mr. Walter to respond to the ambulance/fire issue. Mr. Walter reported that it is akin to the Hatfield's and McCoys. Yet both need each other. Tiffany Quinn disagreed, she stated that it as just a question of the wording of the description.

Motion was made by Mr. Willis to adjourn at 9 pm. Mr. Dutch seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Deb Denette,
Town Clerk and BOF Recording Secretary